

CROSS-EPISTEMOLOGICAL FEMINIST CONVERSATIONS BETWEEN
INDIGENOUS CANADA AND SOUTH AFRICA

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INDIGENOUS CANADA AND SOUTH AFRICA

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LAY ABSTRACT

This project examines a small selection of the literatures by Indigenous women writers in Canada and black South African women writers to conceptualize anti-oppressive approaches to working across differences in both literary/scholarly and activist/lived contexts. It uses conversation as a critical methodology for engaging four primary texts and practicing an uneasy comparative method based on horizontal forms of juxtaposition rather than vertical relations of evaluative power: *Mother to Mother* (Sindiwe Magona) and *The Book of Jessica* (Maria Campbell and Linda Griffiths); and *Coconut* (Kopano Matlwa) and *Monkey Beach* (Eden Robinson). The overall aim is to re-imagine forms of engaging across difference along a range of registers – racialization, gender, nation, class, language, and geographical location – that create conditions for more expansive and substantive forms of social justice than are currently visible. The project draws on feminist, Indigenous, postcolonial, critical race, and related areas of scholarship with an orientation towards social justice.

ABSTRACT

This is a project that takes inequality as its starting point to ask not why it persists in all its myriad forms, but rather how we might better understand its resiliency in order to re-orient our responses. It asks how we can re-imagine one another and work across asymmetrical divides in ways that move us towards substantial forms of social justice, actively disallowing the entrenchment of hierarchical valuing systems, and how we can engage with literature as part of reconfiguring ‘equality’ in the process. These questions are traced through Indigenous women’s literatures in Canada and black South African women’s literatures as sites of deeply textured resistance and re-imagined relationality. My analysis focuses on select texts from the 1980s to present in two primary archives: from Indigenous Canada, *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation* (Maria Campbell in collaboration with Linda Griffiths) and *Monkey Beach* (Eden Robinson); and from South Africa, *Mother to Mother* (Sindiwe Magona) and *Coconut* (Kopano Matlwa). I use conversation as my methodological and thematic compass for seeking modes of enabling comprehension across perniciously unequal systems of making meaning and considering the possibilities for transformative knowledge production and textual interpretation at sites of unequal intersubjective exchange. I employ an uneasy comparative practice that I base on horizontal forms of juxtaposition within conversational structures, and I argue that conversation’s generative instability and risky uncertainty open onto hopeful possibilities for transformative change.

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Introduction/ Chapter One:

Why Conversation? Why Change?: Articulating Across Archives

“My voice is for those who need to hear some truth. It has been a long time since I had an intimate conversation with my own people If you do not find yourselves spoken to, it is not because I intend rudeness – you just don’t concern me now.” (Maracle, *I Am Woman* 10)

“I could hear the clattering of his leg chains as he awkwardly steadied himself, extending his hand to greet me. He spoke in a heavy Afrikaans accent: ‘It’s a pleasure to meet you.’ . . . The embodiment of evil stood there politely smiling at me.” (Gobodo-Madikizela 5-6)

“Everything was as we imagined it. The earth and stars, every creature and leaf imagined with us.

The imagining needs praise as does any living thing. Stories and songs are evidence of this praise.

The imagination conversely illumines us, speaks with us, sings with us.

Stories and songs are like humans who when they laugh are indestructible.

No story or song will translate the full impact of falling, or the inverse power of rising up.

Of rising up.” (Harjo lines 15-25)

Intro Why Change?

This is a project that takes inequality as its starting point to ask not why it persists in all its myriad forms, but rather how we might better understand its resiliency in order to re-orient our responses. The project’s anchor, as such, is the coincident fact of resistance – also various and ongoing, mutable and resilient – and its difficult articulations. How are inequalities resisted and what factors condition the response? Who is able to resist what? Where? When and with whom? And how, most importantly, does resistance register? Context immediately shapes understanding, as do the modes of

encounter and address, and disentangling one from the others holds no guarantees. It is with each of these broad concerns in mind that I turn to two interrelated challenges: how we can re-imagine one another and work across asymmetrical divides in ways that move us towards substantial forms of social justice, actively disallowing the entrenchment of hierarchical valuing systems, and how we can engage with literature as part of reconfiguring ‘equality’ in the process.¹ I trace these questions through Indigenous women’s literatures in Canada and black South African women’s literatures as sites of deeply textured resistance and re-imagined relationality, and I use conversation as my methodological and thematic compass to learn from the uncommon but productive crossings that result.²

To start, though, is also to name my own critical impetus towards these questions and to situate what follows in imbricated contexts. I approach this work through the

¹ I use ‘equality’ provisionally as I continue to search for a better term, but I want to flag the fact that ‘equality’ – at least in its current or common usages – does not exactly express the goal I am proposing for positively transformed ‘equality’ can suggest enfranchisement and thus overwrite the distinctive relationships held with land and with constitutional treaty rights that pre-date and supersede nation-state legislation in Canada, the term mis-articulates my intention. I am seeking, rather, an aspirational term capable of troubling the Eurocentric genealogies of rights discourses (including ‘social justice,’ though that term appears in this project also intersubjectivity. I do not intend to invoke a liberal humanist sense of individual rights, nor do I intend ‘equality’ to mean the assimilative same-ness that appends to the term in multiculturalist or citizenship discourses. Particularly in Indigenous contexts, where). I have opted not to use terms from either of the fields under study in an attempt to avoid reading one field through the logic or epistemology of the other but to read, instead, across the fields. I do acknowledge that ‘equality’ remains fraught, and though I do not use it as a ‘universal’ or unlocated term, I also acknowledge that using it in a ‘bridging’ function risks producing that effect. The larger question that this problem speaks to throughout the thesis is working out where knowledge comes from and what makes knowledge meaningful. Thanks to Dr. Amber Dean for questioning my use of this term.

² The terms used to describe my primary archives – ‘Indigenous women’s literatures in Canada’ and ‘black South African women’s literatures’ – are complicated and do not encompass the many identities that each category purports to name. For consistency’s sake, however, I will use those terms and capitalize ‘Indigenous’ but not ‘black’ to emphasize the different contexts: whereas ‘Indigenous’ is generally a positively reclaimed term of self-identification in the contemporary North American context, ‘black’/ ‘Black’ appears to be taken up differently by different speakers in struggles with apartheid taxonomies in South Africa, making the emancipatory capacity of the capitalized version more ambivalent. Because the term is not consistently capitalized in the literature I engage, I have decided not to capitalize (though some scholars, such as Pumla Dineo Gqola, do).

experiential intersections of extended families and resultant ties between Euro-Canada, Kenya, and Mozambique in ways that make me prioritize those sites – interpersonal and systemic – that generate such consistent injustices. I carry the white privilege that distances me from some of those who are closest to me, a dissonant differentiation that continually challenges and humbles me to be the kind of transformative educator and scholar that I seek to be. Yet I also witness and enact violences despite intending and desiring otherwise, just as I also participate in mis-generating understanding. Let me offer my version of an asymmetrically shared anecdote, in the knowledge that it will stand uncontested in these pages, by way of illustration: on a 15-hour bus ride between Maputo and Beira, en route to an inaugural regional training seminar on sexual harassment and HIV in the workplace, my Changana colleague Graça,³ women’s movement activist and long time labour leader, turned to me as the landscape was changing to ask what seemed a simple question: “Jess, what’s your favourite tree?” Graça had – not accidentally – been guiding me for much of the trip, pointing out places and horizons of personal and national significance, and I had been happily absorbing her words. Without thinking, I replied, “the baobab,” pleased to see one outside my window for the first time. But my response only injected frustration into the long journey’s tiring heat: “Of course you would say that,” Graça sighed, disparagingly. “The baobab bears almost no fruit!” I had recently shared my intention to avoid parenthood, which had already created debate. Further, the baobab carries a host of significances that complicate its figurative place in different parts of Mozambique, and I was – am – ill-positioned to claim an ignorant affiliation with such

³ Out of respect for my colleague’s privacy, I will not use her real name.

a weighty presence. While this exchange highlighted the disputed role of reproduction in our divergent feminist politics, in conjunction with a tension around knowings and not knowings, it also raised larger questions about our respective value systems and uneasy terms of alliance. Having now surprised Graça by becoming a parent myself, indicating my nascent willingness to learn, in Graça's mind, through mothering's complex relationships to feminist politics, I might feel less alienated by our contestation in that moment. Instead, the experience continues to signal for me the need to rethink available models for intersubjective understanding. As differently positioned women in markedly asymmetrical positions of power – a (post)colonial foreign settler and a postcolonial host subject⁴ – how could she and I honour one another's differences and still make our selves heard? How could the meanings in the words we used, the attempted and incomplete meanings we each struggled to express, translate adequately across cultures and structures of power without forcing conformity to shared assumptions? My doctoral thesis begins with these questions to explore what unequal intersubjectivity demands of us as social justice-oriented scholars and activists in seeking an 'equality' that neither capitulates to nor relies upon assimilation. As this introductory chapter outlines, I approach the concept of 'unequal intersubjectivity' with caution, understanding it only provisionally as the interaction of diverse individuals and groups of people with dissimilar and unequally-

⁴ To briefly gloss some of the many aspects of our asymmetry: I, a white settler Canadian, cis-gendered woman with advanced university education and no dependents, worked as a 'volunteer co-operant' in Mozambique without a so-called 'proper salary' but carrying a Canadian passport, keys to a Canadian-government paid apartment, and unquestioned access to the foreign diplomatic community and attendant project funding. Graça, a black Mozambican with secondary school education and a grown family, an established union activist and respected feminist leader, had to work with an inexperienced foreigner who was new to the country, its languages, its modes of operation, and its socio-political movements, yet whose capabilities were somehow meant to be an asset to Graça's work and whose 'living subsidy' surpassed Graça's own 'proper salary.' The intricacies of our differences are far more complex and will find echoes in some of the analyses in this project.

valued experiences and epistemologies. Each encounter's frame is significant for shaping the terms on which understandings are rendered meaningful, valuable, comprehensible, or the inverse. Crucially, each intersubjective encounter – each conversation, to use the terms of this project – operates within and is operative of particular knowledge systems, value and power structures, epistemologies, and cosmologies. As such, each interaction offers a site of contestation that can be read for its ideological iterations and frictions. This work is situated at those sites where unequal intersubjectivity is performed across differentiating gaps. Its primary analytical focus is the much more complex work of speaking, making oneself understood, and hearing another's meaning despite those gaps, and its operative mode conceives of and deploys conversation as a critical methodology that, I argue, is particularly germane to this process.

Read with conversation in mind, Mi'kmaw educator and scholar Marie Battiste's call to end "cognitive imperialism" (Battiste xvi) speaks to the central problematic of my project by foregrounding the need for intersubjective meaning-making mechanisms that are capable of addressing inequality's resilience. Because imperial histories and colonial presents continue to produce marked asymmetries in both understanding the world and making the world understood, this project focuses on that epistemological contestation as fundamental to the difficulties encountered in working across differences. Portuguese scholars Boaventura de Sousa Santos, João Arriscado Nunes, and Maria Paula Meneses⁵

⁵ As I have done with Marie Battiste above, I will introduce scholars by the identity category (nation, racialization, etc.) and/or scholarly field with which they are most readily associated or self present. This practice is partial and imperfect and knowingly overlooks many important intersections: Santos, for example, works closely with Brazilian thinkers and contexts and Meneses was born in, has worked in, and continues to research on and in Mozambique. However, I will continue this inadequate practice throughout for the purposes of flagging something of each thinker's positionality. In part, I follow South African

unequivocally name “epistemicide” as the “other side of genocide” (de Sousa Santos, Nunes, and Meneses xvix), and I position this project as taking up their associated contention that there can be “no global social justice without global cognitive justice” (xvix). I ask what that justice requires by seeking modes of enabling comprehension across perniciously unequal systems of making meaning and considering the possibilities for transformative knowledge production and textual interpretation at sites of unequal intersubjective exchange. My analysis focuses on select texts from the 1980s to present in two primary archives: from Indigenous Canada, *The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation* (Maria Campbell in collaboration with Linda Griffiths) and *Monkey Beach* (Eden Robinson); and from South Africa, *Mother to Mother* (Sindiwe Magona) and *Coconut* (Kopano Matlwa).⁶ I have chosen these particular texts for their rich articulations of conversation along a range of registers – narrative, thematic, conceptual and structural – that offer readings of literary content as interrelated with critical methodology and engaged in resistant processes. One priority of this project is to foreground contemporary works from women authors that engage their own kinds of feminisms while also speaking to larger concerns in their respective fields (Robinson, Matlwa). Another priority is to consider texts from earlier, more stridently resistant

feminist scholar Yvette Abrahams in this respect: “Because womanism considers race and gender identity important, I have occasionally specified the race and gender identity of the scholars I discuss. In this way, racism and sexism by exclusion...can be rendered visible” (Abrahams, “Ambiguity Is My Middle Name” 421). In cases where scholarship overrides nation etc. as the basis of identification in the biographies most readily available (through institutional affiliation, for example), my descriptions will reflect that representation.

⁶ The parameters of this timeframe will gain further explanation in section IV.i of this chapter, but it is important to state that the relatively presentist position reflected by the publishing period does not reflect the long historical trajectory to which the material responds. Like “equality” and “social justice,” “Indigenous Canada” is a descriptor I use uncomfortably, without intending to foreground the colonial nation-state within Indigenous women’s cultural production while wanting to gesture across colonial spaces.

moments, either politically or within the frame of the text or both (Campbell/ Griffiths and Magona). In *The Book of Jessica* and *Mother to Mother*, conversation forms the foundational content through which to interrogate intersubjective violence; it also, however, suggests ways of imagining unequal intersubjectivity otherwise. The two texts provide unique opportunities to read the struggles within conversation itself alongside the historiographical work of retelling significant histories that are revised and reflected upon in the process. This is most obvious in *Mother to Mother* with Amy Biehl's 1993 death set in the context of Operation Barcelona and the Congress of South African Students' school boycotts, a time of especial socio-political weight during the transition out of apartheid. In *The Book of Jessica*, the historiography is more personal – Campbell's retelling of her own life story, and her participation in Griffiths's telling of her story – that simultaneously takes place in a socio-political and scholarly moment marked by resistance to the appropriation of Indigenous women's voices in literature. In *Monkey Beach* and *Coconut*, on the other hand, the formal literary structures and critical contexts elicit an expansive scaffolding of conversive work that carries the violence of the other texts but within shifted frames. These later texts grapple with the rise in neoliberal policies and thinking in each of their contexts – following from the 1994 North American Free Trade Agreement and South Africa's adoption of neoliberal economic policies during Thabo Mbeki's presidency (1999 – 2008) – and a parallel decline in identity politics, while also working through the meanings attached to racialization and gender through the experience of continued inequalities. In *Monkey Beach*, questions about identity find expression through explorations of Indigenous Knowledge and knowledge

production; in *Coconut*, those questions are more securely rooted in questions about race and its role in post-apartheid settings. I have chosen to focus on only these four texts rather than on a wider range of works in order to focus on the workings of conversation as deeply as possible. This project does not attempt to be comprehensive in its scope; rather, it limits its sites of analysis in order to examine the potential for crossings or for productive juxtapositions as deeply as possible. Together, these particular texts draw out some of the most difficult risks and hopeful possibilities within conversation as I imagine it and tentatively transform inequality through fragile encounters. In the space of this introductory chapter, conversation also practices making meaning across the distances of the scholarly archives. While my justification for drawing these two distinct fields into a single analytical framework gains accumulated attention throughout the project, the fact of their co-examination brings into focus key scholarly and political models currently used to theorize the effects of unequal intersubjectivity (as outlined in Part III) and the potential for engendering transformative ‘equality’ in both Canada and South Africa. Moreover, the shared framework performs a horizontal relationality across distances shaped by overlapping legacies that challenge us to read “cognitive imperialism” (Battiste xvi), and resistances against Eurocentrism, in ways that deprioritize the vertical address to centres of power and insist on listening more carefully and less comfortably.

My overall project, then, takes the differentiated resiliencies of inequality and resistance as starting points and the uncertain potentiality of conversation as a guide in engaging scholarship and literature across mutually – if unevenly – generative archives. The remainder of this introductory chapter supports those processes by outlining the

project's theoretical framework in relation to Indigenous women's literatures in Canada and black South African women's literatures. I start by sketching out the potential for employing 'conversation' as a critical practice that might approximate, or create the conditions for, working and understanding across difference otherwise, and then by discussing the project's uneasy comparative approach. Following, I map out prevailing scholarly and political modes of addressing inequality across difference and indicate key aspects of those approaches that this project seeks to address. A secondary mapping then foregrounds central aspects of the archives' uncomfortably comparative relationality by focusing on questions of indigenous feminisms at cross-epistemological sites, before providing a brief description of the project's subsequent chapters.⁷ Because I bring together fields that are not often situated in tandem, this introduction engages in some extended discussion of the various political and scholarly genealogies associated with the project's aims. Because I simultaneously take conversation as my analytic lens, I use this space to bring Indigenous women's literatures and black South African women's literatures into careful relationality before commencing the associated analyses. As an overview that also experiments with conversation as its organizing principle, then, this is not a standard introduction. I trust, however, that the traits of a standalone chapter are warranted to account for the range of political, scholarly, and epistemological contexts at work.

⁷ I use the phrase "indigenous feminisms" loosely to refer both to feminisms situated in North American Indigenous contexts (where the term "Indigenous" gains deliberate usage) and to feminisms situated in more diffuse postcolonial contexts, such as South Africa, despite the unequal sense of the term in each space. In both cases, I use "indigenous" to signify "non-settler" or "non-colonial."

Part I Why Conversation?

In this project, I conceptualize ‘conversation’ in three broadly overlapping ways: as an embodied process enacted through physical encounters; as a critical practice focussed on conceptual encounters; and as an interpretive approach to formal, narrative, or thematic literary encounters. I consider each aspect of conversational work in relation to the others, and each undergoes its own sub-division, but I tease apart and simplify the three prongs here for the sake of attempted clarity. I have not sought out conversation in the literal form of interviews – with writers or readers or activists, practitioners – though I imagine that work to be a possible extension from this project. Rather, I have focussed on the unstable aspects of conversation, to work against the assumption that conversation can produce transparent transactions and to avoid placing undue weight on the spoken word or giving it explanatory power. Given the very difficult, asymmetrical, and long-standing practice of settler scholars interviewing Indigenous peoples or of Indigenous speakers telling stories to settler scribes of various descriptions, practices that are discussed at length in such work as settler scholar Sophie McCall’s *First Person Plural* (2011), I have elected to watch conversational work in texts and theorize possibilities for conversational analysis before enacting a different kind of conversational practice. Importantly, conversation as I imagine it works both as an expression of and through juxtaposition, and the sense of there being distinguishable parts in communication with one another to produce particular kinds of energies is key. The epigraphs that open this chapter help illustrate something of what I see conversation doing, conceptually and methodologically. Each passage, for example, implies and also troubles a de-prioritized vertical address and

offers horizontal possibilities in its stead, opening onto a project of living among and despite (mis)familiarities. Sto:Loh writer and scholar Lee Maracle, first, speaks of the conversation her text engages as “intimate,” directed towards and deliberately centering her “own people” in a gesture that welcomes healing through words: “My voice is for those who need to hear some truth,” Maracle states, concerned with “those who need to recover the broken threads of their lives” (Maracle, *I Am Woman* 10). Although her worded offering cannot escape “the Europeans in this land,” it can focus on a less diffuse audience and engage the particularities of oppositional receptions from within Indigenous communities, rather than those coming from normative positions of power, in a consciously located engagement: “If you do not find yourselves spoken to, it is not because I intend rudeness – you just don’t concern me now” (10). The second epigraph, from black South African scholar and psychologist Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela, former coordinator of victims’ public hearings in the Western Cape for South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission,⁸ makes the vertical address more palpably present even as she seeks out horizontality. The scene of address is painfully specific: Pretoria Central Prison, September 1997, interviewing apartheid enforcer turned inmate Eugene de Kock – popularly known as “prime evil” – for the first time. Gobodo-Madikizela’s book-length set of conversations with and about de Kock, which interrogates the limits of forgiveness in a terror and trauma saturated context, insists on something other than rage or love in

⁸ For more information about Gobodo-Madikizela, see her personal website (<http://www.pumlagobodom.co.za/>). Note that I have described her as a “Black South African” rather than by her linguistic or cultural heritage within South Africa. This is consistent with her representation of herself, and with contemporary naming practices in South Africa, which differ markedly from identificatory processes among Indigenous communities in North America. I call attention to this difference to flag it as a gap that I am not forcing closed.

asymmetrical relationships, something akin to what we glimpse in the incongruity of their embodied encounter: the “clattering of . . . leg chains” accompanying an “extend[ed . . .] hand” in a polite greeting (Gobodo-Madikizela 5). For both Maracle and Gobodo-Madikizela, intimacies partially correspond with violences in extended considerations of what white South African scholar Sarah Nuttall suggests are modes of entanglement, and each thinks through expressions of socio-political change as premised on the intensity of personal experience. Yet neither entirely resolves the knottiness of entanglement or renders the unfamiliar familiar.

In the third epigraph, Mvskoke poet, musician, and author Joy Harjo assigns imagination the power to “illumine[] us” (Harjo 19). That same imagination, moreover, “speaks with us, sings with/ us” (19–20) – converses with us – in a reconfigured horizontality that receives “imagining” as a participant “need[ing] praise as does any living thing” (17). And yet should imagination’s progeny – stories and songs – fail to “translate the full impact of falling, or the in-/ verse power of rising up” (23–24), can imagination prove sufficiently compelling to shift global human interactions beyond atrocity-based postcoloniality and claims to indigeneity?⁹ Is that failure even a loss, for Harjo, or is it a different kind of testament? Concerned with substantive social justice in its broadest expression, I begin this project by acknowledging the momentous contributions made by feminist, Indigenous, postcolonial, anti-imperial, queer, critical race, and diverse other scholars and practitioners to address injustices despite pernicious –

⁹ By “atrocity-based . . . claims to indigeneity,” I am not suggesting that claims to indigeneity in and of themselves, on the part of Indigenous peoples (as opposed to settlers/colonialists), produce atrocity, only that they operate within a system of ideological production and counter-production that is related to atrocity.

and arguably deepening – global inequalities. I do have questions about justice-oriented assumptions in creative and scholarly practices that posit unquestioned value in re-imaginings: under what conditions or in which kinds of alliances, for example, can imagination effect substantive socio-political, socio-economic change? How could creative expression better inform either critical analysis or political response? What communicative apparatus might supplement the unreliability of language? Yet despite this unease, it is creativity's central if complicated work in imagining modified worlds that weaves throughout this project and it is conversation – as both embodied process and interpretive practice – that I turn to for reading the textured effects. Making sense of the material that is one's own experience or another's narration demands a particular kind of intersubjective work that, I argue, conversation can help animate by figuring comprehension as a physical scene unfolding, a tangible thing to be handled, a mode of “open[ing] your skull, peel[ing] off and peel[ing] off, listen[ing]” (Grace 151).¹⁰ As these passages from *Maracle*, *Gobodo-Madikizela*, and *Harjo* all intimate, articulating within and across socio-political and literary archives involves varying iterations of unequal intersubjectivity that call comprehension into question as itself a powerfully creative practice of critical significance.

My sense of conversation's critical potential again gains clarity in *Maracle*'s words that shift us even closer towards the work of conversation and away from anticipated endpoints when she observes that “[i]n the end, life is lived through wind's

¹⁰ This passage is taken from a scene in Patricia Grace's 1998 novel, *Baby No-Eyes*, where one of the main characters, Mahaki, reflects upon the frustrating non-conversation taking place between his grandfather's Maori community and the settler New Zealander town council members concerning a prolonged land dispute. Mahaki speaks of ways in which understanding fails in this moment, but not inevitably.

breath” (Maracle, “Oratory” 66). This project explores the striking potential held by conversation for enunciating such ephemerality and propelling glimpses of reconfigured understandings without (re)determining value as fixed or absolute. Concerned with interpretive practices that facilitate movement between epistemologies, I approach ‘conversation’ as a performance that can encompass as many schemes of signification as there are interpretative frameworks. Verbal, physical, and theoretical ‘speech,’ for example, all live in spaces of conversation. The uneven, unequal relationality embedded within processes of speaking to or about one another, of conferring value onto one another, and the operation of difference within those relationships, help conceptualize spatial delineations that conversations seek to cross. Methodologically, I acknowledge the vast amount of work that theorizes artistic involvement in socio-political transformation, observe the prolific social justice-oriented activity that bridges scholarly disciplines, professional sectors, and world regions, and then pause. Rather than prioritizing my position in relation to specific debates, I hope to attend to dissonances between subject positions without nullifying possibilities for understanding. But I also acknowledge that my position is itself located, and though that location is potentially troubling to this project, it is what grounds my questions and so begs naming. As Māori scholar and poet Alice Te Punga Somerville reminds us, “[a]ny book [or project] is a product of place: one always writes somewhere” (Te Punga Somerville, *Once Were Pacific* xxiv). Most immediately, my “somewhere” is the unceded traditional Mississauga and Hodinohso:ni territory that Hamilton, Ontario continues to claim. That place orients me through the set of experiences that are particular to my movements and my sense of their meanings,

patching early life on Mi'kmaw territory (southwestern Nova Scotia) together with more recent years in Nairobi, Kenya (traditional Kikuyu and Maasai land) and Maputo, Mozambique (Ronga and Changana land). Each movement has carried white settler privilege alongside my differently privileged location within a mixed extended family from which I learned to connect imaginatively and emotionally to a version of Kenya long before I could develop connections physically. Those and other combined privileges and shifting knowledges of place undergird the work I am able to do today. My grounding relationships to “somewhere,” then, are both direct and adjacent, uneasily tenuous while remaining powerfully invested; my relationships to these particular bodies of work are likewise deliberate but contiguous, signalling without expressing my experience. The dynamic anchors that emerge through self-mapping encourage me to focus on sites of exchange as places that can enliven useful meta-analysis about how we do the work that we do. And so I begin with the notion of a conversation, think of it as a trope and perceive it as having sites, and experiment with its critical potential.

Based in both creative and theoretical work, my analyses trace implicitly intertextual and explicitly intratextual readings of movement and manoeuvring – among people, laws, forms of oppression, and sparks of liberation – through women's efforts to (re)claim and effect voice across a range of barriers. The framework builds on earlier research that sought to navigate between identity politics' evocation of essentialist 'realities' alongside poststructuralism's displacement of 'the real' within Indigenous women's literatures in Canada. That research focused on reading literary struggles through the limited possibilities of both discourses that, despite their incongruity, unite in

speaking to power imbalances. I expand that analysis into an uncomfortably comparative frame here to consider the broadly intersubjective conditions required for substantive social change rather than the particular theoretical impasse between ‘constructedness’ and ‘essence.’ In order to do so, this project reconsiders the relationship between canonical postcolonial theory, particularly Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s notion of “strategic essentialism” and Homi Bhabha’s “hybridity” and “mimicry,” and Indigenous critical traditions. It engages indigenous feminisms in particular, setting up cross-epistemological conversations to ask how best to move beyond hierarchical power relationships within and between archives. Cherokee scholar and novelist Daniel Heath Justice, for example, provides a way of reading the empowering cultural specificity in Maracle’s use of orature by arguing for Indigenous literary nationalism and both Justice and Maracle complicate Bhabha’s focus on the radical potential of ambiguity. As Maracle states in reference to Indigenous women’s struggles, “[b]ondage is paralyzing and removing chains is painful” (Maracle, *I Am Woman* viii); her unambiguously physical descriptors for both racialized sexist oppression and the necessity of resistance helps situate Maracle’s analysis in contradistinction to Bhabha without losing the imbricated relationality in Bhabha’s thinking.¹¹ By playing the dangerous game of delineating spaces while disrupting the

¹¹ It is significant to note that Maracle’s own writing experience includes her earlier work with Don Barnett and Rick Sterling who acted as editors for her autobiography *Bobbi Lee: Indian Rebel*, first published in 1975 (two years after Maria Campbell’s *Halfbreed* was published) in another kind of asymmetrical conversational process. Barnett and Sterling published that early version with an extended subtitle however, “Struggles of a Native Canadian Woman,” as part of a Liberation Support Movement publication series. That publication held deeply critical political commitments, but was produced through a process that still saw Maracle’s voice modulated and managed by a male settler voice (Barnett’s). Maracle acknowledges this managerial relationship in her preface to the later edition, published by the Women’s Press (1990) with a new preface by Maracle herself and a foreword by Okanagan writer and educator Jeannette Armstrong, where she works to reclaim and reframe her own story. (McCall takes this up in both *First Person Plural* and in an article entitled “‘A Life Has Only One Author’: Twice-Told Aboriginal Life Narratives” [2002].)

bases of those demarcations, I struggle with the risk of reifying differences while addressing the inequalities that material, historical, and epistemological differences produce. My primary focus, however, is on the processes of attempted crossings. Denoting an embodied form of interaction and associated with being of and in the world, ‘conversation’ is especially apt for a critical practice aimed at inter-experiential learning.¹² This kind of intervention elects to forego blueprints for action and instead work through conversation as itself a mechanism for enriching the imperative intersubjective, cross-epistemological interaction at the core of transformative social and academic practice, focussing also on the labour ‘conversation’ demands in remaining an unreliable conveyer of knowledge.

In choosing conversation as my desired praxis, I am compelled to think about expression, understanding, exchange, and value systems simultaneously, and each in relation to location. Learning from postcolonial feminist theorists such as Chandra Talpade Mohanty about imperialist reproductions in Western feminist discourse and Sara Ahmed on the “strange encounters” in asymmetrical intersubjectivity alongside Battiste’s indictment of “cognitive imperialism” (Battiste xvi), I argue that possibilities for non-hierarchical, anti-oppressive cross-epistemological interaction continue to fail in part due to reliance upon unequally shared (Eurocentric or Anglo-American) discourses and a

I Am Woman, following from both of these publications, interrogates gender alongside race and class through fuller engagement with feminism alongside the particulars of colonialism in an extended consideration of under-interrogated power relations between Indigenous people and white settlers as well as power relations within Indigenous communities.

¹² The first definition provided by *The Oxford English Dictionary* for “conversation” is a compelling one for this project: “The action of living or having one’s being in a place or among persons.” (First published in the *New English Dictionary*, 1893.)

falsely universalized – and unlocated – criteria of value. Conversation becomes an important critical tool for the ways in which it both operates within, and is operative of, different knowledge systems, value structures, epistemologies, and cosmologies. Part of the challenge posed by this approach, then, is in hearing, reading, and articulating within continually shifting, asymmetrical parameters of knowledge that incorporate multiple registers of difference. On the other hand, because ‘conversation’ remains unreliable, it builds upon but also moves beyond the canonical notion – for feminisms as well as postcolonialisms – of ‘speaking back’ while taking seriously the hazards of ‘speaking with.’¹³ It renders explicit the situatedness of voice and knowledge as coming from particular places and contending with particular questions to take as its starting point the presence of difference (whether theorized as constructed or as somehow irreducible). Potentially, conversation framed in this way can assume the weighty challenge of rendering those differences meaningful, disrupting a comforting desire for commonality that either obscures or trivializes difference. The resulting critical practice interrogates processes of animating meaning across dissimilar epistemologies. Its focus on the physicality of being present emphasizes embodied ways of knowing that decentre cerebral authority and align with feminist epistemologies like those of Jewish American

¹³ I am not suggesting that approaching conversation as critically productive is a new endeavor. M. M. Bakhtin has perhaps most famously theorized dialogue and interrelationality in resonant ways, though he brings more philological training to his work than do many of the thinkers in this project. Bakhtin’s assertion that “[a]ny understanding is imbued with response and necessarily elicits it in one form or another: the listener becomes the speaker” (Bakhtin 68), for example, or that “[t]he utterance is filled with *dialogic overtones*, and they must be taken into account in order to understand fully the style of the utterance[...]

our thought itself – philosophical, scientific, and artistic – is born and shaped in the process of our interaction and struggle with others’ thought” (92) sounds similar to my interest in learning through unequal intersubjectivity. My interest differs, however, in focusing on conversation as an underused methodology that holds particular potential for thinking through intersubjective differences and distances – textual and embodied – non-hierarchically.

poet and theorist Adrienne Rich who embarks on her own radical mapping of space, “not with a continent or a country or a house, but with the geography closest in – the body” (Rich 30). Because both postcolonial and Indigenous scholarly and creative archives produce contesting essentialist- and constructivist-based discourses as premised on divergent assumptions about revolutionary feasibilities, varying commitments to re-imagined futures surface. Because I work with an archive of overlappings to hear from each without seeking resolution, those commitments may signify otherwise through altered alignments. A key risk I take, however, is one of engaging across fields badly – appropriating, incorporating, or othering – in an attempt to conceptualize anti-oppressive alternatives. As a white settler scholar researching literatures from communities to which I do not belong, I try to de-centre settler interests by de-centering my own settler positionality; the same move, however, risks evoking a voice that intimates falsely neutral ungroundedness and re-inscribes the power structures that this project seeks to unsettle. Amidst this uncertain critical potential, I find models for creative coalition-building hopefully instructive. To quote Ahmed, “[i]mproper juxtapositions can do things. I think that is one of the gifts that interdisciplinary scholars can give to philosophy” (Ahmed, Tuori, and Peltonen 263–264). The trope of ‘conversation,’ then, helps configure a process and a practice of hearing from each element of surprising, if not ‘proper,’ juxtapositions. It provides a structure for taking risks that cannot guard against renewed violence but that might yield altered spaces in which to breathe, and think and experience, differently.

The circular, interdependent structure of conversation also propels my interest and frames the process as a tacit agreement for both listening and speaking without predetermined scripts, enunciating perpetual potential for creativity – continual movement in thoughts, understandings, and assumptions – that is also a growing from and into one another.¹⁴ That same potential carries the danger of re-enacting violence; Métis scholar and poet Emma LaRocque reminds us that some conversations hurt, particularly when necessary critical discord arises within small and beleaguered fields of analysis such as Indigenous feminisms (LaRocque, “Métis and Feminist” 62), and my own opening anecdote foregrounds friction over understanding. Yet as an antidote to inflexibly maintained convictions produced by uncreative thinking, imagined departures from fixed positions – potentiated, if not always realized, through conversation – allow understandings to dislodge and re-lodge themselves with unforeseen nuance. The South African novelist Bessie Head, for example, writes that “[a]ll life flows continually like water in the stream and I am only some of the water in the stream, never able to gauge my depth” (Head 128). For Head, who lived much of her life as a refugee in Botswana due to the racial discrimination she faced in South Africa, the image of movement that engulfs without defining is itself powerfully indeterminate, both painful and liberating.¹⁵ In either

¹⁴ The published conversation between Homi K. Bhabha and John Comaroff entitled “Speaking of Postcoloniality, in the Continuous Present: A Conversation” elucidates this point. Neither theorist – speaker – is clearly the interviewer or the interviewee. Although Comaroff begins the conversation with commentary followed by a question for Bhabha, and although Bhabha often answers rather than asks questions, the piece reads as a process of moving back and forth that was only later edited into thematic sections (Bhabha and Comaroff 15–46).

¹⁵ Head, who never knew her birth parents, was born in 1937 in Pietermaritzburg, Natal to a white mother and a black father. Under the 1949 Immorality Act which banned sexual relations between people of different categories in apartheid South Africa’s racial taxonomy, Head’s parentage became a social and legal impossibility and she experienced the weight of multiple exclusions. As a child, Head was given to a ‘coloured’ family to be raised, but she was later forbidden to return to that home by a court magistrate who

reading, the act of upholding rigid convictions about knowledge or convictions about the rigidity of knowledge is to impose upon the world a knowability that is hostile to the constant change of a stream and antithetical to conceptions of shifting locations or depths.

This insistent evocation of change without fixed conclusions also dovetails with concerns raised by Māori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith about the dangers in forcing standard evaluative criteria onto differently acculturated knowledge production. Drawing from Jamaican-British scholar Stuart Hall – core founder of the Birmingham school of Cultural Studies – Smith describes ways in which concepts of the “West” function to “provide a standard *model of comparison* [as well as] *criteria of evaluation* against which other societies can be ranked” (L. T. Smith 43).¹⁶ As Smith argues, this practice has created “procedures by which indigenous peoples and their societies were coded into the Western system of knowledge” (43), appropriated into adapted taxonomies of knowledge rather than engaged with on their own terms. James Sákéj Youngblood Henderson – a legal scholar and tribal citizen of Oklahoma Chickasaw Nation – and Battiste argue along similar lines, introducing what ‘their own terms’ consist of by emphasizing the unequal relationality between worldviews and the stakes in Eurocentric defining practices:

Eurocentric thought demands universal definitions of Indigenous knowledge, even though Indigenous scholars have established no common usage of the term. The

declared the family not her own. As an adult, Head lived in Botswana where she was not subject to the same laws, but where she was considered an outsider. Head writes of the psychological effects of her many violent displacements in *A Question of Power*, an autobiographical novel that follows her struggle with mental health as intersected with racism and sexism. She died at age 49. (See

<http://www.sahistory.org.za/people/bessie-amelia-head> and http://thuto.org/bhead/html/biography/brief_biography.htm for more information.)

¹⁶ Tuhiwai Smith is drawing from Stuart Hall’s 1996 essay “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power” (S. Hall, “The West and the Rest” 184–227).

quest for precision and certainty is a typical Eurocentric strategy. . . . This is the strategy of a language system that is not attached to an ecology or to its intelligible essences. . . . The Eurocentric quest for universal solutions has raised suspicion among Indigenous people who do not want to be assimilated into Eurocentric categories. Indigenous people do not understand the purpose of manifesting their knowledge and heritage to European researchers. (Battiste and Henderson 36, 37)

I am interested in, and work from, the claim of there being different knowledges that, when manifested in socio-politically shaped environments – in this case, environments shaped by colonialism – co-exist unequally and are employed in corresponding struggles for definitional power.

Although working in and amongst ‘difference’ begs some form of comparative analysis, I share the caution clearly articulated by Hall and expanded upon below and seek notions of ‘comparison’ that are not embedded exclusively in Eurocentric and imperialist evaluative criteria but are based instead on enlivening epistemological interaction, returning me to ideas of creative conversation. Ahmed, for example, elects to interrogate intersubjectivity by focusing on the “particular modes of encounter (rather than particular others)” (Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 144) and conceptualizes particularity as “a question of *modes of encounter* through which others are faced” (144). As such, “the particularity of ‘differences’ [is made to] matter in ethics” (144) without attributing ‘difference’ to one body and undifferentiated ‘normalcy’ to another, and without evacuating the physicality of encounter. Ahmed draws upon movement –

temporal as well as spatial – to suggest the role of embodied communication in her argument. She states:

We could ask, not only what made this encounter possible (its historicity), but also what does it make possible, what futures might it open up? We need to ask, not only how did we arrive here, at this particular place, but how is this arrival linked to other places, to an elsewhere that is not simply absent or present? [W]hat moves (between) subjects, and hence what fails to move, might precisely be that which cannot be presented in the register of speech, or voicing. (145, 156)

Furthermore, Ahmed explicitly calls for a “communicative ethics” as premised on the “impossibility of . . . one voice simply speaking to, and being heard by, another” (156) and that demands “a certain way of holding proximity and distance together” (157). In colonial and postcolonial contexts where merely “listening carefully across the distance” (157) is insufficient to the complex task of understanding, “[a]n ethics that assumes distance as its point of entry . . . fails to recognize the implication of the self in the encounter, and the responsibility the self has for the other to whom one is listening” (157). By focusing on the encounter as in and of history, indeed as carrying multiple histories, Ahmed urges that attention be paid to non-vocal registers of self and other in reading intersubjectivity’s proximate distances. This call also emphasizes the difficult centrality of imprecision in conversational work alongside the impossibility of non-involvement, the fallacy of ‘just listening in’ without leaving a mark.

Cree scholar, writer, and comedian Neal McLeod shifts history and encounter into an explicitly creative frame where conversation enacts “a constant play between present,

past, and future” (McLeod 95). Arguing that Cree narrative memory “is embodied and reflective,” a medium of knowledge production and expression that “allows us to think critically about the world around us through stories and through the process of trying to imagine new stories that we could collectively and individually live through” (95), McLeod assigns the imagination a power akin to Harjo’s in the epigraph. Just as McLeod foregrounds the inextricability of his interpretive methodology from his material under interpretation, I would like to foreground my methodology as one that engages with the power that interpretive practices bring to bear on both academic and activist work. Acknowledging that the methodologies we use come from specific traditions, I ask questions about how to decolonize both scholarly and broader forms of community engagement and how to bring critical conversation to bear on decolonizing methodologies. Afro- and Indigenous-centric scholarly responses to Euro- and Anglo American-centric norms of subjectivity, particularly those that either intersect with or consciously take up feminist modes of theorizing, provide a range of positions that challenge dominant conceptions of self and other and are fundamental to this project as a whole. While such contributions are not given isolated attention, they are – as I hope will become clear – integral to my overall analysis and shape my thinking throughout. Following from Smith’s argument, if we talk about “cognitive justice” then we are talking also about “research justice” and thinking consciously about how to do our work ethically. My own interest in thinking through processes of feminist cross-cultural practice by focusing on possibilities for and barriers to cross-epistemological

understanding provides one starting point for exploring conversation's capacity for creatively transformative labour.

Part II Uneasy Comparative Learning

The work of working across difference raises this truncated set of considerations regarding comparative practice that – albeit cursory – will hopefully suggest both the productive orientations and methodological shortcomings to be expected in what follows. The areas of comparative work that elicit most unease as well as the potential commitment to learning from and with others gain attention here for shaping my cross-archival analyses. Having long raised questions of how to oppose and change systems of pernicious inequality, the literatures in both archives have directly or indirectly challenged frames of legitimacy imposed by non-Indigenous – in the broadest sense – epistemologies and thus practiced conversing across difference. But conversing is, of course, risky. If defense against the dehumanizing effects of imperialism – epitomized by the writing of colonized bodies out of their own histories – calls attention to the constructedness of value systems that distinguish 'margins' from 'centers,' it also risks essentializing disparate pieces of each field in impossible gestures towards cohesion. The usefulness of destabilizing the truth claims that underwrite Enlightenment-based epistemologies and determine the parameters of a modern subject, furthermore, becomes complicated by a subsequent need to recuperate reconfigured truths. It is this ongoing challenge in each field – of both needing and repudiating the truth claim as a powerful unit of discursive weight – that links instability and its opposite in an uneasy alliance. The same challenge forces postcolonial and Indigenous writers to struggle to be heard in ways

that trouble established paradigms of knowing in our Enlightenment-informed academies.¹⁷ I argue that the work engaged in this project grapples with how we can “continue to live, without a [clear cut] revolutionary horizon” (Brown, *Edgework* 99) while still “breathing a renewed emancipatory spirit” (114–115) into anti-colonial feminist practices that circumvent isolating paralysis and despair.

Indigenous Studies scholar Chadwick Allen proposes especially evocative processes for reading across locations. Allen’s methodology, which gains fuller attention in chapter three, shows the productiveness of a comparative practice that bridges Indigenous American (or American Indian, to use Allen’s term) and Māori cultural production. He describes a “sense of highly situated interactions created by juxtapositions” (Allen, “Rere ke/Moving Differently” 47) as integral to the work:

The ‘unique’ interpretive movements I trace through these juxtapositions are linked by a focus on analyzing how the presence or absence of indigenous language functions in each text, a focus that emerged over time from the experience of working with the juxtapositions themselves The point, however, is less about the inevitability of any particular analysis and more about the productiveness of a comparative process. (47)

Allen’s embrace of a comparative practice that he has adapted for his commitments to Indigenous cultural production provides encouragement to researchers like me who are skeptical of comparative traditions generally. As glossed in the earlier discussion of Smith, Battiste and Henderson, and Hall, the insufficiency of comparative analysis resides

¹⁷ Knowing that my terms run the risk of overgeneralization, I draw on the language used by Marie Battiste and Sákéj Henderson in discussion of “Eurocentrism” (Battiste and Henderson 21).

in its basis on a model that normalizes and valorizes one site of study against which ‘other’ sites are compared. Thinking of the legitimizing function of standards and of ‘legitimacy’ as signifying only within the internal systems of power/logic in which it is mobilized, however, we are reminded that the terms – despite their universalizing tendencies – are context specific. The ways in which standards are constructed and rendered valuable, therefore, demand our attention. Allen’s notion of comparative work intervenes here in exciting ways by moving away from a center-reliant model and celebrating, instead, movement within and between relatable but dissimilar texts. Reflecting on the initial use of ‘and’ to describe his cross-archival research, Allen states that “[t]he problem with relying on coordinating conjunctions to do so much work is that their primary function is to connect words, phrases or clauses performing grammatical functions that are the *same*. . . , and despite my own or others’ best intentions, these *ands* are ill equipped to sustain anything in between” (*Trans-Indigenous* xii). To read across contexts and bodies of work without either erecting an ideal, inimitable point of departure or tallying “a balanced list of *same* and its mirrored other, *not same*” (xiii) is this project’s methodological challenge. One primary risk for me in this project is in recentering the settler scholar’s interests in the process of attempting otherwise. My comparative practice and uneasiness therein will become clearer through further discussion of the texts that this project brings into particular kinds of ‘contact,’ and their modes of sustaining and moving outwards from the in between spaces. But for now, I would simply like to start those discussions with an eye on key concerns as well as the critical opportunities made available through comparison and, concurrently, the limitations of unproblematicized

comparative assumptions. Thinking of Allen's "highly situated interactions" as ones that struggle with questions of who can speak for whom; how to converse cross-culturally about lived oppression without becoming the 'native informant'; how to engage without either emptying or overwriting unrecorded experiences of subalterneity; and how best to challenge the colonial epistemologies of empiricism and rationalism that serve to justify 'Othering' the – here – speaking subject, also helps frame the resultant "juxtapositions" within relatable contexts.

By situating theorists in relation to one another rather than merely witnessing efforts to speak back to dominant power structures, this project sees spaces begin to open for closer analysis of the stakes, strategies, frames, and aims involved in rendering meaning intelligible across the distances within unequal intersubjectivity. The literatures and feminisms from black South African women writers and Indigenous women writers in Canada provide rich sites of inquiry into cross-epistemological labour by having to signify in multiple registers and negotiate variously contested allegiances simultaneously. As this project unfolds, I hope to contribute to the texture of their cross-epistemological resistance work by facilitating conversations that potentially complicate prevalent ideas about each archive, and about the kinds of isolation of each from the other that tend to be assumed.

Part III Change What?

This project germinated in six labour union offices in Mozambique's capital with Graça and five other colleagues struggling to coordinate a response to the escalating challenges associated with HIV/AIDS, in a context of deep gender-based inequalities and

acute treatment shortfalls, and simultaneously enjoying the gatherings enabled by our collaboration. Those scenes do not become the material of discussion, but they introduce a series of interlocking issues that frame the analysis: horizontal as well as clearly asymmetrical relationalities, interpersonal and structural productions of inequality, and the complicated intricacies of individual operations within systemic forms of (dis)empowerment. The scenes also foreground my motivating concerns with ‘development’ discourses more generally. This project does not focus on the unwieldy yet powerful international development-industrial-complex, but it is that particular institutional context – calling attention to the inter-statal asymmetries shaping geopolitical inequalities – that makes critical forms of conversation so important. Out of this context comes, first, a sense of urgency to reconceptualize ‘working across difference’ – articulated in a formal political sense as ‘international cooperation/ relations’ – in ways that continually challenge familiar (hegemonic) claims about centres and margins that follow Eurocentric epistemological trajectories. Consonant with Battiste’s critique of “cognitive imperialism” and de Sousa Santos, Nunes, and Meneses’ demand for “global cognitive justice,” this need to reconceptualize unequal intersubjectivity responds to the deeply entrenched imperial practice of valuing particular places as metropolises over places situated as peripheries and the resultant devaluation of non-European ontologies and epistemologies that continues to trouble projects aimed at creating or increasing possibilities for social justice.¹⁸ Numerous scholars based in or focussed on the ‘global

¹⁸ I do take issue with a frequent, and often unquestioned, assumption that work described as oriented towards ‘social justice’ is ‘politically progressive’ in all desirable ways and that ‘social justice’ simultaneously demands little explication. The limitations of this term deserve more attention than is provided in this project.

south,’ including Jean and John Comaroff (US-based South Africans) and Oyèrónké Oyěwùmí (US-based Nigerian), thoroughly critique ways in which ‘western’ scholarly practice pre-disposes interpretations of any ‘Other’ knowledge production – that cannot neatly trace its colonial (colonizing) roots – as always already lesser.¹⁹ These critiques dovetail significantly with those of Smith, Battiste, and Henderson discussed above, and of Chinese New Zealander international relations scholar Stephen Chan. Seeking a ‘new internationalism’ capable of structural transformation that affects individual lives, Chan brings these questions into the emphatic fore of international relations discourse by arguing for a simultaneous displacement of singular certainties and “an exploration of the many crooked paths that, eventually, lead us maze-like to a common point” (Chan 304). The work of reconfiguring concepts and practices of ‘internationalism’ variously envisioned by Chan and others both aligns with the ethos of this project and expressly takes up formalized global relationalities in ways that my work does not. Not unlike my work, Chan brings global issues into embodied scenes and asks that we think through “international contests of the future . . . by way of soft power” (301). More so than Chan, however, I lean back into postcolonial and Indigenous archives and focus on what ‘soft power’ and expanded empathies might look like in cultural work that can potentiate or disrupt state-sponsored violence.

My proposal to work through conversation in the process implies a need for altered modes of bringing justice to inequality, and this section takes a step back to map

¹⁹ As I have intimated, I am especially interested in how these frameworks for ‘value’ continue to indelibly shape development discourses and their links to neoliberal concepts of progress more specifically, although I do not take those questions up directly in this project.

out five prevalent models for theorizing unequal intersubjectivity. Taken together, the models address discourses of tolerance, citizenship, and international human rights in contexts of increasing xenophobia; feminist and Indigenous analyses of gendered and racialized belonging; Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (TRCs) and the circumscribed potential of legal responses; and possibilities for horizontal rather than vertical conceptions of encounter and witnessing. Like my concerns invoked above, these models traverse state/institutional and individual/subjectival lines. They speak to mixed scholarly terrain and offer imbricated pieces of the critiques and the responses that inform my project. They also, however, point to the gaps that I hope conversation can help address.

The recourse to multiculturalism as underwritten by discourses of tolerance (cf. Brown, Jafri, Mackey) is perhaps the most popular mode for conceptualizing unequal intersubjectivity in Canada and it has also enjoyed a marked rise in South Africa post-1994. Both invoking interpersonal relationality and gaining structural expression through state legislation, multiculturalism has become a potent though contested imaginative frame for conjoining difference and belonging. Especially through the 1988 Canadian Multiculturalism Act and – to a lesser degree – post-apartheid South Africa’s 1996 Constitution and Bill of Rights, states have held out multiculturalism as a talismanic promise of peaceful coexistence among culturally diverse peoples in shared geopolitics.²⁰

²⁰ By way of illustration, see the following quotation from the Canadian Multiculturalism Act: “[T]he Government of Canada recognizes the diversity of Canadians as regards race, national or ethnic origin, colour or religion as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society and is committed to a policy of multiculturalism designed to preserve and enhance the multicultural heritage of Canadians while working to achieve the equality of all Canadians in the economic, social, cultural and political life of Canada...” (Canadian Multiculturalism Act, Preamble, p. 2, 1988) <http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C->

Yet a consequent management of difference through multiculturalism's unofficial cousin, tolerance, aligns with amelioration rather than transformation to effectively entrench the bases for inequality that this project seeks to address. Euro-American political scientist Wendy Brown charts out ways in which 'tolerance' acts as a discourse of regulation and control that not only imposes a particular order on the social fabric of a nation-state but in fact reinforces a strict social hierarchy within that fabric. She argues that,

[I]ike patience, tolerance is necessitated by something one would prefer did not exist. It involves managing the presence of the undesirable, the tasteless, the faulty – even the revolting, repugnant, or vile. In this activity of management, tolerance does not offer resolution or transcendence, but only a strategy for coping As compensation, tolerance anoints the bearer with virtue, with standing for a principled act of permitting one's principles to be affronted; it provides a gracious way of allowing one's tastes to be violated. It offers a robe of modest superiority in exchange for yielding. (Brown, *Regulating Aversion* 25)

South Asian Canadian critical race scholar Beenash Jafri similarly critiques the 2009/2011 Canadian Citizenship Guide for its particular constructions of nationhood that simultaneously evoke a language of multiculturalism and disavow the systemic inequality established between cultures upon which such "multiple-ness" relies (Jafri n. pag.).²¹ Eva

18.7/index.html. See also the Bill of Rights in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (1996) that carries a similar meaning without directly naming either "diversity" or "multiculturalism." Sections of especial interest include section 7 ("Rights"), section 9 ("Equality"), section 10 ("Human Dignity"), section 30 ("Language and Culture"), and section 31 ("Cultural, Religious and Linguistic Communities") <http://www.gov.za/documents/constitution-republic-south-africa-1996>; <http://www.gov.za/documents/constitution/chapter-2-bill-rights>.

²¹ Jafri is especially concerned with the ways in which a transnational whiteness gets scripted in this newest Canadian Citizenship Guide as the most (and perhaps only) legitimate form of cultural encounter and

Mackey, Euro-Canadian professor of Canadian Studies, also argues that recourse to benevolence in the national imaginary has long underwritten a fallacious conviction in peaceful “collaborative cultural contact . . . that utilizes the idea of Canada’s tolerance and justice towards its minorities” as the basis of nationhood (E. Mackey 2). For Mackey, multiculturalism “has as much to do with the construction of identity for those Canadians who do not conceive of themselves as ‘multicultural’ [ie. the white Anglo-Canadian whose construction as the unmarked national norm Mackey traces], as for those who do” (16). Tobago-born Canadian poet M. NourbeSe Philip unequivocally underlines the heart of the problem in stating that “multiculturalism, as we know it, has no answers for the problems of racism, or white supremacy – unless it is combined with a clearly articulated policy of anti-racism, directed at rooting out the effects of racist and white supremacist thinking And we cannot begin such an eradication by forgetting how [this] brutal aspect of Canadian culture was formed” (Philip qtd. in Coleman, *White Civility* 7). At their most ‘benign,’ then, discourses of tolerance and multiculturalism²² merely provide strategies for managing difference within (post)colonial, globalized contexts shaped by

interrelationship in this age of “terror.” She links the strident changes in this direction (evidenced in emphasis on Canada’s relationship to Britain, for example, and celebration of Canada’s role in European colonialism – indeed, the guide was re-titled *Discover Canada*) with what Sedef Arat-Koc argues is a re-whitening of Canadian national identity post-9/11 and consequent amplification of state-sanctioned repression of non-white bodies within the national boundaries (Arat-Koc 2005).

²² Although the Canadian Multiculturalism Act does not use the term ‘tolerance,’ I argue that its focus on “recogniz[ing] diversity” employs similar assumptions about the power imbalance between those who can recognize diversity and those whose diversity ‘begs recognition,’ so to speak. For more information on recognition in the ways this project challenges, see Charles Taylor’s essay “The Politics of Recognition” (1994). I do acknowledge, thanks to Daniel Coleman, that neither a Canadian etymology of diversity nor Taylor’s conceptualization of recognition espouses ‘tolerance’ per se, and that Taylor’s argument for an ‘assumption of worth’ in the culture of others evokes a position of proactively reading for value, however asymmetrically. For more on the workings of civility and beneficence, as opposed to ‘tolerance,’ and the subsequent prioritization of a community orientation (again, however asymmetrical) over an outright commitment to exclusion in Canada’s ideological foundations, see Coleman’s *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada* (2006).

increased circulation of bodies, capital, and goods, without destabilizing the deeply disempowering terms of that management or calling into question ‘management’ itself. At their most destructive, these discourses fix intra- as well as international relations from a position of dominance: “Tolerance,” states South African-based Cameroonian scholar Francis Nyamnjoh, “is thus a crucial analytic hinge between the constitution of abject domestic subjects and barbarous global ones, between liberalism and the justification of its imperial and colonial adventures” (Nyamnjoh, *Insiders and Outsiders* 8). As such, ‘tolerance’ not only justifies but relies upon the continual othering of the non-normative body within a particular geo-polity and, further, constructs a simplified global hierarchy between nations that (hold the power to) tolerate and nations that are (subject to being) tolerated.

The second model follows from the first in turning to citizenship – “flexible citizenship” (cf. Nyamnjoh), “gendered citizenship” (cf. Gouws), and constitutional citizenship (cf. Sákéj Henderson) in particular – for addressing critical iterations of state-sponsored inequalities and possibilities for change. A key part of South Africa’s shift away from apartheid-era taxonomies in its attempt to address the legacies of legislated racism involved the embrace of ‘rainbowism,’ and that move remains significant for radically undermining assumptions about the inevitability of vertical power relations.²³ Yet Nyamnjoh argues that although inclusion is a desirable antidote to exclusion, xenophobia and the histories of primarily labour-based migration into apartheid and post-

²³ For information on early debates about the discourse of ‘rainbowism’ see Pumla Gqola, “Defining people: Analysing power, language and representation in metaphors of the New South Africa.” *Transformation* 47 (2001): 94-106).

apartheid South Africa contribute to the complexity of South Africa's legal terrain that demands more flexible forms of belonging than are typically assumed of citizenship. As Nyamnjoh details, the pejoratively labeled "*makwerekwere*" or foreign black African typifies the limitations of South Africa's progressive 1996 Bill of Rights by facing material and psychic alienation in South Africa where 'home' and 'belonging' are made forcibly tenuous (Nyamnjoh, *Insiders and Outsiders* 13–18).²⁴ He argues that a "flexible citizenship informed less by rigid geographies of apartheid than by histories of relationships, interconnectedness, networks and conviviality" nurtures an ideological shift that allows "individuals and communities their reality as melting pots of multiple and dynamic identities" (75) and as "simultaneously embedded in more than one society" (76). Without contesting the many ways in which belonging is politicized to violently demarcate inside from out, white South African scholar Helene Strauss shifts the discussion by theorizing mobility alongside careful consideration of migrant subjectivities that encompass more than economics and resist relegating the migrant to bare life (Strauss 107).²⁵ Moving from racialization and migration to gender, white South African

²⁴ A particularly chilling example of this multivalent precarity is seen in the extremely violent xenophobic attacks against foreign nationals that began in Alexandra, Johannesburg in May 2008 and spread to various parts of the country targeting Malawians, Mozambicans, and Zimbabweans especially – ie. 'neighbours' – and that were recently repeated in April and May 2015, when violence began in Durban and spread to Johannesburg. During both periods, mass evacuations were carried out by the foreign nationals' own embassies in an attempt to secure safety after the fact. For many who became 'returnees' to their 'home nations,' however, countries of origin no longer uncomplicatedly acted as 'home.' Similar kinds of violence have had a long history in South Africa and have been examined by such scholars as Loren Landau and Michael Neocosmos.

²⁵ Strauss does the important work of calling attention to the shortcomings of "bare life" theorizing by pushing the limits of what can be said and imagined about those subjects and subjectivities deemed "bare." This position is a significant one in our current critical moment that sees scholars turning to Giorgio Agamben perhaps too quickly in an uncritical mobilization of his important and damning critique of biopolitics. While these analyses do much to underscore the urgency of attending to the consequences of biopolitical governance in our neoliberal epoch, they also tend to focus on the conditions that allow for systemic and systematic dehumanization in ways that ignore the lived consequences and resistance enacted

scholar Amanda Gouws also critiques what Nyamnjoh calls “policies and practices of confrontation” (75) arising out of legislated statehood but through a gendered lens.

Gouws interrogates the dynamic but difficult relation between the South African women’s movement and state, arguing that mandating gender analysis in state structures through post-1994 gender mainstreaming “has [both] limited the organic construction of interests and depoliticized gender” (Gouws, “Shaping Women’s Citizenship” 85). She demonstrates that the “relationship between rights, participation and struggles in the locale of the state determines the shape of women’s citizenship” (87) even with increased opportunities to “move their interests onto the [post-apartheid] political agenda where previously it was subordinated to the national liberation struggle” (71). In the Indigenous North American context, Henderson further emphasizes the distance between legal recognition and the conditions required for cross-difference engagement by distinguishing between statutory and constitutional subject-hood. Whereas the former produces colonially-determined citizenship, the latter allows for the (radical) acknowledgement and protection of Indigenous peoples’ *sui generis* belonging within the Canadian state without requiring Canadian-defined citizenship: as Henderson explains, “the [Queen’s 1991] invitation of citizenship [to Canada’s Indigenous peoples] becomes an ideological rival to our existing *sui generis* and treaty citizenship” (Henderson 418). Henderson argues:

The vague offer of citizenship ignores the fact that the rights of aliens to Canadian citizenship are derived mostly from the Aboriginal sovereign’s conditional

by “the dehumanized.” In effect, the now popular use of both biopolitics and bare life as critical frames within left-leaning scholarship stages the same challenges I’m working to theorize by providing a powerful way of talking about unequal intersubjectivity that remains unequal to the task of comprehending non-dominant voices.

permission to the British sovereign to provide for settlements, rather than as is frequently argued, from British sovereignty alone and delegated legislative authority. Aboriginal peoples do not have to join Canada and become citizens; Canada and its citizens have to acknowledge their Aboriginal foundation. (419)

Each criticism of statutory citizenship is helpful to this project in suggesting that different conceptions of belonging are, and must be made increasingly, possible. The continual reassertion of a dominant epistemology in each case, however, that shapes nation-state legislation and efforts to right historical wrongs, is the same reassertion of a standard set of values that I am working through conversation to disrupt.

Third, Truth and Reconciliation models (cf. Mamdani, Motsemme, Henderson, Wakeham, Episkenew) provide powerful examples of institutional forms of redress enacted when states recognize their failures to ‘protect’ or ‘provide for’ ‘equality,’ and of processes that rely uneasily on relationships between individuals. They also provide a cogent point of contact between Canada and South Africa. Henderson bases his own “response [in his] belief in the implicit principles and legacy of treaties in creating a global order based on consent and respect” (Henderson 422). Injecting legalese with concepts of “consent” and “respect” demands, in part, consideration of “Aboriginal law and treaty rights” which in turn requires “a comparative, intercultural, legal analysis...since ‘one culture cannot be judged by the norms of another and each must be seen in its own terms’”²⁶ (430). But TRCs have not proven consistently able to work

²⁶ Henderson is citing “Chief Judge E.T. Durie of the Maori Land Court of New Zealand and Chairman of the Waitangi Tribunal, ‘Biculturalism and the Politics of Law’, address to University of Waikato, 2 April 1993, quoted by Judge A.G. McHugh in ‘The New Zealand Experience in Determination of Native or

through the epistemological struggles that underlie claims to justice even when they have been wary of state knowledge and mindful of legislative limitations in their own projects of redress. In popular discourse, truth and reconciliation processes have been heralded as transformative mechanisms capable of ensuring progressive social change and serving justice in complexly cross-cultural contexts, yet the kinds of failings that emerge from TRCs underscore the kinds of intersubjective imaginings still on the horizon. South Africa's TRC, established in the wake of 1994's heady political compromise and the African National Congress (ANC)'s success in the nation's first free, multiracial elections, has acted as a historical watershed in instituting a legal process for conceiving of shared socio-political life in the aftermath of violence. Notably, South Africa has sought to take stock of and transform the effects of its atrocities while "practic[ing] neither impunity nor vengeance[, . . . remaining] determined to avoid two pitfalls: on the one hand, reconciliation becoming an unprincipled embrace of political evil and, on the other hand, a pursuit of justice so relentless as to turn into revenge" (Mamdani 33). While widely celebrated for providing a structure through which to transition from apartheid to democracy and "open[ing] up a space on which the new South Africa could be inscribed with the help of particular memorial acts" (Motsemme 911), South Africa's TRC has also been critiqued for "fail[ing] to open a social debate on possible futures for a post-apartheid South Africa" (Mamdani, "Truth" 183). Ugandan Asian scholar Mahmood Mamdani argues that this failing is linked to both the limitations of the Commission's mandate – to hear testimonies from a group defined as "perpetrators" before the Amnesty

Customary Title: Effect of Title Grants and Need for a New Title System' (address to Supreme Court and Federal Court judges of Australia at the 1995 conference in Adelaide)" (Henderson 427, footnote 78).

Committee and from those defined as “victims” before the main Commission – and its scope, limiting “perpetrators” and “victims” to political leaders/ state agents and political prisoners/ oppositional voices, all operating within the framework of apartheid. As a result, the amnesty granted to perpetrators of specific incidences of violence that are deemed extra-judicial is “part of the political compromise that ushered in a post-apartheid South Africa” (176) and possibly strategically necessary, and yet simultaneously reinforces a reductive understanding of what constitutes apartheid violence. By effectively overlooking structural forms of violence and focusing on individualized criminal acts (classified as human rights violations), South Africa’s TRC remained unable to challenge cognitive imperialism – embodied in the operations of a legal system that had enshrined the validity of apartheid itself – and unable to fully account for testimonies from the majority of people who had experienced apartheid policies and practices as crimes against humanity.

In Canada, the TRC process has been similarly restricted in scope, potentially capable of effecting limited redress while simultaneously reinforcing false assumptions about the structural soundness of Canada’s internal human rights record.²⁷ Whereas South Africa’s TRC played a key role in a wider political and social transition from apartheid governance to non-racial, democratic governance, Canada’s TRC was established within

²⁷ The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, based in Winnipeg, Manitoba, was mandated 8 May 2006 when the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was signed (see the agreement at <http://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/AIP.pdf>). There were delays in establishing and operationalizing the TRC, but its first national event took place June 16-19, 2010 (in Winnipeg) to begin an estimated 5 years of activities. Its closing activities took place in Ottawa May 31 to June 3, 2015. More information about the TRC of Canada can be found at its official website (<http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=26>) and the Residential Schools Agreement Official Court Notice (<http://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/>).

a more limited transition that, arguably, saw the Canadian state move from a position of denial about colonial violence against Indigenous peoples to one of limited – though official – acknowledgement of particular abuses. This fetishization of the apology, to echo Mamdani’s criticism of legalese, creates what Euro-Canadian scholars Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham call a “culture of redress” in contemporary Canadian politics and policies vis-à-vis its Indigenous peoples that demands close interrogation (Henderson and Wakeham 1).²⁸ A key limitation demanding that interrogation is the exclusive focus on the residential school experience as mandated by the 2006 Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement within a larger process of healing and redress. In this way, Canada is asked to acknowledge the effects of only one aspect of its colonial policies, past and present, and can thereby ignore the similar effects engendered by its apartheid-like policies and practices more generally. In Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew’s words, by “only apologizing for one element of its genocidal policies,” the Canadian government “implicitly refuses to take responsibility for the trauma that the remainder of its policies continue to cause” (Episkenew 189–190). While the validity of working towards a “stronger and healthier” – more just – future is not under question, the stakes for Indigenous peoples remain far higher than those of their asymmetrically positioned non-Indigenous counterparts in seeking “truth, healing and reconciliation.”²⁹

²⁸ Note, also, that Canada failed to endorse the 2007 United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), amid much controversy (joined as they were by the other major settler states: the United States, Australia, and New Zealand), until November 2010. See Canada’s delayed endorsement of the UNDRIP at <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1309374239861>.

²⁹ Schedule “N” of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement detailing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Mandate, “Introduction,” and “Principles” (<http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/index.php?p=7>; http://www.trc-cvr.ca/pdfs/SCHEDULE_N_EN.pdf)

As a result, it remains unclear whether “put[ing] the events of the past behind us” will help or hinder the group defined most closely with “us” in combating a now sanctioned – but still fragile (given Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s 2009 denial) – historicization of colonialism in Canada.

The fourth and fifth models – postcolonial contact zones (cf. Pratt) and ethical forms of witnessing (cf. Oliver) – shift the still quite present state structures and processes of legal redress into the background while theorizing resistant encounters and ethical responses to trauma in ways that generate some of the energy I see in conversation. By moving from multiculturalism/citizenship/TRCs to contact zones and witnessing, I hope to carry forward consideration of state and legal processes while foregrounding sites and experiences of embodied intersubjective work within (and, at times, despite) those processes. Now a catchphrase in postcolonial analysis, “contact zone” was coined by Euro-American scholar Mary Louise Pratt to refer to “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (Pratt, “Arts” 34). Like “tolerance” and “multiculturalism,” the notion of the “contact zone” relies on a certain boundedness of difference that both demarcates subjects from one another and mediates interaction among subjects. Like “flexible citizenship” and juridico-political attempts at reconciliation, Pratt’s term elicits interest in the difficult ways those bounded subjects pressure and shape one another. For the purposes of this project, Pratt’s concept is of particular importance in paying sustained attention to the experiences of asymmetrical intercultural interaction and subsequently

shaped knowledge production. Her illustrating example is both ideological and tactile: the 1613 manuscript of an Andean socio-historical and political treatise written by Guaman Poma, an Inca man hitherto unknown in European records, in the form of a twelve hundred page letter addressed to King Philip III of Spain. What Pratt finds remarkable about this manuscript, besides its length and date (written four decades “after the final fall of the Inca empire to the Spanish” [34]), is its transculturated composition and effect. The text, pointedly titled *The First New Chronicle and Good Government* (where “chronicle” signifies as “the main writing apparatus through which the Spanish represented their American conquests to themselves” [34]), is written in both Quechua and Spanish and contains four hundred pages of “captioned line drawings” (34) that incorporate Andean representational modes alongside Christian imagery. Poma does not merely integrate Andean epistemology within Christian discourse: he re-writes the core of that discourse as Andean which Pratt describes as a key mode of agential address, capable of influencing imperial knowledges (35, 37).

I am less interested in reading the epistemological instability of contact zones as constituted by ‘colonizer’ and ‘colonized’ than I am in the sites’ evocation of engaged contact between diverse subjects whose legibility speaks to but does not rely on the ‘colonizer’s’ discourse. By troubling a direct correlation between language and community, Pratt effectively calls into question the necessity of shared linguistic or epistemological rules to intelligible exchange. By situating her work within “part of a large-scale effort to decolonize knowledge” (40) in the academy, Pratt pays careful attention to the “critique of empire coded ongoingly on the spot, in ceremony, dance,

parody, philosophy, counterknowledge and counterhistory, in texts unwitnessed, suppressed, lost, or simply overlain with repetition and unreality” (*Imperial Eyes* 2). But she also attends to the pedagogical capacity of knowledge, decolonized. Each of these elements draw Pratt’s work alongside my question of hearing, of how one makes oneself heard in these processes of articulating across epistemological, geopolitical, and socio-historical divides, and of horizontal relationality therein. Here, Euro-American scholar Kelly Oliver’s conceptualization of witnessing enters to further tease out the workings within and across contact zones.

Moving beyond the boundaries of legal testimony to engage in ethical questions about ways of apprehending pain, Oliver proposes a theory of subjectivity that draws on the notion of witnessing in its double sense: acting as an eye-witness and bearing witness to that which cannot be seen. She explores both theoretical and applied routes beyond either appropriating or disengaging from the ‘Other’ in “spontaneous and strained”³⁰ cross-cultural dialogue by insisting on the ability to both address and respond. In reframing the joint processes of recognizing and being recognized as address-ability and response-ability, Oliver forces a decisive shift away from understanding recognition as bestowing subjectivity upon an ‘Other’ (the political recognition Euro-Canadian scholar Charles Taylor describes, for example, in the context of multiculturalism), and towards understanding subjectivity as exceeding legal, ocular, and same-based recognition. For Oliver, the dual structure of witnessing operates in all subjectivity and requires the

³⁰ bell hooks and Mary Childers describe cross-“race” dialogue as “a combination of the spontaneous and the strained” (Childers and hooks 60). They use the term “spontaneous” to highlight the unpremeditated element of exchange in a conversation, and “strained” to emphasize the tempered, more deliberate phrasing that can both elicit and respond to conflict in speaking across differences.

recognition of both historical fact (eye witness) and that which cannot be seen (bearing witness). Conceived in this way, witnessing becomes capable of according value to truths and experiences that remain invisible, inaccessible, and unavailable for incorporation into another's subjectivity. Therefore, as Oliver states: "victims of oppression [...] are not merely seeking visibility and recognition, but they are also seeking witnesses to horrors beyond recognition. The demand for recognition manifest in testimonies from those othered by dominant culture is transformed by the accompanying demands for retribution and compassion" (Oliver, "Witnessing and Testimony" 79). Most important to this project, Oliver's notion of witnessing disrupts the violence of domination and assimilation within Hegel's master/slave, or subject/object, dialectic and creates space for intersubjectivity beyond a hierarchically-valued paradigm to sharpen readings of complex negotiations of subjectivities constructed by and materially experienced through such registers as racialization, gender, class, sexuality, age, language, religion, and nation. Her conception of witnessing suggests that the historical, social and political contexts for subject-positions interact with the psychological and phenomenological frames for subjectivity to generate a productive tension (85) that helps us read intersubjectivity beyond notions of ownership. In effect, Oliver's dual form of witnessing rewrites the hierarchical, vertically-aligned power relationship between self and other: "My insistence on subjectivity as response-ability [. . .] is meant as a corrective to political theories that begin with a subject essentially either isolated from, or opposed to, objects including other people" (85). Because Oliver's work interrogates external structures shaping subject-positions and experiential conditions for subjectivity simultaneously, it advances

my analysis of unequal intersubjectivity by working through tensions that open up possibilities for transformation through an unstable and exploratory process of conversation.

Having reviewed five modes of working across difference, we can begin to see both the challenge and the promise of “epistemological crosstalk” (Coleman) that engages legal legitimization as a framework for interrogating selfhood and nationhood as variously enabled and limited by liberal humanist discourses. Each of these models provides a particular mechanism for understanding inequality and orienting modes of response, but the potential for multiculturalism, critical forms of citizenship, or TRCs is consistently undermined by the state’s assumption of its own normative sovereignty and attendant epistemological homogeneity that is fundamental to that assumption. These frameworks also generally remain focused on anticipated endpoints rather than on the radical opening up of conversation that this project explores. That paradigm changes in the contexts of contact zones and witnessing, which are disarticulated (minimally) from discourses of the nation-state and potentially more able to sustain uncertain processes of attempting to generate meaning across distances of space, epistemology, and experience. When conversation is put to work with this project’s literary texts (in chapters two and three), those altered spaces will open into fuller illustrations of risky possibility and uncertain creativity.

Part IV Co-Articulating Archives

The primary texts that come into conversation in this project and the conversational work that those texts produce take us through interlocking analyses about

learning, struggling, and re-imagining. A second anecdote that bridges Canada and Southern Africa, one that is not my own but that carries structural echoes, helps introduce these densely layered archives and their points of encounter, both conceptual and lived. This is a story about building solidarity along potentially horizontal lines that partially replicates, partially disrupts, ‘First World’ privilege. It is also a story that demonstrates how hard distinctions between numerical ‘worlds’ (First through Fourth) are only ever partially productive. And it is a story where that conceptual overlap takes physical shape at a key site of ‘Fourth World’ articulation.

To begin, then, some experiential etymology: Shuswap leader George Manuel has been widely accredited with coining the phrase ‘Fourth World,’ now referring to “nations forcefully incorporated into states which maintain a distinct political culture but are internationally unrecognized”³¹ or simply, for Allen, “indigenous minority peoples” (Allen, *Blood Narrative* 9). Yet the former Chief of the (then) National Indian Brotherhood (NIB) of Canada describes coming to the phrase through conversation with Tanzanian statesperson Mbuto Milando, in Ottawa in the 1970s.³² Although ‘Fourth

³¹ This definition of “Fourth World” comes from Dr. Richard Griggs, Research Director of Independent Projects Trust in Durban, South Africa. The definition can be found on the Center for World Indigenous Studies’ website (<http://cwis.org/GML/background/FourthWorld/>).

³² Manuel writes of this encounter in his book on the Fourth World: “It was an African diplomat who pointed out to me that political independence for colonized people was only the Third World. ‘When native peoples come into their own, on the basis of their own cultures and traditions, that will be the Fourth World,’ he told me” (Manuel and Posluns 236). Anthony Hall describes the exchange more fully, situating it both socially and politically: “During the 1970s George Manuel consolidated an international network of friends and associates who together formed a movement to express and realize the ideals of the Fourth World. A key person in the genesis of this movement was Marie Smallface Marule, a Blood Indian from southern Alberta who worked in Ottawa with Manuel after he became national chief of the National Indian Brotherhood, Canada’s most influential Indian organization in 1970. In the years before she moved to Ottawa, Smallface had worked in Zambia on behalf of Canadian University Students Overseas (CUSO). . . . There she became deeply involved in the struggles of the African National Congress, an involvement that included her marriage to an ANC activist named Jake Marule. While in Ottawa, the Marules arranged many social and political gatherings involving George Manuel and diplomats from Tanzania and a number of

World’ first appeared in print as the title of Manuel’s 1974 book, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality*, and in international fora at the inaugural General Assembly of the World Council of Indigenous Peoples (WCIP) the following year, the phrase retains a longer genealogy that is premised on political discussion arising from face to face encounter. The image of two leaders, identifying nationally as Shuswap and Tanzanian and discussing ‘Fourth’ and ‘Third’ worlds as subjects of each, lends a poignant immediacy to the power of serendipitous, if not arbitrary, conversation. The discussion’s physical location in a ‘First world’ capital, moreover, emphasizes the surprising circularity rather than predetermined linearity that shapes cross-epistemological knowledge production. As a result of the interpersonal crossings that Ottawa effectively hosts, in this instance, counter-hegemonic discourse proliferates in ever widening circles.

For my project, however, this story of Manuel’s and Milando’s meeting becomes even more compelling for its reliance on Marie Smallface Marule. Human rights advocate/ educator and member of the Blood nation, Smallface Marule was “one of the first Aboriginal women to travel to Africa [sic] with CUSO as a volunteer in Community Development and Adult Literacy in Zambia.”³³ Her politicized experience in Southern Africa made her a key member of Manuel’s team in the NIB where she served as Executive Director (Miller and Chuchryk 192) and for whom she facilitated alliances with Southern African activists and politicians. Today, Smallface Marule’s history makes her a particularly relevant figure in this research by embodying the gendered, and invisibilized,

other African countries. It was at one of these gatherings that Manuel first heard Mbuto Milando, first secretary of the Tanzanian High Commission, utter the novel phrase ‘the Fourth World’” (T. Hall 238).

³³ See <https://indspire.ca/laureates/marie-smallface-marule/> (Indspire: Indigenous Education, Canada’s Future/ L’éducation des autochtones, L’avenir du Canada).

labour of bridging. In omitting Smallface Marule's contributions, the prevalent narrative of 'Fourth World-ing' produces an Indigenous feminist space as liminal, off centre, yet powerfully generative. The figure of Smallface Marule also helps concretize the difficult conceptual relationships between Indigeneity and feminism in Canada and South Africa. Whereas terms for Indigeneity remain fraught in the Canadian context due to the Indian Act's continued life, they remain multiply so in a post-apartheid South Africa that battles its own settler colonial constructs without easy inclusion in Fourth World maps. South Africa's San communities are currently represented within the Indigenous Peoples of Africa Co-ordinating Committee (IPACC), for example, but South Africa's broader feminist movement tends to use 'Indigenous' to mean 'South African' more generally which can both galvanize gender-based action and complicate analyses of intra-African power differentials. Finally, because as Shireen Hassim points out, the idea of an 'indigenous' South African feminism emerged in the 1980s as a counterpoint to both Western and broadly African feminisms (Hassim 76–81), neither indigeneity nor feminism cohere around stable meanings. That instability, however, remains a productive point of departure in both archives, allowing for a history like Marie Smallface Marule's to signify instructively in a cross-epistemological project.

This story of encounter notwithstanding, Indigenous women's literatures in Canada and black South African women's literatures – or Indigenous and postcolonial work more generally – are not archives that often share analytical space. My broadest reason for bringing them together rests on histories of struggle and stories of crossings that are under articulated, and my methodology offers points of engagement between their

distinct (though overlapping and partially interactive) epistemologies in order to facilitate conversations between an established ‘postcolonial’ archive and a less securely situated Indigenous archive that straddles national, (post)colonial, and Indigenous studies categories. The primary authors I have chosen, namely Sindiwe Magona, Kopano Matlwa, Maria Campbell in collaboration with Linda Griffith, and Eden Robinson, each attest to the vitality of imaginative frameworks in re-shaping the conditions in which differently racialized women live; their emergent conversations underline commonalities generated by apartheid in South Africa and the longer-standing Indian Act in Canada and subsequent attempts at reconciliation and redress in each fraught space. Yet shared concerns with attaining social justice also throw into relief the significant contemporary differences between post-apartheid South Africa and a complicatedly (post)colonial Canada. The next section briefly fills out aspects of each context that bear especial weight on the time frame and texts chosen for this project. Finally, through consideration of an issue glimpsed in the Smallface Marule illustration – tensions between nationalisms and feminisms alongside a commitment to learning from and with others – the last part of this discussion maps out points of convergence and divergence within the contexts’ broadly shared oppositionality to help set up the conversations that follow.

IV.i Contextual Contours

Euro-Australian historian and settler colonial scholar Patrick Wolfe argues that a “logic of elimination” (Wolfe 387) characterizes settler colonial projects wherein the removals of peoples from lands is closely tied to the epistemic violence that de Sousa Santos and others fight to address. I argue that South Africa and Canada, despite their

distinct histories and divergent settler colonial logics, offer pivotal points of intersection through consideration of apartheid and the Indian Act. An immediate departure is of course the vast numerical differences between colonizer/settlers and Indigenous communities under displacement in the two geopolitical spaces that have shaped the most visible forms of repression and resistance. As historian and settler colonial scholar Edward Cavanagh (Euro-Australian) argues, for example, South Africa's "colonisers were always a minority dependent on 'native labour.' The 'natives,' for their part, were ultimately contained by segregation rather than targeted for destruction, and today they have reached a kind of political independence that settler-colonised peoples elsewhere will unlikely attain" (Cavanagh 16). In Canada, on the other hand, colonial violence has been described as genocidal.³⁴ As Laich-kwil-tach interdisciplinary artist Sonny Assu summarizes,

First People had no immunity to the industrial diseases brought over from Europe: measles, influenza, whooping cough, and, most notoriously, smallpox. These diseases had already wiped out a large number of people within the early years of first contact. Those who didn't die right away were shipped off to reserves and, eventually residential schools, to be stripped of their humanity and, paradoxically, to be assimilated into "civilized" society. Treaties and agreements were beginning to be ignored in the hopes that, with assimilation and attempted genocide, the land would eventually belong to the government and the Hudson's Bay Company.

³⁴ See, for example, Supreme Court Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin's ruling that "Canada committed 'cultural genocide' against Indigenous peoples through policies like Indian residential schools which were created to wipe out the languages and cultures of pre-existing nations" (APTN National News, 29 May 2015, <http://aptn.ca/news/2015/05/29/canadas-top-judge-says-country-committed-cultural-genocide-indigenous-peoples/>)

Eventually, the decimation of the people led to the adoption of the Indian Act (1876), which rendered every Native in Canada a ward of the state: infantile white guilt at its finest. (Assu 148)

However, because both apartheid and the Indian Act have operationalized settler colonial logics of elimination through legislated forms of dispossession, and because dispossession has been territorial, socio-cultural, economic, political and – through the identities legally produced and suppressed – psychic, the effects on Indigenous communities in Canada and black communities in South Africa carry shared resonances. In particular, the political contexts that produced apartheid and the Indian Act and the resistance mobilized around each shape key questions in the literature this project examines.

Like the Indian Act in Canada, apartheid in South Africa – the legislated system of racial segregation in all areas of life and work governed through the conservative Afrikaner-focused National Party from 1948 until 1994 – emerged out of a much longer struggle for power, land, and resources. Beginning in the 17th-century, those struggles involved the San, Khoi, and Bantu-speaking communities (collectively referred to as ‘Africans’), the Dutch colonists (later known as Afrikaners), and the British colonists. The Cape region, where Magona’s novel is set, can be read as a flashpoint for struggle as precipitated by the Dutch East India Company’s 1652 invasion and settlement at the Cape of Good Hope, the British 1795 ‘capture’ of the Cape, and the protracted battles over indigenous lands and resources between European constituencies and between Europeans and indigenous/ African peoples that followed, moving north. With the discovery of

diamonds in 1868 and gold in 1886 in what were then the Orange Free State and Transvaal, and the emerging reliance on migrant black labour and imported labour from the Indian subcontinent, tensions intensified alongside industrial expansion (Deegan 6).³⁵ Forced location and dislocation, therefore, which gains focus in chapter two, was institutionalized in such segregationist apartheid legislation as the 1950 Group Areas Act and the 1954 and 1955 Natives Resettlement Act and Natives (Urban Areas) Amendment Act, but the practices had long been in effect. As Euro-American historian Nancy Jacobs argues, from the 1910 creation of the Union of South Africa that amalgamated four provinces – the former British colonies of the Cape and Natal and the former Afrikaner republics of the Orange Free State and South African Republic (Transvaal) – “[a]n inchoate principle of segregation underlay . . . governance . . . , and over the next four decades it developed into more sharply defined and extreme policies. . . [that] increasingly determined how people related to each other, the state, the economy, and the environment” (Jacobs 148). The Union government’s Native Lands Act of 1913, for example, “forbade the purchase or lease of land by Africans outside designated areas known as reserves [which] were far removed from white-owned farms and the key areas of commercial agriculture . . . [and] thus extend[ed] the ban on African land ownership in the Free State to the majority of the union” (Worden 55). Moreover, those land designations along racial lines increased in 1936 to become “the basis of the ‘homelands’ of the apartheid era” (55). In 1927, the Native Administrative Act – again pre-dating apartheid – “made customary law and government proclamations the basis for rule over

³⁵ For a comprehensive chronology of events in South African history, see Worden pp. xi-xvii.

Africans,” placing “Africans under the jurisdiction of the Department of Native Affairs rather than under the Department of Justice,” and “segregat[ing] the justice system by inaugurating customary law as the legal code for Africans” (Jacobs 150). By the time D. F. Malan and the National Party won the 1948 general elections, much groundwork had been laid for both bolstering an Afrikaner national sentiment, that saw itself as resisting British rule and the encroachment of British interests, and supporting a “‘firm native policy’” by invoking “‘cultural’ factors . . . to rationalise [strengthened] controls over African urban settlement [and further consolidated] reserves” (Deegan 19).

Colonialism in present-day Canada has also seen protracted struggle between European powers, English and French, where the latter’s processes of conquest and settlement predate those of the former and continue to inspire nationalist/separatist support,³⁶ and where a range of federated arrangements have prioritized relations between colonizers over relations between settlers and Indigenous nations: namely the British Crown’s division of the Province of Quebec into Upper and Lower Canada in the 1791 Constitutional Act, following British defeat of France at the Plains of Abrahams, that upheld provisions in the Quebec Act (1774) for French civil code to operate in Lower Canada; the 1840 British North America Act’s redesignation of the Canadas as East and West; and Confederation’s creation of four provinces, including Quebec, in 1867, to form the Dominion of Canada. In both geopolitical locations, is it also the earlier arriving colonialists (the Dutch, the French) who developed longer standing economic and socio-cultural relations with Indigenous communities, however asymmetrically, through trade

³⁶ For a history Quebec separatist movements and their relation to the present, see Cara Des Granges’s article “Finding Legitimacy: Examining Quebec Sovereignty from Pre-Confederation to Present” (2014).

and out of Europeans' needs for guidance, translation, and labour, and contributed to the emergence of distinct Indigenous communities.³⁷ However it is the reserve systems in both Canada and South Africa that provide particularly compelling sites of juxtaposition for this project by carrying within them longer and broader histories of dispossession and of resistance within comparably violent 'management' systems. In both locations, the reserve systems entrenched the colonizers' identificatory taxonomies as applied to the Indigenous communities and predated their 19th- and 20th-century legislated forms: the Indian Act, first passed in 1876 by the newly formed Government of the Dominion of Canada, "amalgamated and expanded several pre-Confederation acts that pertained to Indigenous peoples" in all aspects of their lives and "effectively appropriate[ed] Indigenous peoples' right to identify themselves" (Episkenew 28). Under the act, "Indian" was (and remains) "narrowly and exclusively defined" (28) and "non-Indian" in contradistinction meant Indigenous/ non-European communities who would not be party to land treaty negotiations, such as those that were in process at the time the act was passed, and including Indigenous women who – until the 1985 Bill C-31 Amendment –

³⁷ In the Canadian context, I am referring to the Métis communities, many of whom have English rather than or in addition to French ancestry of course, but who also have historical ties to the fur trade and have had to struggle alongside and not always easily within First Nations- or Indigenous-identified struggles in Canada. The exclusion of Métis from the Indian Act's definition of "Status Indians" is a case in point. Metis scholar Duke Redbird provides an important overview of those histories in *We Are Metis: A Metis View of the Development of a Native Canadian People* (1980). In the South African context, see Cavanagh's work on the Griqua communities as emerging from the Khoi and San peoples and European colonists in the Cape region who make up part of what became called the 'coloured' communities under apartheid (*The Griqua Past and the Limits of South African History, 1902-1994* [2011]). See also South African historian Mohamed Adhikari's *Not White Enough, Not Black Enough: Racial Identity in the South African Coloured Community* (2005) for an analysis of the political workings within and beyond the administrative production of 'coloured' identities. For an analysis of the Population Registration Act (1950) that legislated the racial taxonomy of apartheid identity categories, see Deborah Posel, "What's In a Name?: Racial Categorisations under Apartheid and their Afterlife" (2001).

lost their status through marriage to non-Indigenous men (30).³⁸ The act also extended and formalized the reserve system, over which the Government of Canada continues to act as a custodian of the registered bands and their members. The combined goals of the act were to assimilate, to ‘civilize,’ and to manage the Indigenous communities who would eventually (colonialists hoped) be enfranchised (read: disappeared, as Indigenous peoples) and thereby also lose claim to treaty land (29-31).

Despite their demographic, geographic, political, and commercial differences, it is not accidental that the two settler colonies produced wide-scale dispossession in similar ways. As Euro-Canadian political scientist John S. Saul argues, they studied and learned from one another: “instructive parallels were readily grasped, on both continents, by the oppressors themselves, South African leaders, for example, turning eagerly to Canadian experience with ‘Indian reservations’ for guidance in further crafting and firming up their ‘homeland’ structures in the 1920s” (Saul 136). Métis sociologist Ron Bourgeault writes at greater length of this settler relationality:

It is significant that South Africa came to Canada at different times since the Boer War [1899 – 1902] asking and [obtaining] permission to study the Canadian system by which Indian people were controlled and managed separately from the politically dominant white population. South African [sic] took what it needed and applied it to its own situation: first to segregation, and after the Second World War to apartheid. The fundamental difference between Canada and South Africa was

³⁸ Euro-Canadian historian Olive Patricia Dickason provides an overview of treaty-making in Canada, including the Numbered Treaties (Treaties 1 [1871] to 11 [1921]) that resulted from the British Crown giving Canada the right to negotiate for land title in the west (through the Proclamation of 1763), in chapter 11 of *A Concise History of Canada's First Nations* (2010).

that Canada was interested in segregating and managing, as cheaply as possible, a population it did not want as an important source of labour. South Africa was interested in the same type of relationship, but for a people whose labour it needed and wanted cheaply. (Bourgeault 7-8).

What I am interested in considering, however, is the consequent resistance generated in each location and how expressions of resistance – specifically in literatures written between the 1980s and today – can also be cross-instructive, minus the physical travel and embodied meetings of writers. This timeframe is chosen for its rise in Indigenous politics and anti-apartheid struggle in the respective locations. In South Africa, the period is marked most emphatically by the decade of heightened resistance leading up to the Nelson Mandela's release from prison (1990), followed by the period of transition, the first democratic elections (1994), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings (1996-1998), and the contemporary struggles to transform life post apartheid (cf. Gqola, Nuttall, Posel). In the Indigenous context in Canada, the period is marked by less politically momentous but still galvanizing movements to challenge the appropriation of Indigenous voices in literary and scholarly contexts (cf. Fee, Hoy, Keeshig-Tobias), increase Indigenous involvement in the operations of museums and curatorial decisions regarding Indigenous artefacts and repatriation (cf. Onciul, Phillips), strengthen Indigenous presence and knowledges in academia (cf. Battiste and Henderson, Timpson, Womack et al), forward Indigenous literary nationalisms (cf. Justice, McLeod, Womack), and force state acknowledgement of colonial oppression – albeit in limited ways – through the Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and TRC. These various forms of

resistance to the epistemicide of settler colonial logics make the recent past and contemporary eras ones of productively disrupted certainties through fights for physical, political, epistemic, and emotional survival.

The uneasy relationship between postcolonial and Indigenous critical theory broadly, and the focus on women's writing from these postcolonial and Indigenous locations in particular, also beg comment to trouble a facile bridging between the fields without losing sight of potential crossings. Broadly speaking, differences between Indigenous and postcolonial theories primarily concern the former's treatment of Indigeneity and indigenouness and its connections to land and title, blood (cf. Allen), and survivance (cf. Vizenor). Kanien'kehaka scholar Taiaiake Alfred and Jeff Corntassel argue that "[i]t is this oppositional, place-based existence, along with the consciousness of being in struggle against the dispossessing and demeaning fact of colonization by foreign peoples, that fundamentally distinguishes Indigenous peoples from other peoples of the world" (Alfred and Corntassel 597). Claims to situated space and to reliable histories are also present in postcolonial theorizing (cf. Parry, Ahmad), but there they tend to be less emphatic, though physical place and narrative truth-telling codify conflicting assumptions regarding discourse, (dis)possession, and power in both archives. For Indigenous critical theory, the materiality of 'location' demands – and troubles, but grapples with – the language of sovereignty in settler colonial environments that render land both an essential resource and a foundational component of anti-colonial struggles.³⁹ The histories

³⁹ I am thinking of Alfred's critique of sovereignty as itself too closely entwined with European epistemologies and colonial state practices to provide an adequate frame for Indigenous forms of governance ("Sovereignty" [2005]).

associated with specific locations get called upon to substantiate the claims for justice that Indigenous politics prioritize. Whereas deconstruction of colonial discourse is often central to postcolonial critical practice (cf. Bhabha, Spivak), in other words, poststructuralist analyses that risk emptying out historical referents raise caution for some Indigenous critical practice.⁴⁰ Yet I have chosen to work with women's writing from within these uneasily intersecting fields due to the highly resonant colonial impacts upon Indigenous women in Canada and black women in South Africa. Those impacts include, for Indigenous women, the legacy of European patriarchal conventions in such areas as schooling where curriculum was gendered to privilege the masculine (and girls were given "domestic education") (Episkew 48); and the similarly motivated sexism in legislation such as the Indian Act and policy that puts especial pressures on Indigenous women's efforts to address gendered inequality (Huhndorf and Suzack 2). In the black South African context, Ellen Kuzwayo's essential book *Call Me Woman* (1985) outlines the particular challenges faced by racialized women under legislated inequality that simultaneously – like in Canada – instituted sexism. Under the Group Areas Act, for example, that forced communities into semi-urban areas and off arable land, black women became largely dependent on domestic labour in white households to earn a minimal wage, while unequal schooling (under the 1953 Bantu Education Act) meant increased barriers to basic education and greatly reduced access to higher education. The latter made Kuzwayo deliberate celebrate the achievements of black women who became

⁴⁰ For further discussion on the tensions between Indigenous and postcolonial critical theory and practice, see Chickasaw scholar Jodi A. Byrd's book *The Transit of Empire: Indigenous Critiques of Colonialism* as well as her co-authored article "Between Subalterneity and Indigeneity" (with settler scholar Michael Rothberg). See also Jace Weaver's "Indigenusness and Indigeneity."

doctors and lawyers between 1947-1981 and 1967-1982 respectively in the appendices to her book (Kuzwayo 264-266). Resultant violence against women in both contexts draws another unhappy parallel between the colonial contexts, as does women's organized resistance – be it to pass laws in South Africa (Sharpeville 1960), or to the disappeared and murdered Indigenous women across Canada (through the more recent Sisters in Spirit Campaign). Keeping the fields' differences and similarities in mind, I approach each text as asymmetrically related with distinct concerns, and yet as potentially meaningful to one another.

IV.ii Feminisms' Unanalagous Crossings

LaRocque states unequivocally that “[w]e must be both decolonizers and feminists” (LaRocque, “Métis and Feminist” 68). Much of LaRocque's work addresses this demand, continually evoking sites for bringing feminist analysis to bear on the decolonizing nationalist frames that are so central to Indigenous and postcolonial scholarship and political struggle. In this, her efforts dovetail with those of diverse Indigenous feminist scholars and activists in a field that Joyce Green (English, Ktunaxa, Cree-Scots Métis) describes as “hotly debated” and nascent but also “unique and anti-oppressive . . . [and] critical, in the best tradition of transformative thinkers” (Green 20, 30). Strikingly, Indigenous feminisms converge with postcolonial feminisms – including black South African feminisms – in demanding intersectional race, class, and nation-based analyses capable of combating the decentring effects of both sexist nationalisms and hegemonic feminisms. Stated otherwise, in the critical race and transformative gender

work that spans these two archives, “[w]hat term – *Indigenous* [/ *postcolonial*/ *South African*] or *feminism* – should take precedence?” (Huhndorf and Suzack 12).

I am particularly interested, however, in the ways that Indigenous feminisms in Canada and black feminisms in South African speak to similar issues while rarely speaking directly to one another. Women’s Studies and Native Studies scholar Bonita Lawrence (Mi’kmaq) comments in conversation with Kim Anderson (Cree/Métis), for example, that something she respects about “‘third world feminism,’ as they call it” is the way in which “[w]omen who have been through colonial movements in other places have seen how anti-colonial movements appropriate notions of the woman representing the nation while at the same time placing stringent controls on the women as part of gaining control of the national identity” (Anderson and Lawrence 269). Shari Huhndorf (Yup’ik) and Cheryl Suzack (Anishnaabe) also gesture towards this divide in pointing out that Indigenous feminisms are “presumed to fall within normative definitions of women of colour and postcolonial feminism[s]” but gain little analysis within any form of contemporary feminist theory (Huhndorf and Suzack 1). Yet the first concern – the role of feminism within nation-based struggles – foregrounds critiques of nationalist discourses that challenge sexist structures internally by tackling both forms of governance and claims to tradition and find expression in each archive. As Huhndorf and Suzack argue in the Canadian context, marginalization of Indigenous women’s issues within Indigenous politics is

compounded by the fact that a critical component of colonialism throughout the Americas involved the imposition of Western gender roles and patriarchal social

structures. Those who struggle for gender equality are often seen, sometimes erroneously, as opposing traditional Indigenous practices and forms of social organization. Thus, Indigenous feminism frequently elicits accusations that it fractures communities and undermines more pressing struggles for Indigenous autonomy. (2)

In implicit response, Anderson – arguing that “[c]oming from the history that we do, Aboriginal women have had to become practiced at resistance” (Anderson, *A Recognition of Being* 115) – is most preoccupied with mobilizing inherited elements of her cultural traditions that can do empowering work for women. Yet she is careful to argue for the corresponding need to thoroughly critique assumptions about culture as either static or available in ‘authentic’ forms. In so doing, Anderson emphasizes modes of validating women’s resistance within their own narratives of tradition without allowing ‘tradition’ to discursively line up with gender-based oppression. She renders ‘tradition’ a complex and responsive set of ideas and practices without acting as an apologist for uncritical citations of culture, in part by emphasizing historical contextualization and strategy. While advocating for being “selective in our use of tradition because, like our ancestors, we must work with those things that suit our present reality ” (36),⁴¹ Anderson also squarely situates her work within a continual process of learning about her own Cree and Métis

⁴¹ In this same passage, Anderson cites LaRocque on the question of tradition’s place vis-à-vis Indigenous women’s empowerment. LaRocque argues that “culture is not immutable, and tradition cannot be expected to be always of value or relevant in our times” but that “contemporary and international human rights standards” help assess the relevance of particular beliefs and practices (LaRocque, “The Colonization of a Native Woman Scholar” 14 qt. in Anderson 37). LaRoque’s statement is particularly interesting in light of this project’s attention to the uses and limitations of liberal, international human rights frameworks as expressed through Indigenous Canadian and Black South African women’s archives.

inheritances as a means of adapting traditional ways that are empowering for women as well as men in diverse Indigenous communities.

Similarly, South African feminists have long had to contend with charges of betrayal alongside efforts to make empowering spaces within a range of cultural configurations. Though still present today in ways that gain attention in chapter two,⁴² the demand to prioritize nationalist over feminist struggles was particularly stringent during the anti-apartheid era. As Hassim writes, “[b]y the 1950s, these struggles [in the labour movement, the Communist Party, and local community organizations where women’s issues found support] had been subsumed and homogenized within a nationalist narrative that emphasized the primacy of struggle for national liberation – the struggle against white rule” (Hassim 20). Yet Hassim simultaneously echoes Anderson’s concerns about ‘tradition’ when she cautions that “[i]nterrogating the claims of nationalism does not relieve us of the responsibility for examining what *kind* of women’s liberation can be envisaged within a nationalist framework and in what ways this might conform to feminist standards of liberation, in its broadest interpretation” (Hassim 38). Further, a competition of ideologies has overshadowed potential sites for integrated political action:

The extent to which feminist activists were able to harness and develop feminist consciousness was constrained by the attitude of the nationalist movement toward this project. From at least the 1970s feminism had an uneasy status within the

⁴² The 2011 article by Jo Beall, Shireen Hassim, and Alison Todes (“We Are All Radical Feminists Now: Reflections on ‘A Bit on the Side’”), for example, interrogates the (dis)place(ment) of feminism in contemporary South African politics. The authors revisit their controversial 1987 article that criticized the sexism and silencing of feminist critique within the anti-apartheid movement. Although they make adjustments to their argument, they end “still proudly own[ing] the thrust of [their] argument about the gendered nature of politics and policy – that gender cannot be delinked from class although they are not equivalent concepts” (Beall, Hassim, and Todes 101).

national liberation movement. On the one hand, it was seen as an ideology primarily articulated by white (academic) Western women. Its perceived intellectual roots in the North were seen to limit its applicability to the experiences of black women in the highly exceptional circumstances of apartheid. . . . These misrepresentations were fueled by the narrow and overly prescriptive versions of feminism that dominated debates in the United States and Britain in the late 1970s, and by the problematic decision of some U.S. feminists to ally themselves with the call to keep politics out of discussions at the Nairobi Decade for Women Conference in 1985. (29)

This passage is especially compelling, first, in the context of a project that tentatively draws histories of colonialism and structures of apartheid closer to one another. By describing the “circumstances” produced by South African apartheid as “highly exceptional,” Hassim invokes an isolationist narrative that – irrespective of intent – complicates attempts at making conceptual links with Indigenous peoples in Canada. The passage also, however, points to the material damages that hegemonic feminism has caused for postcolonial – and specifically South African, in this case – feminisms. Hassim’s reference to the 1985 Nairobi Conference as a site emptied of the political potential that was required by feminists on the continent provides a chilling reminder of the gross inequality in global power and resource distribution that more broadly frames this project. While a set of meetings cannot guarantee particular results, the Nairobi Conference held significant symbolic value in declaring that a decade be devoted to women within the UN system. The conference served as a platform for launching

strategies aimed at women's "advancement," yet "the call to keep politics out of discussions" effectively undermined feminist work within decolonizing movements and postcolonial contexts by tacitly supporting a nationalism/feminism divide.

For all of LaRocque, Anderson, and Hassim, non-hegemonic feminisms provide insight into "teas[ing] out patriarchy from what is purportedly traditional . . . and avoid[ing] essentialist identities and systems that are not to our advantage as women" (Anderson, "Affirmations of an Indigenous Feminist" 86) while mobilizing sites of cultural power in the service of racialized women. Their double duty, of course, rests on critiquing the feminisms that fail them. Black South African feminist scholar Desiree Lewis's 2007 retrospective assessment of the ways in which apartheid shaped feminist scholarship and activism in South Africa, for example, indicates that "[t]he subtleties of power – explored in much of their complexity through postcolonial and poststructuralist attention to discourse – were usually articulated by women dealing with their actual locations in a matrix of knowledge and power" (Lewis, "Feminism and the Radical Imagination" 18). Black South African feminist scholar Pumla Dineo Gqola, by extension, calls attention to ways that "Blackwomen's theory in Africa" transforms possibilities for knowledge production by "construct[ing theory] in sites which are traditionally, under white supremacist capitalist patriarchal logic, assumed to be outside the terrain of knowledge-making" while ensuring "activism is able to find expression in academe" (Gqola, "Ufanele Uqavile" 11). In arguing that the feminist work of diverse black South Africans is transformative, Gqola is also careful to position that work as deliberately, and productively, self-focused: resonating with Maracle's epigraph, the

world of white feminism is not central to their concerns, despite that world's centrality to the ways in which feminism has been understood in South Africa. Gqola states:

I visualise the work of Blackwomen doing activist work influenced by anti-racism, feminist and postcolonial discourses. Linguistically the spaces we occupy are designated diversely but the commitment is to a common purpose. And, as we cross boundaries with six mountains on our backs, the world takes on a slightly different form. The transgressive behaviour and ideologies which characterise this space mean that we are always challenging the meanings attached to being Blackwomen. The activity, however, is not outward looking even as it must engage with the outside world. Central to this space is the creation of new language, new vision and new realities as we world our environs anew. (20)

When Maracle does speak to a non-Native audience, she directly engages that reader as a settler Canadian in a society that has dispossessed her own people: "I write about racism to free my mind. Racism is the poison that crippled my tree. It also bent yours in all kinds of crazy directions. A talk, an intimate talk, between an ex-racist and an ex-victim of racism is not apt to be pretty" (Maracle, *I Am Woman* 138). The 'you' of Maracle's address begins as an "ex-racist," but as her anti-colonial analysis probes her difficult experiences in coming to a potentially liberatory orientation as an Indigenous woman, the 'you' shifts to an ex-imperialist feminist. She states:

Racist ideology had defined womanhood for the Native woman as nonexistent, therefore neither the woman question nor the European rebel's response held any meaning for me Native women do not even like the words "women's

liberation” and even now it burns my back. How could I resist the reduction of women to sex objects when I had not been considered sexually desirable, even as an object? No one makes the mistake of referring to us as ordinary women I am not now, nor am I likely to be, considered an authority on women in general by the white women’s movement in this country Let Wounded Knee be the last time that they erased us from the world of the loving. (15–19)

For both Gqola and Maracle, racism combines with sexism to violently erase bodies that demand not only physical integrity but also avenues for emotional safety and community.

Joint projects of decolonizing feminisms and unsettling patriarchal nationalisms, finally, continue to find expression in unintended conversations – or surprising juxtaposition, to echo Ahmed – between Gqola and Maracle. Again providing incisive commentary on feminism’s role within anti-colonial struggles and Indigenous women’s lives, Maracle states: “I sometimes feel like a foolish young grandmother armed with a teaspoon, determined to remove three mountains from the path to liberation: the mountain of racism, the mountain of sexism and the mountain of nationalist oppression” (x). With such vivid imagery, Maracle evokes the centrality of not only revolutionary desire but of hard, gendered labour aimed at multivalent liberation. The chosen weapon – a teaspoon – is both readily available and unequal to the task, but encourages rather than deters the speaker from tackling all three mountains. Gqola, also, describes South African women as crossing boundaries with and despite the impossible weight of mountains, “mindful of the nexi of power relations at play in Blackwomen’s lives whilst acknowledging the agency with which we engage with them” (Gqola, “Ufanele Uqavile” 12), in order to visualize

the continual interplay between theory and everyday life for those bodies tasked with decolonizing feminism. “The mountains are not overwhelming,” Gqola states, “even if they are monumental and strenuous, and we are not passive” (12). Moreover, these weighted border crossings are substantively transgressive; with each, “the world takes on a slightly different form” (20).

Finally, critical divergences between Indigenous feminisms in Canada and black feminisms in South African also demand attention in a project that seeks to interrogate intersubjective inequality without flattening differences into a single transferable analogy, and different relationships to ‘Indigeneity’ provides one example. Because ‘Native’ and ‘Indigenous’ enjoy positive reconfiguration in Fourth World contexts, the two terms underline a discursive tension between academic fields as well as ontological and epistemological codes that are anything but ‘equally’ experienced. LaRocque’s comments are again instructive here as she thinks about her role as a Native academic in Canada’s colonially-rooted institutions:

As a long-standing scholar in Native studies, I especially wish to bring to this discussion some of my reflections about what confronts those of us who are not only Native and women but are also intellectuals and researchers caught within the confines of ideologically rooted, Western-based canons, standards, and notions of objectivity and research. We are in extraordinary circumstances: not only do we study and teach colonial history, but we also walk in its shadow on a daily basis ourselves. What do we do with our knowledge as well as with the practices of

power in our lives, even in places of higher learning? (LaRocque, “The Colonization of a Native Woman Scholar” 12)

In the South African context, feminist scholar Yvette Abrahams builds upon Hassim’s commentary above to make ‘indigenous’ meaningful beyond a contradistinction from ‘hegemonic’ or ‘African’ feminisms while also interrogating structures of learning. Abrahams analyses the production of a pornographic imaginary that securely positions Khoisan women as sex objects. She does so as part of drawing out terminological difficulties around racialization and indigeneity in the Cape region especially. Interestingly, Abrahams’s scholarship on the Khoisan resonates with both Indigenous and postcolonial study preoccupations about uncomplicatedly sharing rubrics while suggesting certain commonalities. She writes:

This article is about the mental abuse to which white travelwriters [sic] and scientists subjected the Khoisan for a period of some 50 years, from about 1780 to 1815. I ask you to read it in the knowledge that the mental abuse is far from over. In fact, I will also discuss how it continues to the present day. What I have to write of is painful and soul searing. . . . Before describing the lies and abuse, it is important to remember those who overcame, those who fought and perhaps bent, but who fought hard to leave us a memory of struggle, a reminder that no abuse and no material poverty, can deprive us of the final spiritual victory. (Abrahams, “The Great Long National Insult” 35)

Abrahams’s emphasis on the Khoisan’s continued trauma recalls the legacy of residential schools in Canada, for example, and related work by scholars such as Edward Cavanagh

(settler colonial studies), Keyan Tomaselli (media and cultural studies), and Michael Wessels (literature) does much to situate the Khoi/ Khoe/ Khoisan/ Khoesan/ San peoples' historical and contemporary struggles within indigenous frameworks that correspond in part to those of North America. At the same time, interestingly, Khoisan women's experiences and narratives tend to fall outside the large and varied scope of "African feminisms" just as, according to Tomaselli, "the indigenous [in post-apartheid South Africa] are no longer considered indigenous and the new indigenous (i.e., those in power) now control what 'indigenous' means" (Tomaselli qtd. in Wessels 468). Noting that frames of indigeneity do not map easily onto apartheid taxonomies of 'race'-based identity categories, and cautious of the varied stakes in claims to South African indigeneity, this project elects to focus on "the majority indigenous population" (Allen, *Blood Narrative* 9) in South Africa for the sake of using broad but infrequently animated bases for conversation and leave more adequate treatment of contextualized indigeneity and related cultural production to another project.

Part IV Conversive Maps

The remainder of this project is divided into two major chapters, each of which sets one primary text from the South African archive in conversation with a counterpart from the Indigenous archive in Canada to examine interrelated aspects of cross-epistemological feminisms that speak to envisioning difference non-hierarchically. The combined analyses seek, in the largest sense, to orient thinking towards social justice potentiality in more substantive ways than appear possible at present. They do so through consideration of intersubjective engagement at sites that enable or foreclose those

possibilities, and they follow conversation as a radiating frame through which to parse attempted crossings. More specifically, conversations in chapter two help explore intersubjective dissonance through a series of juxtapositions: between different conceptualizations and narrativized experiences of place and property, safety and location, and ownership and belonging; and between altered readings of self in relation to other as shaped by place. In chapter three, conversations juxtapose the literary texts within their scholarly contexts; the structural and thematic recursive modes in each text; and the reader's participation in knowledge production with each text to draw out experiences of loss and processes of empowerment that are enacted through productive returns.

Chapter two, "In Conflict, In Conversation: *Mother to Mother* and *The Book of Jessica* on Place, Property, and Justice," begins the discussion with embodied, fictionalized conversations to examine conversation's relationship with violence in Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* and Maria Campbell and Linda Griffith's co-authored text, *The Book of Jessica*. This chapter maps out a set of epistemological conflicts that undergird the texts' unequal intersubjective exchanges. It goes beyond reading conversation as itself conflictual to focus on ways in which the conflicts in each text are rooted in dissonant understandings of place and of property. It draws out the texts' pedagogical impacts, analysing the different kinds of work that conversation enables in structurally distinct narratives that unite in attending to constructions of justice, and it considers transformative potential despite or in the dissonance. Chapter three, "Conversations at Work: Fiercely Recursive Knowings in *Coconut* and *Monkey Beach*,"

shifts the focus to consider conversation's generative capacities for attempting to articulate and be understood across epistemological dissimilarity. It does so by shifting the conceptual focus from embodied to structural interactions and expands 'conversation' to imagine a wide range of productive scholarly, narrative, thematic juxtapositions. The chapter looks at contemporary Indigenous feminisms in South Africa and Canada through the theme of 'coming to knowledge' – of self, of the world, of power, of knowledge itself – in Kopano Matlwa's *Coconut* and Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*, and it interrogates recursivity as key to those processes.

Moving outward from here, it is my aim that the discussions contribute to ongoing conversations about what goes into this work of working across difference somehow well, or anti-oppressively, and what limits or challenges this work. I have chosen literature as my primary material of study in the belief that literature can potentially act as a scripted witness to the struggle of making meaning. I approach literature as a medium that theorizes in practice, evoking personalized and affective response while also engaging thought about those responses. As such, literature helps bridge practice/ theory divides, false as they are, and foreground both the situatedness of theory and the openly interpretive meanings of practice. The resultant disruption of a dual hierarchy that places theory over practice, and unsituated (read as universal, 'western') over situated (read as the rest of the world) work is especially compelling for this project. By working through the risks and potentials of conversation itself, I draw upon the unstable aspects of conversation in developing a comparative project of listening, a rigorous process of learning, and a hopeful commitment to social change.

Chapter Two:

In Conflict, In Conversation: *Mother to Mother* and *The Book of Jessica* on Place, Property, and Justice

“Shame and anger fill me day and night. Shame at what my son had done. Anger at what has been done to him. I am angry at all the grown-ups who made my son believe he would be a hero, fighting for the nation, were he to do the things he heard them advocate, the deeds they praised. If anyone killed your daughter, some of the leaders who today speak words of consolation to you...mark my words...they, as surely as my son, are your daughter’s murderers.” (Magona 199)

“MARIA: In community work there’s an exchange of power, a sharing, and as a result we all get strong. But what I’ve learned from *Jessica* in the last little while...why do I hurt when we talk about these things? It’s because I can never own it either, and everything else in my life I’ve always owned. . . . It’s so hard...the world is all ownership But in *Jessica*, who created the story? I didn’t create it myself and you didn’t either. We have to stop thinking ‘you and me.’

LINDA: I stand on the land that is *Jessica* because I’m the mother that tilled that soil. That’s where I come from too, and I don’t think it’s entirely reprehensible, although I know it completely wrecked the land for your people.” (Griffiths and Campbell 90–92)⁴³

“Good things are scarce in Guguletu.” (Magona 32)

Intro Located Dissonance

I find it exciting to think about conversation as a methodology capable of opening up critical practice to unanticipated understandings located in difficult cross-epistemological terrain. If conversation can help situate, or prepare, social justice-oriented scholar-practitioners to grapple meaningfully with voices and experiences unlike (or like, though removed from) their own, then conversation can suggest possibilities for ongoing transformative practice. But what happens when conversation fails, spectacularly or

⁴³ Where ellipses appear with spaces when citing *Mother to Mother* or *The Book of Jessica*, words have been omitted from the original text. Ellipses without spaces appear in the original texts.

ordinarily? What happens when the attempt to engage does more to entrench than destabilize the foundations for a myriad of oppressions, “reproduc[ing] a relation of domination” (Bhabha 46) between the conversants and augmenting violence in the process? Bhabha’s use of this phrase reminds us that struggles over knowledge production and interpretation take place within complex discourse theories and between scholarly disciplines as much as through embodied intersubjectivity. Those struggles, moreover, are of course anything but equal, and the very possibility for ‘equality’ gets eclipsed by the terms that frame the encounter.⁴⁴ In his own foundational – if partial – response, Bhabha convincingly theorizes translation and hybridity with an eye on conversation by drawing out ways in which “the desire of the signifier, the indeterminacy of intertextuality, can be deeply engaged in the postcolonial struggle against dominant relations of power and knowledge” (48). Yet my concern remains slightly lateral and perhaps conceptually impatient, probing textures in the spaces between complex, intra-(in)formed, and embodied subjectivities – not unlike Bhabha – but seeking out, and therefore imagining as possible, conditions for approximated understandings to emerge across the unsettled work of difference. Euro-Canadian literary scholar Daniel Coleman provides a compelling interpretive approach that shifts the experiential focus of knowledge production to reading in ways that reach beyond but help illuminate this

⁴⁴ As Bhabha states in relation to (especially) French critical theory’s treatment of otherness, “the site of cultural difference can become the mere phantom of a dire disciplinary struggle in which it has no space or power” (Bhabha 46). This results, Bhabha argues, from “a familiar manoeuvre of theoretical knowledge, where, having opened up the chasm of cultural difference, a mediator or metaphor of otherness must be found to contain the effects of difference. In order to be institutionally effective as a discipline, the knowledge of cultural difference must be made to foreclose on the Other; difference and otherness thus become the fantasy of a certain cultural space or, indeed, the certainty of a form of theoretical knowledge that deconstructs the epistemological ‘edge’ of the West” (45–46).

discussion. Coleman argues that a critical scholarly practice grounded in humility can shape discerning readers who learn to navigate between the hermeneutical poles Paul Ricoeur characterizes as either affirmative or suspicious.⁴⁵ Vital to this process is nurturing a reading “posture” that “necessitates, ultimately, the possibility of not just reading but of *being read* by the book”: “If reading is to have any impact,” Coleman suggests, “it requires a posture of expectation and receptivity” (Coleman, *In Bed with the Word* 60, emphasis in original). Further, “[a] spiritually healthy posture combines suspicion with its hermeneutics of affirmation” (60) to differentiate discernment from critique (61) in ways that consciously incorporate generous attentiveness into the work of criticism alongside a willingness to be changed by the process. Without directly following Coleman’s line of inquiry, I am attentive to his discussion of “being read,” interested in its potential for a more generative mode of reading – a mode of conversing with text – that works at in-between junctures marked by gaps, tensions, and uncertainties. Perhaps most salient for my project is Coleman’s description of the composite workings of distance in “discerning” reading (and scholarship), proposing a posture that acknowledges and seeks modes of reaching across “structure[s] of absence” in order to make and read meaning:

We develop right posture when as readers we recognize the structure of absence or distance across which we long to pass, when we recognize our limitation and isolation, and when we discern the suppressed or hidden possibility of connection and belonging to the Other who seemed so far removed. (63)

⁴⁵ For a succinct gloss on Ricoeur’s discussion of the hermeneutics of faith and the hermeneutics of suspicion, see Coleman, *In Bed with the Word* 32.

Returning to the question of ruptured discursive travel, however, and considering the face-to-face encounter alongside its textual kin, what happens when a discerning readership is either too difficult to enact or proves insufficient to the task of disentangling dense histories of injustice just enough to enliven moments of altered conception? Framed otherwise, what factors underwrite conversational conflict most deeply and how might those factors be addressed most substantively?

These questions propel a circling back to the project's opening queries about unequal intersubjectivity and possible avenues for transformative practice, but now with especial attention paid to violences produced and perpetuated through dissonant conversations taking place between individuals in the texts. In particular, the chapter focuses on intersubjective violence arising out of conflicting assumptions about core concepts – property and place – that reinforce colonially shaped structures of (dis)empowerment. By interpretively tethering violence to property and place, the analysis unfolds along axes of located dissonance, but the chapter also asks us to imagine conditions for engaging otherwise. The primary texts in focus – Sindiwe Magona's *Mother to Mother* (1998), a novel-length address from the fictionalized mother of a man accused of murder to the actual victim's mother; and Maria Campbell and Linda Griffiths's *The Book of Jessica* (1989), a collaboratively documented process of theatre development and production – are both animated by conversational structures. Moreover, those structures are constituted by the kinds of asymmetrical relationships that stimulated this project and that place the fraught workings of unequal intersubjectivity at center stage. Whereas the next chapter will unpack some of conversation's generative work

through a focus on recursive relationships to knowledge, this chapter pauses at sites of conversational ‘failure’ to read differentiated conceptions of ‘justice.’ I argue that a dual place/property lens both opens up a chain of productive organizing concepts – ownership, belonging, safety, and home – and helpfully bounds that analysis through an arbitrary closure⁴⁶ around territories of signification. The texts’ dissonances can be traced through Eurocentric frameworks that place non-European differences at a devalued remove such that, as the Comaroffs state,

[t]he accomplishment of anything like the real thing, the Euro-original, is presumed, at worst, to be flatly impossible, at best to be deferred into a dim, distant, almost unimaginable future – which, as Fanon (1967:121) put it, if the colonized ever *do* arrive, it is “[t]oo late. Everything is [already] anticipated, thought out, demonstrated, made the most of.” To the degree that, from a Western perspective, the global south is embraced by modernity at all, then, it is as an outside that requires translation, mutation, conversion, catch-up. (Comaroff and Comaroff 2)

This sharpens the frame through which to read assumptions about knowledge – and by extension definitions of justice, ownership, property, and place – as springing from one primary, authorizing location. It is by locating dissonance at sites that are themselves trained on contested conceptions of placement, however, that analytical traction gains ground for attending to the complicated work of unspoken, asymmetrical, and conflicting assumptions within structures of conversation.

⁴⁶ I am borrowing Stuart Hall’s term, here, from his discussion of identity production in “Minimal Selves” (1996).

Property and place are bound up in post-Enlightenment assumptions that span the texts' contexts and seem impervious to epistemological challenges, yet they also generate tensions that suggest otherwise. Dominant assumptions about property as expressed in each text find firm grounding in particular genealogies of European superiority: articulated most foundationally in John Locke's *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), property is securely interwoven with notions of civil governance, individual liberty, and private ownership – each intersected with the conceit of 'improvement' – that find singular association with Europe. For Locke, as for the settlers of imperial Britain versed in Lockean precepts,

every man has a *property* in his own *person*: this no body has any right to but himself. The *labour* of his body, and the *work* of his hands, we may say, are properly his. Whatsoever then he removes out of the state that nature hath provided, and left it in, he hath mixed his *labour* with, and joined to it something that is his own, and thereby makes it his *property*. (Locke par. 27, emphasis in original)

Furthermore, as Coleman maps out in relation to Hodinohso:ni land claims that the Canadian government continually works to de-legitimize, "[James] Tully explains that from foundational concepts formulated by political philosophers such as Thomas Hobbes and John Locke onwards, the management of property was central to the principles that produced not only the modern nation-state, but also colonial expansion into Indigenous territories" (Coleman, "Imposing subCitizenship" 201). If bodily property and physical labouring 'improvements' beget property ownership and legitimate nation building, then,

only the Lockean “man” – both gendered and racialized – can claim a body as “properly his” (Locke par. 27) in contradistinction from “the earth, and all inferior creatures” (par. 27) which are not only void of ownership or governance capacity but are “common to all men” (par. 27), available for exploitation at the discretion of the self-appointed proper owners. That Indigenous epistemologies and imperial justificatory praxis collide on and over physical territory in the settler states is obvious; that an ostensibly insurmountable incomprehension characterizes that divide appears intuitive. Yet what Magona, Campbell, and Griffiths all bring to these continued knowledge encounters are variances on the now familiar challenges to Eurocentric logic that reads the “earth, and all inferior creatures” (par. 27) as always already denigrated, always already situated at a devalued remove. Significantly, the bodily property conceptualized by Locke also coheres with the racial property theorized by African-American critical race scholar Cheryl I. Harris. Operating as both “status property and modern property” (Harris 1714), whiteness is characterized by “the legal legitimation of expectations of power and control that enshrine the status quo as a neutral baseline, while masking the maintenance of white privilege and domination” (1715). Attending to place as both constructed and experiential, then, shifts the framework for thinking about property just enough to read through its motivatedness slightly otherwise.

Place, together with property, helps signal the situatedness of thought systems in ways that are particularly productive for this project’s desire to ground but also trace the movements of ideas and resonant with anti-imperial scholarship. Oyěwùmí’s call for “world-senses” to be considered in place of “worldviews,” for example, emphasizes

interpretive modes “that may privilege senses other than the visual or even a combination of senses” (Oyěwùmí 4). Nuttall and Cheryl-Ann Michael similarly call for “a critical view of ‘the politics of visibility’ . . . and at the same time attempt to mark the limits of cultural discourses that are not open to other imaginative and theoretical configurations” (Nuttall and Michael 18). Here, Ahmed also re-enters with offerings on place, sense, and encounter together. By situating discussions of belonging within the tangible realm of embodiment through the figure of the stranger, Ahmed theorizes a certain “politics of stranger making; how some and not others become strangers; how emotions of fear and hatred stick to certain bodies; how some bodies become understood as the rightful occupants of certain spaces” (Ahmed, *On Being Included* 2). She does so, furthermore, from the position that “[s]trange encounters are . . . tactile as well as visual: just as some others are ‘seen’ and recognised as stranger than other others . . . , so too some skins are touched as stranger than other skins” (*Strange Encounters* 29). Although the unequal intersubjectivity in Magona and Campbell/Griffiths gets expressed through neither sight nor touch exclusively, it does unsettle a series of unspoken assumptions about knowledge production that trouble the visual bias in asymmetrical differentiation. The relation of violence itself – potential and actual, historical and continuing – that adheres to asymmetrical embodiment and get experienced through different understandings of place and property is what centres this chapter: for *Mother to Mother*, through placement and displacement (forced vs. elected), tensions between transitions and home, and differential relationships with safety; for *The Book of Jessica*, through the contract, ‘the process,’ accented intent, and sibylling. Finally, this chapter considers select moments in each

conflictual conversation as potentially transformative and asks how that potential might be expanded by paying particular attention to Kelly Oliver's dual notion of witnessing and Daniel Heath Justice's theorization of "community and kinship . . . as interpretive concepts" (Justice 149) in animating ethical, and decolonizing, Native literary critical practice.

Part I Placing Conversational Dissonance: *Mother to Mother*

Sindiwe Magona's 1998 novel *Mother to Mother* locates the sites and terms of conversational dissonance in transition-era South Africa. Like *Coconut*, explored in the next chapter, *Mother to Mother*'s anchoring narrative unfolds along a single day in a specific place – 25 August 1993, in the Cape Town township of Gugulethu⁴⁷ – with extensive unpacking and complication achieved through recollection. Unlike *Coconut*, however, *Mother to Mother* focuses on an exceptional iteration of township violence and its genealogical narrativization. Through Magona's protagonist, Mandisa Ntloko,⁴⁸ questions about agency, culpability, interpretation, and context permeate both frame and embedded narratives to destabilize singular readings of violence or its relation to place. Violence gets enacted by individual youths, including Mandisa's son, in located moments; but the systemic workings of violence also find expression in Mandisa's stories that are simultaneously backgrounded from the central action and foregrounded through

⁴⁷ Antjie Krog, Nosisi Mpolweni, and Kopano Ratele note that "'Gugulethu' is the correct spelling of the name of the township . . . although the official spelling during apartheid years is given [in their book] as Guguletu" (Krog, Mpolweni-Zantsi, and Ratele 215, fnnt. for "Page 1"). "Guguletu" is Magona's spelling throughout the novel.

⁴⁸ Note that Ntloko is Mandisa's childhood surname (see Magona 107). The text does not make clear whether or not Mandisa's surname is changed (either through her short marriage to China, for example, or later in her relationship with Dwaḁwa), but I want to reference a surname to avoid informalizing Mandisa's character by providing only a given name in contrast to her auditor who is best known by her more formal, and implicitly more respectful, surname.

its telling. In this way, *Mother to Mother* troubles multiple dominant assumptions about the operations of power while orchestrating an extended imagined conversation – an extended dramatic monologue – between the protagonist and her silent, distant interlocutor whose position gets read through what Mandisa selects to share, and how. That monologue operates, I argue, in conversation with the imagined American mother as invoked by western-dominated media representation of the event.

By opening up considerations of justice, injustice, pain, and healing to reconsider the operations of place, Magona's novel performs some of the reparative work that Episkenew credits to Indigenous literatures in Canada:

Not only does Indigenous literature respond to and critique the policies of the Government of Canada [and, we might add, apartheid-era policies of South Africa]; it also functions as “medicine” to help cure the colonial contagion by healing the communities that these policies have injured. It accomplishes this by challenging the “master narrative” Indigenous literature acknowledges and validates Indigenous peoples' experiences by filling in the gaps and correcting the falsehoods in this master narrative. (Episkenew 2)

The resultant “‘counterstory’ that . . . attempts to replace [the oppressive identity assigned Indigenous people in settler mythology] with one that commands respect” (2) is akin to Magona's fictionalized, but also contextually deepened, account of Amy Biehl's murder in Guguletu, South Africa. The respect that Magona's protagonist commands operates along nationalist and racialized as well as feminist lines in a textualized conversation whose script lacks the face-to-face process that Campbell and Griffiths's collaboration

mediates and reproduces in *The Book of Jessica*. *Mother to Mother*'s absentee interlocutor, however, allows Mandisa's counterstory to register more clearly as a healing tool than does Campbell's, whose voice continually competes for audibility and raises questions about the pressures placed by conversational dissonance on resistant texts. In this section, place-based dissonance is read through juxtaposing narratives and narrative spaces in the novel, juxtaposing places and displacements in the characters' lives, and characters' juxtaposing experiences of safety.

I.i Structuring Place

While place finds significance across interrelated themes in Magona's novel, it registers first through the narrative structure. A frame narrative recounting a single notorious killing in Guguletu, an attack that captures international – and especially North American – attention, bounds an extended embedded narrative of how that killing became possible. On 25 August 1993, Amy Elizabeth Biehl, a white American Fulbright scholar from Stanford University temporarily in South Africa to support preparations for the first free elections, was driving friends home to Guguletu when her car was attacked. She alone did not survive. Her death was widely reported inside and outside of South Africa as a senseless tragedy and terrible human rights violation; and her attackers' appeal for amnesty before the Truth and Reconciliation Commission four years later, while serving 18-year sentences, again captured public attention for gaining the support of Amy Biehl's parents.⁴⁹ The fictionalized account of Amy Biehl's murder provides Magona's frame

⁴⁹ Pumla Gobodo-Madikizela refers to the Biehl case as one of the TRC's exceptional examples of compassion and forgiveness (see p. 118 and footnote #1 on p. 170 of *A Human Being Died That Night* as well the 2001 film *Long Night's Journey into Day*, dir. Hoffmann and Reid [0:00-16:10]). Richard A. Wilson also discusses this case in his study of the TRC's impact on notions of justice at the local level.

narrative, centering on Mandisa's son Mxolisi – through Mandisa's viewpoint – the day of the attack and one day following. The embedded narrative is Mandisa's own, offering memories and reflections that attempt to articulate "something of the other world," something of "the world of this young woman's killers" (Magona v, "Author's Preface"), such that the violence prompting the address might be better understood. Further, Magona constructs a mediating narrative bridge in the shape of seven italicized passages, dispersed between the two storylines, that compose a direct address to the woman Mandisa calls her "*Sister-Mother*" (Magona 198, emphasis in original).

Although Magona's 1998 novel is fictionalized, then, it participates in conversations across politicized locations that both precede and exceed its telling. In the novel, it is Mxolisi's mother rather than Amy's who gains central attention; in popular memory and recitation of this particular event, however, it is the Biehls's footprint that becomes firmly established. Indeed, Amy Biehl gains an expansive public voice post mortem through a combination of press coverage – iconizing her as a victim of meaningless violence – and her parents' statement to the TRC that moves Manqina Mongezi, upon whom Mxolisi's character is based, to say: "It made my heart sore to hear how they described her. I didn't know who she was. I had seen her simply as another oppressor. I realized I had beaten someone who should not have been beaten. I hit the

Wilson is more critical of the Biehl case's role within the TRC, however, arguing that it "commanded international attention and massive media coverage since it seemed to epitomize reconciliation," especially in the ways the parents' "press statements appealed to *ubuntu* and principles of human dignity, called for all to 'link arms', to build reconciliation and to further the cause of 'social progress' in South Africa," making the decision to "grant[] amnesty for the killers of Amy Biehl . . . a public relations coup which the TRC could not afford to pass by" (R. Wilson 92). That said, Antjie Krog questions Wilson's critique and urges further consideration of the role of *ubuntu* in the TRC's encouragement to forgive (Krog 205–207).

wrong person” (Hoffmann and Reid 13:48–14:15).⁵⁰ Common media references to a clearly specified “Amy Biehl” and her largely unnamed “attackers,” furthermore, help underscore the asymmetrical value assigned each subject and the disproportionate weight carried by “Amy’s” story. Magona’s text responds by interrupting the predominant focus on Amy in ways that locate her actual attackers – Mongezi Christopher Manqina, Mxikhona Eazi Nofemala, Vusumzi Samuel Ntamo, and Ntombeki Ambrose Peni⁵¹ – in a complex set of places and afford those young men less flattened subjectivities via imaginative reconstructions. This response is especially significant to my project for not only making one member of the accused speak (be it through his mother), but also for circumventing a derivative voice generated through the Biehls’s gesture of forgiveness. To be rendered thinkable only, or primarily, as a recipient of compassion does little to re-imagine the epistemological structure that places a white American in the position to bestow meaning upon Agamben’s “disposable” *homo sacer*. Because Mxolisi is narratively conceived (in a double sense) as the valued child of a speaking subject, however, he becomes more than a figure of bare life, challenging the concept’s limits at the moment that its conditions of emergence – socio-political dispossession, placement outside the fold of statehood – are delineated. In this way, Magona’s fiction provides illustration for Jean Comaroff’s argument that

⁵⁰ As Meg Samuelson explains, “Mandisa and Mxolisi are based upon Evelyn and Mongezi Manqina. The latter is one of four (the other three being Vusumzi Ntamo, Ntobeko Peni, and Easy Nofemela) charged with killing Amy Biehl in August 1993. They were granted amnesty by the Truth and Reconciliation Committee in July 1998” (Samuelson, “Reading the Maternal Voice in Sindiwe Magona’s *To My Children’s Children and Mother to Mother*” 243, fnnt. 8).

⁵¹ I have used the spelling of each name as it appears in the Truth and Reconciliation hearings transcripts (see Manqina et al. 1).

[w]hile the will to power or the effects of structural violence might significantly sever life from civic protection and social value, no act of sovereignty – save perhaps in the fantasies of philosophical absolutists or biological determinists – can actually alienate humans from entailment in webs of signs, relations, and affect. (Comaroff 209)

By bridging these communicating but distinctly placed frame and embedded narratives, Mandisa simultaneously moves between individualized accounts of events and larger contextual considerations. Her narrative, then, has the effect of filling out the located subjectivity of an otherwise emptied and placeless *homo sacer* figure without losing sight of the structures that Agamben's political analysis urgently, and rightfully, foregrounds.

With three narrative lines running through an overarching conversation, *Mother to Mother* poses the question of where to listen most carefully and which textual and geopolitical places mean what. The frame narrative's provision of an organizing skeleton suggests that Biehl's murder merits interpretive priority; by constituting the bulk and inner workings of the stories, however, the embedded narrative could make that same claim; and by composing a direct address, Mandisa's words to her absent listener imply primary importance as well. I argue that the resultant contest over where and how interpretive weight is borne calls attention to values as contingent, shifting contextually throughout the novel to emphasize the changing meaningfulness of sites themselves. The epistemological interplay around violence and justice, in turn, resonates with the novel's historical moment of transition out of almost five decades of apartheid and into a newly formed democracy. As Nuttall and Michael point out,

[South Africa's] policy, during the apartheid period, of legalized segregation on the basis of race, isolated it as the grotesque in the colonial historical narrative.

Yet South Africa is also a place striking for its imbrications of multiple identities – identities that mythologies of apartheid and of resistance to it tended to silence.

(Nuttall and Michael 2)

I am especially interested in spacialization's role in the transition-era production of South Africa's multiplicity, where flux and hopeful uncertainty coalesce with reconfigurations of place amidst pressing debates about nation-building, and where isolationist policies find response in more expansive desires for participatory interchange. 'Place,' then, gains meaning both within the novel and its broader context and 'property' signals South Africa itself, as well as who comes to count – cf. Cheryl I. Harris – within that emergent reconceptualization.

Remembering Harris, Tully, and Coleman on nation building as a form of knowledge production and citizenship as at once enabling and regulatory, it is striking that although Amy Biehl did not survive her transition-moment attack, her death in that space was less exceptional than her whiteness. "Guguletu was not safe long before Amy was killed in Guguletu," Magona notes. "And it wasn't going to be safe in a hurry long after" (Magona et al. 285). As Mandisa pointedly asks Amy's mother: "*And, if he'd killed one of the other women who were with your daughter, d'you think there would be all this hue and cry? He'd be here now; like the hundreds of killers walking the length and breadth of Guguletu*" (Magona 2–3, emphasis in original). Yet it is the humanitarian American figure – depicted as having "*an all-consuming, fierce and burning compulsion*

[to do good in this world]” (2, emphasis in original) – and her experience of violence rather than the startlingly quotidian version permeating institutionalized sites of oppression that ignites a widespread sense of injustice, an appalling transgression of ‘civility.’ Harris argues that, “[i]n a society structured on racial subordination, white privilege became an expectation and . . . whiteness became the quintessential property for personhood” (Harris 1730), thereby not merely a marker of privilege but a status to be owned and levied as proof of legitimate subjectivity. An attack on that embodied property, then, co-articulates with unjust action insofar as the perpetrators, together with the racialized victims and survivors of violence, lack the requisite “property for personhood” that commands protection. Harris takes the United States as her object of critical race analysis, but she cites South Africa’s constitutional development in the transition era as a foundational frame for her engagement with whiteness (1713 fnnt. 9), and Magona’s critical invocation of a conditional “grievability” (Butler) relies on a similar logic. Aligning (de)valued bodies with (de)valued geographies through legislation like the 1950 Group Areas Acts, apartheid South Africa orchestrated a biopolitics that should have separated bodies that mattered out of spaces that did not. Magona reminds us, however, that not only do the ostensibly devalued sites of violence matter, but they also succeed in generating complicated forms of living around and despite the violence. Without directly comparing instances of violence and trauma, then, I am interested in attending to the cross-fertilization of violence, ‘justice,’ and epistemological dissonance across cultural locations. Magona’s fictive account of the Biehl murder offers provocative terrain on which to further tease out the complexities of asymmetrically intersubjective

work with a view to enabling a differently conceptualized ‘social justice’ by staging a prolonged dramatic monologue from one grieving woman to another – the mother of the accused and the mother of the deceased – whose implied investments in justice center on coincident, but not shared, sites of pain.

I.ii Mapping (Dis)Placements

The remaining sections of this discussion train conversation’s critical potential onto thematized places and displacements to ask who and where the participants are situated in Magona’s postcolonial, but also newly postapartheid, literary conversation, and how notions of place inflect the speaker’s address. By parsing ‘conversation’ in this way I hope to trace intersubjective modes of making (in)justice meaningful in a socio-political context of immense upheaval. Magona’s speaker, as we know, is Mandisa, the black South African mother of Mxolisi, and her auditor is the fictionalized white American mother of Mxolisi’s victim. The larger intended audience, however, extends to both South African and North American readerships either unfamiliar with the experience of racialized South Africans before or during apartheid – for whom Mandisa describes her memories in a level of detail unnecessary for more cognizant listeners – or quite familiar with those experiences and unaccustomed to seeing them animated as medicinal counterstories (alia Episkenew). Mandisa’s address is also, crucially, shaped by an assumed readerly belief in the rule of law, in guilt and innocence, and in clearly delineated value systems that render moral truths transparent. The “Author’s Preface” opens unequivocally, for example, as ostensibly objective as corresponding media headlines intended: “Fulbright scholar Amy Elizabeth Biehl was set upon and killed by a

mob of black youth in Guguletu, South Africa, in August 1993. The outpouring of grief, outrage, and support for the Biehl family was unprecedented in the history of the country” (Magona v). But the “Preface” also proposes shifted reading practices by expressing unease with normative assumptions about justice. Although Magona points to an uncomplicatedly shared set of ethics, stating that “[u]sually, and rightly, in situations like this, we hear a lot about the world of the victim” (v), she also consciously opens those ethics up to questioning by filling out pictures of “the world of those, young as she was young, whose environment failed to nurture them in the higher ideals of humanity and who, instead, became lost creatures of malice and destruction” (v).

The novel’s closing, similarly, aligns blame more with structural conditions than with individual culpability by naming Mxolisi “an agent, executing the long-simmering desires of his race” (210) who, under altered circumstances in August 1993, may have not been rendered a murderer, “[p]erhaps, not yet” (210). Both the opening and closing effectively draw place into discussions of justice by challenging the adequacy of universalisms and associated assumptions about their straightforward definitional capabilities, while also resisting the provision of simple correctives. Renée Schatteman responds to some of the critical unease with this aspect of Magona’s closing that Rita Barnard, for example, argues reinscribes a sense of inevitable fatalism in South African race relations irrespective of location. Schatteman, in contrast, asserts that “Barnard’s reading misses what makes *Mother to Mother* a unique representation of the transitional period between 1990 and 1994 – its insistence that guilt and innocence can co-exist without resolution” (Schatteman 278). While I am more hesitant than Schatteman to read

the novel as “ultimately transcend[ing] rhetoric of culpability and blame and mov[ing] to a higher plane of understanding” (278), I agree that it “provides insights into the complexities of a nation struggling to come to terms with its violent past and to chart a path towards it [sic] future” (278). Magona’s significant contribution, I argue, is in foregrounding the physicality as well as the temporality of this located (not universal) encounter to deal not only with South Africa’s complicated history but also its complicated spaces. By rendering visible the unequally contesting value systems and experiences undergirding South Africa’s transition out of apartheid, resonant with Carli Coetzee’s argument for unharmoniously accented reading practices (Coetzee x), Magona injects site specificity into structural analyses to help make sense of meaning produced at situated and historicized epistemological crossings.

Mother to Mother does rehearse a dissonance that locates the white American addressee and intended reader on one side, whose sense of injustice is epitomized by Amy’s killing, and racialized subject positions defined by myriad forms of legalized injustice on the other, for whom South Africa’s rule of law operates as indelibly fictive and inadequate to encompass the depth of experiential injustice that exceeds legal definition. Yet Magona’s positioning of speaker and addressee also goes beyond demarcating divergent concepts of justice along socio-historical and geopolitical lines to stage a literary “speaking back” that claims some commonality of experience while painstakingly outlining the dissimilarities that fundamentally shape the end result. Euro-American scholar Donna Haraway’s foundational work on “situated knowledges,” as a way of theorizing a “feminist objectivity” capable of engaging contradictory tensions

between constructivism and empiricism, becomes important here for challenging “us to become answerable for what we learn how to see” (Haraway 581) in relation to place. Magona’s opening line – “*My son killed your daughter*” (Magona 1, emphasis in original) – emphasizes the novel’s interest in motherhood, for example, and Mandisa’s closing call to her “*Sister-Mother*” (201, emphasis in original) reasserts that basis for cross-epistemological identification, but *Mother to Mother* refuses to sit comfortably upon an assumed sameness and instead asks that we make readings of sharing difficult. Analyzing the roles and limitations of empathy in cross-“racial” work, Anne Whitehead notes that “[m]otherhood is clearly posited as the common ground that brings the two women together” (Whitehead 185) in Magona’s novel, despite ultimately positioning “the black mother’s affective experience outside of the empathetic reach of the white mother” (181). Samuelson’s more comprehensive discussion of the maternal voice in Magona’s work draws attention to an autobiographical influence on characterization that also shapes this particular – imagined – cross-cultural encounter. Samuelson suggests that Magona “insert[s] the details of her own story into Mandisa’s narrative in order to reinscribe their meanings and write herself into a new identity more in tune with the discourses of the ‘New South Africa’” (Samuelson, “Reading the Maternal Voice” 227–228), an identity that must negotiate community- and individual-based structures of value. As Magona explains in an interview, Mongezi Manqina’s mother, Evelyn Manqina, was a childhood friend, and learning of her relationship to the Biehl murder is what prompted Magona to write:

Mother to Mother is a book I did not plan. It's a book I didn't write at the moment of the act that provoked it [at which time] I was in New York where I live now.⁵² I was shocked. I was saddened. But in the ways in which these things are; these things happen. You know, people get killed. My sadness, I must confess, was kind of distant and impersonal. Six months later, I went home for the elections; I discovered that one of the four young men implicated in her murder, who were then on trial, is the son of a childhood friend of mine. Well, that changed things a bit, because then I was catapulted into a situation where I had *empathy* for the mother of the perpetrator of such a crime. (Magona et al. 283–284)

Elsewhere, Magona states that “[b]iography will flesh out the bare bones of history. . . . And in terms of South Africans beginning to understand who they are in their totality [biography] also helps. Because of [apartheid's] total segregation, the lack of knowledge about each other helps to perpetuate myths” (Magona interview, Magona and Orantes 32). In Haraway's argument for “situated and embodied knowledges and . . . against various forms of unlocatable, and so irresponsible, knowledge claims” (583), then, we can see Mandisa labouring to articulate responsibly and demand a similarly responsible reception about justice and its absence. Whereas proximities gained through lived experience are central to the text's making and pedagogical import, the particular locations of mothering frame the story's knowledge production, unsettling easy assumptions about maternal understanding across contexts to foreground empathy and indignation in complex tension.

⁵² Magona lived in New York at the time of this interview (2000) but has since returned to, and currently resides, in South Africa.

Where Haraway's work speaks to the asymmetrical situatedness of knowledges in *Mother to Mother*, Euro-American anthropologist James Ferguson and Mamdani draw out particular sets of factors shaping that asymmetry. Magona delineates a fictionalized Evelyn Manqina from an imagined Linda Biehl such that Mandisa's assumptions about her listener's expectations – notably, that Biehl can neither envision nor understand “the other world” (Magona v) without directed guidance – find expression. Yet these assumptions do more than trouble universal terms of sisterhood or justice by in effect speaking to the “West's” ongoing use of “Africa” as a “metaphor of absence – a ‘dark continent’ against which the lightness and whiteness of ‘Western civilization’ can be pictured” (Ferguson 2). Pivoting on Cameroonian scholar Achille Mbembe's analysis of “Africa as an idea, a concept, [that] has historically served, and continues to serve, as a polemical argument for the West's desperate desire to assert its difference from the rest of the world” (Mbembe 2 qtd. in Ferguson 2), Ferguson points to an overwhelming prevalence of undifferentiated “‘Africa’ talk’ . . . [animated by notions of crisis and] full of anguished and (often vague) moral concern” (Ferguson 1–2). As an anthropologist, Ferguson asks: “What is at stake in current discussions about ‘Africa,’ its problems, and its place in the world? And what should be the response of those of us who have, over the years, sought to understand not ‘Africa in general’ (that unlikely object) but specific places and social realities ‘in’ Africa?” (2). As a student of cultural and literary theory, I am attuned to the “serious danger of romanticizing and/or appropriating the vision of the less powerful while claiming to see from their positions” (Haraway 584) and wonder how to hear the responses of those most keenly aware of being metaphorically and politically

absented. *Mother to Mother* is part of this response. Contributing to the contentious work of forcing the ‘West’ to recognize its uncomfortable proximity to ‘Africa,’ *Mother to Mother* highlights the ‘West’s’ role in both grossly misconstruing what ‘Africa’ means globally and framing the ways justice signifies locally. The novel sees Mandisa, for example, having to contextualize the violence within apartheid and transitional South Africa to a white American listener such that her own legibility relies on first educating the person in a position of privilege. But Mandisa also complicates and densifies assumptions about ‘Africa’ to underscore the workings of suffering. She does so in ways that potentially reinscribe stereotypes about ‘Africa in crisis,’⁵³ but she is able to trouble those stereotypes by carefully outlining particular historical contexts that undermine simplistic reductiveness. Furthermore, Mandisa’s complicated but carefully delineated story of apartheid destabilizes the dual notions that Africa’s crises are somehow inevitable or ahistorical, and that they are too complex for reasoned – as opposed to frantic or sensational – interpretation and response. Finally, the novel’s staged address draws attention both to what the story means to Mandisa and what the story presumes to mean to the American auditor, thereby underscoring an active relationality between ‘Africa’ and the ‘West.’

Working from related theoretical bases, Mamdani shifts the construction of ‘Africa’ as a ‘Western’ signifier of racialized and radicalized otherness to look squarely at politicized genealogies of postcolonial violence. Mamdani theorizes a perceived

⁵³ This is a stereotype that Ferguson interrogates as well as the title of a collection of essays that Ferguson cites (Tunde, Zack-Williams, Diane Frost, and Alex Thompson, eds. *Africa in Crisis: New Challenges and Possibilities*. London: Pluto, 2002. Print.)

indifference to contemporary political violence in African states – arguing that the “modern political sensibility is not horrified by all violence[, but by] violence that does not make sense [within particular logics]” (Mamdani, “Making Sense” 132) – by mapping out a distinction between ‘acceptable’ or sensible (“civilized”) and ‘unacceptable’ or senseless (“colonial”) versions of atrocity. This emphasis corresponds well with Magona’s attention to the treatment of Biehl’s death – widespread demand for justice as based on a contravention of “civilized” codes – in contrast to South Africa’s daily “colonial” violence that fails to startle a Western imaginary. Similarly, Mamdani’s critique of South Africa’s TRC focuses on its inability to read violence outside a ‘colonial-vs.-civilized’ frame. Building upon the differentiated schematics of violence, Mamdani’s analyses also cohere with Magona’s narrative witnessing to apartheid’s systemic violence by focusing on the Commission’s own definitional limitations. Because the TRC interpreted its mandate to mean “victim” and “perpetrator” in strictly individual terms, necessarily “obscur[ing] the victimization of communities” (Mamdani, “Amnesty or Impunity?” 34) and nullifying – or at least undermining – its “acknowledge[ment of] apartheid as a ‘crime against humanity’” (33), it remained unable to address “the bifurcated nature of South African law and legal authority” (58). This bifurcation is key: in Mamdani’s concise summation,

the law [in apartheid South Africa] simultaneously racialized and ethnicized the population. Races were defined as those not native, not indigenous; whether they were accorded full civil rights (whites) or only residual rights (Coloreds, Indians), races were governed through civil law. In contrast, tribes were defined as those

indigenous, those native to the land; set apart ethnically, each tribe was ruled through its own patriarchal authority claiming to enforce its version of colonially sanctioned patriarchy as “customary law.” (53)

In failing to interrogate apartheid’s two-tiered structures, the Commission failed to unsettle the political meanings attached to race and ethnicity in South Africa or their parallel administrative or legal articulations, and thereby failed to deal with systemic abuses. What remains particularly significant is Mamdani’s analysis of unequal power as enabled and fostered by situated – placed – definitional practice, where a particular colonial determination of who would be categorized and administered by race and who by ethnicity delineates the application of civilizational assumptions. In a more general discussion of colonialism in Africa, Mamdani describes indirect rule as “an attempt to stabilize colonial rule by moving away from direct rule that created a volatile context in which the identity of both rulers and ruled was racialized, but the former as a minority and the latter as a majority” and by instituting instead “a legal project that fractured the singular, racialized and majority identity, *native*, into several, plural, ethnicized, minority identities – called *tribes*” (“Making Sense” 137). When read in the context of apartheid South Africa, we find this logic protecting the rights of a raced minority citizen – who is considered alien to and therefore dominant over the space – in a unitary but living statutory law. Simultaneously, the same logic vulnerablizes an ethnicized majority subject who is bound to the physical location in immortalized, colonially transcribed, and proliferating sets of customary laws. To deconstruct postcolonial sites of political violence, then, we must first understand the instrumental politicization of identity that

falsely fixes otherwise fluid identities in the service of direct and indirect “alien” rule over “natives” and the relationalities that ensue.

Both Ferguson and Mamdani build on concerns expressed throughout this project about the multiply-reinforced positions of subordination assigned non-European subjects and the challenges involved in substantively and radically transforming the claims that structure resultant socio-political, as well as epistemological, hierarchies. At the outset of this chapter, a critical look at Locke on property helped situate the tenaciousness of racialized and gendered superiority in colonial ideology and practice; here, Mamdani highlights ways in which the core standard – against which comparisons are read as always already lesser iterations – is the subject deemed fully human. Magona, in turn, responds to public horror at an act her own protagonist finds incomprehensible, made possible by the processes that see her bemoan “*these monsters our children have become*” (Magona 2, emphasis in original), but takes up the challenge to untangle those processes and help the woman most intimately affected by their consequences understand. This move again resonates with Mamdani’s thinking when, discussing Rwanda’s 1994 genocide, he states:

I thought it important to understand the humanity of the perpetrator, as it were, to get under the skin of the perpetrator – not to excuse the perpetrator, and the killing, but to make the act ‘thinkable’, so as to learn something about ourselves as humans. How do we understand the agency of the perpetrator? Framed by what history? Kept alive, reproduced, by which institutions? Who did the Hutu who

killed think they were? And whom did they think they were killing in the persons of the Tutsi? (Mamdani, “Making Sense” 142)

Rather than deliberately theorize South African political history, Magona provides a way of making Biehl’s murder ““thinkable”” through Mandisa’s personalized analyses of life before and during apartheid that reflect on situatedness, and its inverse.

I.iii (Dis)Located Safety

Thinking of location both thematically and figuratively raises additional intersecting questions about movement, displacement, familial possibilities, and safety that the novel’s extended conversation scripts. Much of Mandisa’s recollection that intersperses her recounting of 25 August 1993 centers on dislocation. The recollection itself is an effort to “dredge[] her memory and examine[] the life her son has lived . . . [:] looking for answers for herself whilst talking to the other mother[,] . . . hop[ing] that an understanding of that and of her own grief might ease the other mother’s pain” (Magona vi). And that effort focuses on the forced removals of entire communities during apartheid that saw Mandisa’s family uprooted from Blouville (and what she remembers as a “fantastic sense of security” (54) and placed in Guguletu (where “[g]ood things are scarce” (32) and frame her attempted understanding of Mxolisi’s experience. Crucially, Mandisa’s childhood experience of mandated movement that results from South Africa’s 1950 Group Areas Act teaches her how communities, family structures, and modes of education change once the force of “[v]ans, bulldozers and army trucks . . . [– a]s though enacting a long-rehearsed macabre dance” (65) – move people far from familiar locales to render home a fragile construct. The arbitrarily demarcated townships become deeply

experiential sites of complex instability and insecurity, and of changed kinds of survival. Mandisa states: “We laugh, to hide the gaping hole where our hearts used to be. Guguletu killed us...killed the thing that held us together...made us human. Yet, we still laugh” (33). The degrading experience of enforced removal meets ordinary resistance – in the sound of laughter – while finding reflection in degraded cohesion of families and communities as, on one hand, “the new houses changed [people]” (66) and, on the other, women’s labour becomes relocated:

We got here [to Guguletu], and everything and everybody changed, especially Mama. . . . People believed they’d been bettered, and strove hard to live up to that perception. In their wood and zinc and cardboard houses with wooden windows [of Blouvillei], they’d needed no curtains or carpets or fancy, store-bought furniture. In the brand-new brick houses of the townships, with their glass windows, concrete floors, bare walls and hungry rooms, new needs were born. But how to satisfy these needs? The wages of fathers had certainly not been augmented. Soon, all our mothers, who had been there every afternoon to welcome us when we returned from school, were no longer there. They were working in white women’s homes. Tired, every day when they returned. Tired and angry.

In time we did not remember coming back from school to mothers waiting with smiles. (66–67)

This passage helps sketch out the composite situatedness that, for Mandisa, obstructs possibilities for remaining the “benevolent and nurturing entities . . . that throw up the

Amy Bielhs . . . and other young people of that quality” (v) by injecting market pressures and restricted parenting into lives already delimited by legislated inequality. It helps, by extension, unpack an earlier gloss on violence and safety in Guguletu:

Young and old alike, men and women, no one is exempt from the scourge.

Violence is rife. It has become a way of life. When a husband leaves for work of a morning, there is no guarantee he’ll safely find his way back home come night.

Nor is there such casual certainty about children going to school. Between drunk drivers of stolen cars, the police, *tsotsies* and those who kill those with whom they do not see eye to eye in matters political – safety has become quite, quite fragile.

(44–45)

Communities’ unchosen movements change horizons of possibility and landscapes of belonging; they also alter possibilities for in/security. When Mandisa rhetorically asks what her son had to live for as a result, she surmises: “*His tomorrows were his yesterday. Nothing. Stretching long, lean, mean, and empty. A glaring void. . . . Long before the ground split when he pee’d on it, that knowledge was firmly planted in his soul...it was intimately his*” (203, emphasis in original). Mxolisi’s intimate knowledge of future-as-foreclosure suggests a perverse form of ownership, or perhaps the perversion that commodity ownership produces. If the forced shift to townships corresponds with an edged emergence of consumer culture in “hungry rooms, [where] new needs were born” (67), its larger shift in value systems stagnate the conditions for producing the nurturing and pedagogical work of preparing children – and becoming adults – who engage as members in something larger than their individual selves.

Amy Biehl's intimate knowledge, in sharp contrast, speaks to the vast experiential divide between forced and intended processes of dislocation that simultaneously registers the materiality of whiteness. Mandisa repeatedly demands to know how Biehl chose to be in a place that could not apprehend her belonging, "so full of childlike zest" (12), privileged even in her visceral reactions. On the destination itself, Mandisa asks:

Guguletu? Who would choose to come to this accursed, God-forsaken place? This is what I want to know – what I can't begin to comprehend. I keep asking myself the same question, over and over again. What was she doing here, your daughter? What made her come to this, of all places? Not an army of mad elephants would drag me here, if I were her. (48)

On the fact of Biehl's appearance there, Mandisa more forcefully repeats the same questions, almost verbatim, in two separate instances:

And your daughter, did she not go to school? Did she not see that this is a place where only black people live? Add to that, where was her natural sense of unease? Did she not feel awkward, a fish out of water, here? That should have been a warning to her...a warning to stay out. Telling her the place was not for her. It was not safe for the likes of her. Oh, why did she not stay out? Why did she not stay out? (3, 72; latter citation slightly modified).

Harris's argument about the status property of whiteness, protecting the privilege that Amy had never not known, resonates strongly in Mandisa's incredulity. As a racialized subject who has lived through apartheid spatialization, with specific memory of when "Blouvlei was declared a coloured area in the 1960s by the National Party government

and . . . black people were forcibly removed” (Kamish 242), Mandisa has long been forced to feel “*a fish out of water*” (Magona 72) in places explicitly deemed not for (her) entry. Yet as a white subject who understands injustice as situated elsewhere, Amy’s “*natural sense of unease*” (72) does not rest on site specificity or tend towards fear for bodily safety. To help explain propertied whiteness in the U.S. context, Harris states:

The hyper-exploitation of Black labor was accomplished by treating Black people themselves as objects of property. Race and property were thus conflated by establishing a form of property contingent on race – only Black were subjugated as slaves and treated as property. Similarly, the conquest, removal, and extermination of Native American life and culture were ratified by conferring and acknowledging the property rights of whites in Native American land. Only white possession and occupation of land was validated and therefore privileged as a basis for property rights. (Harris 1716)

Amy’s experience of property as a white subject translates into a confident inhabiting of space that does not quite hold in the absence of white privilege, or under the violent conditions of forced, racialized displacement.

Mandisa’s pointed reference to school in her rhetorical critique of Amy’s judgement delineates a related but shifted site for interrogating the structural distances held between speaker and listener that shape intimate as well as public forms of knowing. In Mandisa’s idiom, school is a site for learning the kinds of truths that dictate racialized boundedness in heavily legislated spaces. School also, however, is what brings Amy to South Africa – on her ‘own’ initiative, through institutional support – to unintentionally

overlap with Operation Barcelona and the Congress of South African Students' (COSAS's) school boycott. Magona is careful to situate Amy's attack in the context of COSAS's call for "school children to join Operation Barcelona, a campaign they say is in support of their teachers who are on strike. Students were urged to stay away from school, to burn cars and to drive reactionary elements out of the townships. Flint to tinder. The students fell over each other to answer the call" (Magona 10). This linkage corresponds with TRC transcripts that describe the political context for the Biehl attack and the Commission's attempt to adjudicate the political motivation of Manqina, Nofemela, Ntamo, and Peni's actions.⁵⁴ Whereas education provides secure structure for Amy's plans and placements, in the United States as in South Africa, Mxolisi's education undergoes violent truncation in both content and process. Whereas Amy actively strives within academic institutions to play a part in reforming the system that is apartheid's legacy, Mxolisi actively struggles against that same system that shapes and constrains him. Amy is able to look ahead to South Africa's elections and required preparations as overriding priorities, functioning at an experiential remove from her University of Cape Town friends and a further remove from the boycotting Guguletu youth. Her naïve

⁵⁴ See http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/amntrans%5Ccapetown/capetown_biehl01.htm. Heather Deegan provides a helpful gloss on the role of student politics in the anti-apartheid struggle more broadly: "Youth activity was central to the UDF [the United Democratic Front], and one of the biggest organizations formed in 1979 was the Congress of South African Students (COSAS), which had branches in towns and cities throughout South Africa. In 1980, 55 per cent of the African population was under the age of 20. . . . In 1986, the system of apartheid education almost collapsed when all black educational institutions throughout the country were affected by mass action aimed directly at challenging apartheid. However, the young were to pay a high price for their struggle against apartheid. The school boycott affected their educational attainment so badly that they barely managed to reach an elementary grade, the level of a 10-year old. When political change came, many young people were found to be uneducated, unskilled and unemployed in Nelson Mandela's democratic South Africa" (Deegan 57–58). It is notable that Magona directly criticizes lost schooling and the extent of youth's involvement in school boycotts both through Mandisa and in interviews. See Magona et al. 289-290.

decision to leave the minimally-familiar surroundings of central Cape Town for Guguletu, uninvited and unsolicited, attests to Amy's operative assumptions – her learned truths – about safety that fail to apprehend the material knowledge of enforced dis/placement.

The same power differentials that show up so clearly in Magona's portrayal of movements and displacements are less evident in, but still pivotal to, differential proximities to home. For three different subjects, home gets positioned at a physical remove that the novel's structure foregrounds but that the span does not reach. Amy, most emphatically, is almost home when she is killed just as her friends are almost home when the yellow Mazda, unremarkable in Guguletu but for its driver's race,⁷ is attacked (204–205). Amy's story opens the 25 August 1993 narrative not in Guguletu but in Cape Town's affluent suburb of Mowbray, carefully detailing the movements of her day and the fact of her imminent departure for the United States. Mandisa imagines Amy having difficulty saying goodbye as the heightened emotionality attached to 'here' comeslingles with a renewed longing for 'home'; Magona depicts the young American in her rush of final travel preparations, simultaneously excited and saddened "[f]or the same, the very same reason" (10), surprised at "how she [had been] able to...bear being away" (9) but now, "[w]ith a day to go, [finding the distance] suddenly...unbearable" (9). Mxolisi, strikingly, is likewise almost home when Amy's yellow Mazda appears; yet whereas Amy's proximity to home opens the text, her point of contact with Mxolisi and his own location is narrated only at the text's closing in a delayed relation of ostensibly core action. Here, we learn that Mxolisi can in fact "see his home, this side of the Police Station, a mere hundred metres from where he stands. Why, were he to hail someone

standing at his gate, they'd hear him, it's that close. They'd see him too, if he waved and they happened to be looking his way" (205). In neither instance does danger feel particularly imminent for the person on her/his way home, nor does conviviality feel absent. Mxolisi and his friends are described as "chatting idly" (205), having finished "the toyi-toyi, the freedom songs, and the marching" for the day, now "reiterating the next day's plans and bidding each other goodbye" (204). Biehl and her passengers have also just finished singing their own songs and are waiting, inside an idling car, for traffic lights to change (205). The two groups are in movement when they meet, in transition, but they are more specifically in moments of pause, reaching the close of their respective days without the bounded focus of a specific activity. Magona's fictionalized version of events places Mxolisi securely within and shaped by the context of Operation Barcelona but, shifting slightly from the emphasis found in TRC transcripts, also foregrounds an element of unanticipated rather than premeditated action that issues out of a kind of hiatus.⁵⁵

A casual glance from a passer-by. Instantaneous ignition.

'KwiMazda! KwiMazda! *Kukh' umlungo* KwiMazda! In the Mazda! In the Mazda! There is a white person in the Mazda!'

ONE SETTLER! ONE BULLET!

⁵⁵ The particular emphasis in the Manqina, Nofemela, Ntamo, and Peni hearing on determining the extent to which Biehl's killing was politically motivated, and thereby a result of some degree of planning, is consistent with the TRC's definition of "gross violation of human rights," used as the basis for adjudicating amnesty claims, as any action "emanat[ing] from of the past *and which was committed* during the period 1 March 1960 to 10 May 1994 *within or outside the Republic, and the commission of which was advised, planned, directed, commanded, or ordered, by any person acting with a political motive* (section 1(1)(ix). [TRC 1: 90, ¶42, emphasis mine]" (Mamdani, "Amnesty or Impunity?" 36–37).

The cry rings out, sending a shock-wave through the hoards all around this part of NY 1. Not yet a crowd. Nothing binds them yet, but of course Operation Barcelona is on the air. (205)

This fact of transition, and the unstable potentiality of change not yet realized, resonates with the third subject looking towards home in the novel: South Africa itself. Magona cites the galvanizing phrase “ONE SETTLER! ONE BULLET!” as a non-citation, a suggestively disembodied cry that gets depersonalized to the extent that determining a specific source loses meaning in its own momentum. What happens when it is a voice of ‘South Africa,’ though, that both speaks those words and demands redress? Stef Craps, for example, reads *Mother to Mother* as a “truth-and-reconciliation novel” (Craps 51), but one that nuances understandings of South Africa’s transition out of apartheid “by critically revisiting [the TRC’s] limits, exclusions, and elisions” with the effect of “supplement[ing] the [commission’s] work” (51).⁵⁶ If we imagine the nation itself as a physical site of trauma – a traumatized body – and not just as a context for individuals’ traumatic experiences, then we might also start to bridge the limiting gap that Mamdani critiques between acknowledging apartheid violence as pervasively systemic and addressing only individualized instantiations of that violence. What remains especially cogent within the confines of this discussion, however, is the way in which ‘almost home’ figures similarly in each of these instances to flag a certain intimacy between trauma and safety that generates a complicated affect at sites of temporal

⁵⁶ Craps reads *Mother to Mother* as a way of challenging the limits of Eurocentric trauma theory and opening up possibilities for a field that gets at the ethical work that 1990s-based trauma theory claims to do but, Craps argues, falls short of achieving. Whereas “the TRC mapped Euro-American concepts of trauma and recovery onto an apartheid-colonial situation,” Craps sees Magona’s novel as “suggest[ing] a possible way for ‘traditional’ trauma theory to renew itself” (51).

(apartheid-to-postapartheid) and spatial (between South Africa and America, between Guguletu's police station and Mxolisi's home) flux.

If Magona offers a sort of etymology of township violence in South Africa, she does so with the effect of demonstrating not an inevitable saturation of life with trauma, but a historiographic challenge to undifferentiated 'justice.' By striving to understand an addressee in conversation with the narrator, Magona raises questions about the implication of intent in cross-epistemological work and the productive function – and risk – of assuming willful vulnerability in the process. Mandisa's interlocutor, for example, can neither affirm nor complicate Mandisa's assumptions about her thoughts and feelings, and thus her intent is curtailed in the service of the narrator's/narrative's. Yet Mandisa renders her own speaking position vulnerable by simultaneously critiquing and contextualizing the conditions that make Amy's murder thinkable. Judith Butler suggests that "[w]e ask these . . . [larger] questions [about taking responsibility as something other than moralistic denunciation] not to exonerate the individuals who commit violence, but to take a different sort of responsibility for the global conditions of justice" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 17). It is this orientation to "take a different sort of responsibility" that underwrites much of my project and helps read Mandisa's (and Magona's) personal explication as a project of putting vulnerability to productive use. Thinking anew about the methodological possibility of conversation in relation to place, we might consider David Theo Goldberg and Ato Quayson's argument for developing "an ethics of becoming" in Postcolonial Studies generally (Quayson and Goldberg xiii) in ways that

suggest continual evocations of situated vulnerability by allowing aspirational questions rather than familiar maps to guide analysis. Goldberg and Quayson explain that:

An ethics of becoming would require rigorous attention to the details of the object under scrutiny to discern the aspects within it that speak to an imagined freer future. It requires a careful grounding of the specificities of the local, not to impose a regime or tyranny of the local and specific but to show how such an ethics might disclose a transfigurative relationship to the world. It also requires what might be described as a full-spectrum approach to phenomena, embedding these in a variety of social, cultural, historical, and political contexts that would disclose the layered significances through which a transfigured and better future might be brought into view. (xiii)

Such an ethics speaks to my interest in the creative instability of conversation that can engender a critical facility with flux. By navigating continual situatedness within texts alongside continual possibility within transitory movement, conversation offers entry points for intersubjective engagement that is necessarily framed by complicated histories while remaining open to undetermined change.

Part II Parsing Property Failures: *The Book of Jessica*

The Book of Jessica: A Theatrical Transformation brings a different kind of immediacy to this discussion by offering a sustained example of intimate and asymmetrical cross-cultural, intersubjective conversations that are embodied. Though suggestive of transformation, the conversations gesture towards but fail to enact processes of reconciliation and redress, as this text's most emphatic expression, instead, is of

collision. To borrow a phrase from bell hooks and Mary Childers, the often painful collaboration between Maria Campbell and Linda Griffiths in developing and staging *Jessica* the play, documenting that process in *The Book of Jessica*, and reflecting on both throughout engenders “a combination of the spontaneous and the strained” (Childers and hooks 60). The two speakers bring dissonant, unarticulated assumptions to what becomes their intersubjective struggle over the terms, stakes, and claims of ownership vis-à-vis stories, identities, and histories within colonially-situated collaborative practice. Notions of place continue to signify importantly in this analysis but it is the contesting ideas and beliefs about property – ostensibly shared as the material of their encounter, on the overlapping sites of their coming together – that lend especial insight into these conversational failures. And yet, while critics have generally been quick, and accurate, to note the text’s unrelenting conflict, I argue that the text also motions towards potentially transformative practice within collaborative work that may – slowly, tentatively, and painfully – transfigure social relationships. The latter part of this discussion focuses especially on difficult pauses held at sites of particular hurt.

In the live play and combined project of *Jessica*, boundaries are actively and intentionally – if problematically and unevenly – transgressed. Neither the boundaries nor the transgressions are simple, however, and disentangling ensuing interpretations requires a mobile perspective. Campbell’s autobiography *Halfbreed* – heralded the most important Native text of the 1970s (Petrone 118) – is offered up for adaptation to the stage, as *Jessica*, and Campbell is called upon to feed into and arguably authenticate the adaptation as she herself is learning through the theatre process. Griffiths, a white Canadian actor,

performs the unscripted (and therefore continually re-developed and re-interpreted) role of Campbell, a Saskatchewan Cree-Métis writer, educator, and activist.⁵⁷ Differential geography maps onto differently situated subjectivities: Griffiths, Toronto-based and working in the experimental culture of Theatre Passe Muraille; and Campbell, Saskatoon- and Batoche-based, writing and learning and working to strengthen her communities. Campbell must in turn prepare, teach, guide, protect, and even defend Griffiths throughout their collaborative process, struggling to carry out a demanding set of roles to which she experiences contradictory responses. Yet Campbell herself remains off stage while her dramatized self provides the play's core, as embodied by Griffiths. Whereas Campbell's participation demands the offering of her most intimate narratives, Griffiths's role in the project is conspicuously performative, both as a professional actor and as a woman staging white guilt for whom the "sense of guilt over playing Jessica [becomes] an obsession" (Griffiths and Campbell 54) during the play's production. Griffiths recounts her propensity for "climb[ing] into other people's psyches and kind of . . . sibyl[ling] them" (14), for example, alongside a claim to whiteness as an alibi for inevitability that positions her as a privilege-laden victim from the outset:

LINDA: I'm still not over it, I'll never be over it, that was the hardest, the scariest, the most lost time. Nobody approved of me, even though I worked my guts out. I worked and worked, and invented and wove, and all they could do was ask for

⁵⁷ Although I use these descriptors for the sake of situating Campbell amongst the other authors in this project, I am aware that Campbell herself troubles the same adjectives and that I am uncomfortably transgressing a boundary around identificatory practices. ("MARIA: What a bunch of garbage. I'm a community worker. A mom. 'Métis writer'? – I should have a giant typewriter? 'Activist'? – I should be throwing Molotov cocktails? It just sounds so. . . so much like a white professor introducing me at a convention of anthropologists" (Griffiths and Campbell 18).

more and tell me I wasn't jumping off the cliff. I opened myself to the spirits of Native people, and then warred with my own, and meanwhile there was a play to do. But I was wrong, always wrong, because I was white and didn't know anything, but that was the point, that's what they asked me to do. There's never been a crash course like that, never, not one that demands a result. And still they were mad at me for something I couldn't help. But I stood there in front of them, with someone else's bad dreams, and my own, and I still did it! (14–15)

The improvement-oriented labour that Griffiths experiences as simultaneously demanded and unacknowledged, combined with her under-theorized understanding of racialization and privilege, are key factors in blurring both boundaries and transgressions such that – as is discussed more fully later – she is particularly challenged to hear Campbell's concerns.

Although Griffiths expresses surprise at the difficulties encountered throughout the project, her overt performativity – which she literally scripts in retrospect – limits the scope of “spontaneity” in her dialogic contribution. It also, perhaps more urgently, underscores a set of personalized preoccupations that conceal the landmines of appropriation littering her professional terrain. Griffiths's righteous sense of woundedness, of being subject to unfair criticism “for something [she] couldn't help” (15) as she works through disorienting material without the familiar comfort of external reinforcement, returns throughout the text. Griffiths's description of “The Beginning,” for example, opens with “I was white. Really white” (15); yet she consistently falls short of owning the place that whiteness accords her or deconstructing the implicit racial binary that undermines her intersubjective exchange with Campbell, suggesting instead that

simply naming her whiteness is explanation – and exculpation – enough. To further complicate the collaborative process, Griffiths’s reflection on her own subjectivity is limited but not absent: “I was battering against a stubborn, rebellious, self-hating character,” she states, “who was struggling with her own power. It was Maria, of course, or Jessica. It never occurred to me, not for years, that it was me” (31). In the same section (“Rebellion”), Griffiths’s unusual degree of clarity also appears in the observation that “[m]aybe my racism was in not accepting that there would be racism” (34), and later, that “somewhere, this [conflict] has to do with [her] taking a bit of the faerie glass off [her] own eyes” (88). Simultaneously, however, Campbell’s concerns repeatedly call attention to the tangible weight of property that bears on the collaboration, asking us to place that weight onto questions of subjectivity and attend to its divisive function in attempts at shared productivity. Property, as this chapter continues to explore, signifies both through a designation of boundaries and a means of gaining ownership through ‘proper’ use of what the boundaries define, even if to contradictory ends.

Campbell’s passage in the opening epigraph is especially significant for analyses of property in underlining the potential for “an exchange of power, a sharing” within community work through which “we all get strong” (90). This mode of relationality both challenges an always-already hierarchical configuration and carries the potential of re-conceptualizing “‘you and me’” to extend beyond individuals (91). So long as ideologies of settler colonialism and racial capitalism jointly underpin unspoken assumptions – dominant silences – about who and what belongs where and with whom, Campbell’s desire for “exchange” comes apart; and yet paying especial attention to property’s work

in Campbell and Griffiths's border-crossing project highlights its tangled resonances across individual and community lines such that a troubled "sharing" remains on the horizon. Campbell, significantly, appears more intent than Griffiths to establish extra-individual bases for self-positioning even when those bases express shared disempowerment rather than affirmation. The self-hatred Griffiths comes to perceive as her own, in contrast, effectively circumscribes systemic processes of dispossession and racist interpellation as individualized phenomena, incapable of extension to generalized group experiences. As a result, Griffiths's notion of property persistently collides with Campbell's attempts to share her experiences, emphasizing Griffiths's failure to broadly understand and offer her own. Indeed each woman's foundational assumptions map onto her own dense structure of experience and append to each act in the collaboration.

Because Campbell and Griffiths do document their crosstalk – to invoke Diana Brydon and Marta Dvořák's use of the term – in the form of a co-written book, however, their work suggests that employing dialogue as collaboration's troublesome trope may help us move beyond the limitations of ownership-based struggle while emphasizing the tenacious difficulties of property-based delineations in a settler context. Brydon and Dvořák theorize crosstalk as "forms of discussion that can respect and learn from diversity" (Brydon and Dvořák 2) when focussed on a shared object of analysis. Campbell and Griffiths jointly focus on *Jessica's* production and, following, its process and aftermath; yet outlines of larger contexts remain unshared and out of focus – in ways reminiscent of *Mother to Mother*, where an intimate conversation is textualized for a wide readership to both listen in on and take away as, in part, allegorizing larger social

conflicts⁵⁸ – such that they weigh more heavily on the collaboration’s outcome. One discursive path that Brydon and Dvořák consider in their edited collection of “humanities-based collaborative work” (2) taking the form of cross-cultural interventions follows Anna Tsing’s analysis of friction as critically and conceptually productive. Tsing claims to “begin with the idea that the messy and surprising features of such [global] encounters across difference [as between university students and village elders, for example] should inform our models of cultural production” (Tsing 3) in ways that “emphasize the unexpected and unstable aspects of global interaction” (3). Those instabilities, in turn, provide stimuli for movement and growth without pre-determining the value of either, yet guaranteeing something other than stasis along points of encounter: “Cultures are continually co-produced in the interactions I call ‘friction’: the awkward, unequal, unstable, and creative qualities of interconnection across difference” (4). Something *The Book of Jessica* brings to the workings of frictive crosstalk is an auto-ethnographic, in-process attempt at “interconnection across difference” without the benefit of critical distance that might allow the co-production of cultures to feel sufficiently larger than either single participant.

This is where my interests in the collaborative process and in unequal intersubjectivity coincide, taking us into hooks’ and Childers’ uneasy “combination of the spontaneous and the strained”: cross-‘race’ dialogue (Childers and hooks 60). With “spontaneous,” hooks and Childers highlight the unpremeditated element of exchange in a conversation while “strained” emphasizes the tempered, more deliberate phrasing that can

⁵⁸ I thank Daniel Coleman for this observation.

both elicit and respond to conflict in speaking across differences. I use the term “uneasy” to draw attention to the destabilization that occurs when assumptions about our own subjectivities are challenged, raising a mirror to the suppositions we hold about who we are, what we think, and how we enact our subject positions. In the context of collaboration, I argue that subjectivity demands especial attention because exchange, or at least an imbricated process of working in tandem, relies upon the interaction of multiple ‘I’s each rendered minimally intelligible to the other. *The Book of Jessica* provides an exciting opportunity to navigate this destabilization within a Métis – Euro-Canadian collaboration that provides readings of each ‘I’ from the view of the other without initially conceiving of itself as a racialized project or anticipating the extent to which differentiated experiences of racialization would shape each woman’s participation.

The text has been taken up to ask a range of interrelated questions about women’s autobiographical writing, theatre, and collaborative practice (Susanna Egan, Kathleen Boardman, Lorraine York); transformational theatre as genre (Jennifer Andrews); Euro-Canadian appropriation of Indigenous stories, histories, and cultures (Helen Hoy, Jeanne Perreault); agreements/ contracts, theft versus ownership, and triangulated “economies of experience” (Laura J. Murray); and collaborative writing as defying a merging of selves (David Jefferess). I turn to this text, however, for the ways in which its tensions help animate performances of unequal intersubjectivity in order to ask what work property does in conversational failures. I read those failures by juxtaposing Campbell’s and Griffiths’s understandings of and experiences with the contract, ownership, trade, the ‘process,’ collaborative intent, and sibylling.

II.i Contractual Property?

Beginning with the contract provides a material anchor that also gestures outwards, encircling interrelated points of tension that cohere around property. A written contract, ostensibly, is a document designed to frame and guide – facilitate, enable – work taking place between multiple parties. Yet the terms and process through which the contract in Campbell and Griffiths's text renders *Jessica* property catalyzes the collaboration's deepest rupture. Due to its late appearance in the project, the contract is superimposed onto a process already in motion, which – though unnamed and undefined – chafes under the attempt at superficial stabilization through contractual definition. Only once the play is being staged does director Paul Thompson, pointedly described in retrospect by Campbell as "the conqueror with his piece of paper" (Griffiths and Campbell 104), present the document to Griffiths and Campbell, separately. Griffiths sees the document first, "in a dark lounge at the Bessborough Hotel" (55), and reports "barely look[ing] at it" (55), feeling "barely [able to] focus enough to read" (55) "and no energy to really care" (54) in the appropriately titled section "The Break." "[T]hat whole area had always been Paul's territory" (54) according to Griffiths, inattentive to her own colonial imagery, and she agrees to sign what Paul presents without question. Campbell, however, experiences the contract's arrival quite differently: "I kept saying, let's get a contract, let's do it now, because I don't like working without one. Then he just put it in front of me at a coffee shop and said, 'Sign it.' When I looked at it, it had the theatre owning film rights, video rights, television rights...." (104).

Whereas Griffiths describes the contract as a “red herring” (55) and claims to have not “underst[oo]d what any of it meant” (104), and both women agree that their break involved much more than the words on that paper, Campbell’s very real concerns with the terms of ownership – that, notably, incorporate Griffiths’s entitlement – laid out in the contract get effaced when its contents are paradoxically disregarded as immaterial:

[MARIA]: . . . I wouldn’t have given away everything, but if it had been explained to me we could have worked something out....Paul confirmed all my fears, and worse.

I don’t remember how long after the play opened that I met Paul in the coffee shop. I think he was leaving in the afternoon for Toronto, and I was really looking forward to sitting down and talking with him about ‘the process.’ I thought, ‘This is my chance, now he’ll talk to me.’ And he gave me that contract, and he said we’d already talked about it before, and we had, over the course of the rehearsals and stuff, but we never really got down to it. I read it and the contract said that you would have first refusal rights on who would play Jessica. But you and I had already said that after this time Jessica would have to be played by a Native woman. And I know what ‘first refusal’ means with a publisher, that means you can’t go to anyone else, so if you decided to do it, you could do it forever after. I wanted to direct Jessica next, and I wanted to do it with a Native woman. That was something I thought you understood, because we’d talked about it and you’d agreed. Another clause in the contract was the video and screenplay rights, and I don’t remember how that was broken down, but all of a sudden I would have

to share with 25th Street House Theatre, with you, and with Paul. I understood sharing with you and Paul, but nobody had ever said anything about the Theatre owning anything. And that really made me angry, because two film producers had flown in for opening night and negotiations were already beginning for a film, and the negotiations were for *Halfbreed* and also the stuff in *Jessica*. I questioned those clauses, and Paul refused to discuss them. All he said was that a theatre always owns parts of a play, and I knew this to be untrue. All of the stuff through the play came to a head, and I just exploded. I refused to sign, and Paul said, ‘Well, it’s two against one.’ (105–106)

When Griffiths empties the contract of its literal significance by suggesting that its importance lies more in what it symbolizes and catalyzes than what it states (a move that Thompson repeats in concurring that the contract is a “red herring” (107), she also colludes – however (un)consciously – with Thompson to obscure the fraught history of treaty-making and -breaking that precedes and shapes this scripted encounter. That eclipse coincides uncannily well with the belligerent tone Thompson takes to coerce Campbell into signing and his false suggestion of a democracy among equals. The resonant relationship Campbell clearly outlines, between this contract and still disputed treaties over still disputed lands, is especially significant for the way in which she again maps personal and community experiences onto one another:

The ugliest part of the contract was that I had never been consulted, and it reminded me of the treaties, being asked to put my ‘X’ on something, and I didn’t even get the right of an interpreter. My great-great-grandfather was head chief and

signed Treaty Six. But he was there to negotiate, and he had an interpreter, and this was nineteen eighty-whatever, and I wasn't given any respect at all. (106)

A treaty over lands, a contract over stories, and a point of encounter at differently expressed testaments to enjoined histories place the individual in conversation with larger groups as partially co-constitutive. Yet the two white collaborators readily separate their personal experiences and systemic privilege from the ways in which this particular contract is already layered with a history of papered agreements, disingenuous and broken.

Though we might read the myriad difficulties between Campbell and Griffiths as culminating in the act of rendering their collaborative process property, a process for which Thompson forever withholds the clues and to which Campbell and Griffiths feel dissimilarly entitled, the work of property-as-signifier in this text proves more tenaciously complex. Much of the book's critical attention focuses on questions of ownership and appropriation within a fraught power struggle that begs reading through the socio-cultural, historico-political lens of Canada's colonialism,⁵⁹ even as the analysis of property in that scholarship shifts. A brief survey of Griffiths's performed and avowed relationship to the play, for example, demonstrates a markedly colonial belief in property ownership as validated through its "proper" (colonially-defined) use.⁶⁰ In direct reference to the contract, Griffiths reasserts what she considers to be her rightful position as owner of Jessica, the play and character. She describes her fear of retaining only fractional

⁵⁹ See Helen Hoy and Laura Murray in particular.

⁶⁰ Following from earlier discussion in "Intro. Located Dissonance," see more extensive treatment of the notions of property that informed British colonialism in Locke, "On Property" found in *Two Treatises on Government* (1689).

authority as justification for requesting first refusal rights even in the “kn[owledge that] the role had to be given to a Native woman the next time it was produced, maybe forever after” (54): “[I] was seared by it,” Griffiths states, “both a creation of it, and its creator. Strange as I felt playing the part, the thought of never playing her again was unthinkable . . . I was afraid I’d be left an outsider, officially ‘one-third’ writer on a project I might never be able to touch again” (54). Griffiths’s fear is of losing what she considers rightfully hers, but it is her sense of rightful ownership that carries a dense violence. Through what she considers to be sacrificial labour on the theatrical land that is *Jessica*, Griffiths rehearses the colonial project where “enterprise in regard to land functioned ideologically to justify Whites’ displacement of Natives from the land, and second[ly], . . . distinguished between good and bad settlers” (Coleman, *White Civility* 55) as based on an “ideology of improvement” (96). Griffiths’s claim – cited forcefully in the epigraph – is both gendered and imperial, domestic and domesticating, firm in its developmental assertion: “I stand on the land that is *Jessica* because I’m the mother that tilled that soil” (Griffiths and Campbell 92).

Not surprisingly, then, what may be Griffiths’s most ardent claim to *Jessica* is also her most damning indictment of Campbell as unreliable property owner. The passage – which precedes three full sections devoted to bargaining, deceit, and theft (“The Treaty,” “Stealing,” “More Stealing” 79-88) – likens *Jessica* to a bag of rocks that Griffiths continually hauls up a hill, Sisyphus-like, in the frustrated belief of Campbell’s abdicated responsibility:

LINDA: I feel like I've single-handedly kept this thing together so that there would be something, which is very important to me because I do consider myself a writer and always, all my life, I've been attached to. . . accomplishing things. . . . I just feel like a water diviner. I go in with my whale bone thing and I feel heat or I feel energy. I've driven this book, bullied it, willed it. I have taken unbelievable amounts of shit from you and an absolute lack of respect. And just when I think that there's absolutely nothing coming from you, you switch around and are so wonderful that I feel awful for having ever doubted that you were there. The switching always wrecks me up. I get all worked up and think, 'What am I worked up about? This woman is dedicated to the same things I am.' But you're not dedicated in the same way because you would have let *Jessica* die. (78)

As Laura Murray argues, "Griffiths did give immense time and energy, imagination, skills, and nerve, but by graphically portraying her pain in the re-enactment of the collaboration, Griffiths insists on the costliness of the gift she gave and gives, and asserts her ownership over the play even as she gives it" (Murray 101). Most interesting for the purposes of my project is the alignment between Griffiths's sense of "costliness" and her claims to cultivation-based productivity, best articulated by Campbell as an instructing paraphrase. Here, Campbell speaks in the voice of Wolverine that Griffiths assumes to explain the misunderstood righteousness of her theft:

Now Wolverine is saying, 'I took it. I gave it birth. I gave it life. It was mine and it would have died without me. I salvaged it. I built temples all over the place. I built high-rises all over the place. I put wheat fields out there. I produced it and if it

wasn't for me, you would have let this land die. So I came along and I took what you were wasting and I made something productive out of it, because you weren't doing it, but I need you to tell me that I didn't steal anything, that I didn't take anything from you.' (Griffiths and Campbell 80)

Campbell's stories respond to, but cannot entirely unsettle, Griffiths's understanding of herself as contributing to the collaboration through an investment of energy and time, or her need for Campbell to validate the appropriation. The ensuing engineering for which Griffiths proudly claims responsibility coincides with an unequal 'trade' in stories where only Campbell's (raw) material is placed in circulation and rendered subject to Griffiths' value-added processing.⁶¹ Read in this way, Campbell's intense unease with re-engaging Griffiths and her "sense of losing" (67) each time uncannily expresses her own lack of control over goods that have been passed on in a chain of production.

Significantly, the text's second half – "The Red Cloth" – revolves around questions of property, sacrifice, and manipulation and opens with two divergent conceptions of *Jessica*-as-story and ownership. In "The Argument. June 1988, Toronto," Campbell says of Griffiths: "She's going to do it the way she wants. She's going to make changes . . . and she'll do it any way she can, by crying . . . getting crippled up . . ." (67). We know from the text's prefatory timeline that *Jessica*, the break, Griffiths's solo rewriting of *Jessica*, Griffiths's directing of *Jessica*'s second (and award-winning) run, Griffiths's suggestion to write and publish the play and Campbell's counter-suggestion to

⁶¹ Helen Hoy also points out that, "[a]ccording to Diane Bessai, early program notes for *Jessica* credited Maria Campbell with the subject matter, Griffiths and director Paul Thompson with the dialogue and structure respectively [104]" (Hoy 50).

instead write and publish “the story of the making of the play” (10), have all happened prior to this argument. We also know that Griffiths has “writ[ten] her version of the story but is dissatisfied” (10), and that they begin taping their conversations at this time in preparation for this book. The “it” Campbell refers to, then, is both story and process, both the object and the continued experiential ‘contract’ shaping relations to that object. “It” is also both resilient and tenuous and carries with it its own history that brings the two women to this difficult commitment to telling quite imperfectly dovetailing truths.

From the contract to the play to the book, then, the asymmetrically shared products of Campbell’s and Griffiths’s work generate collisions that parallel their own difficult relationship. Interestingly, their intersubjective collisions come to a temporary climax, and a painful hiatus, in Griffiths’s literal take-over of *Jessica* for her own purposes; although this phase in the broken collaboration is succeeded by a renewed working together to construct *The Book of Jessica*, its eclipsed treatment in the text is worth considering for its exacerbation of the schism expressed by and through the contract. For Griffiths, a sense of misunderstood anonymity within a project she fears losing and a painfully experienced irresolution fortify her resolve to revisit *Jessica* on her own. As she recounts:

I was in New York, acting at the Public Theatre, when things finally broke. I thought I was gone – I was moving to the States to finally enter a world of true careerism in the grand old style. But there was always *Jessica* over my head. . . . So, finally, I started...very carefully...to make notes, read all those books again,

listen to the tapes. And then I would stop myself. . . . I was a complete bloody mess. (57–58)

In her narration, Griffiths emphasizes the physical agony she endures as her “whole body seize[s] up” (58) and, bedridden, she is no longer able to perform. Yet she “could always talk” (58), and she implies that “tell[ing] stories to [her] visiting friends, stories about the rehearsals with Maria and Paul, the ceremony, the traveling, even about wolverine” (58) is both her unproblematic right and an obsessive focus that is not of her choosing. The sense of sacrifice is again emphasized as Griffiths labours on otherwise languishing terrain despite her physical pain. Griffiths does note her ambivalence in starting to re-work *Jessica*, starting and stopping in fits of doubt. She includes telling Clarke Rogers – the then artistic director of *Passe Muraille* – that “he couldn’t include it in the *Passe Muraille* season without [Campbell’s] consent” (59), and she remembers having to talk to Thompson about her plans for the play. But Griffiths’s actual decision to re-write *Jessica* and intentionally embark on that process alone remains oblique, as if – like the contents of the contract – that choice is self-evident and neither requires direct attention nor carries substantive weight. She refers, for example, to “starting to make it concrete” (59) but immediately follows with: “It was on paper now, it had passed over to me or maybe you would say I’d taken it...Anyway, there was no way we could talk about it as if it was still a collaboration” (59). The *fait accompli* then becomes a thing to be first hidden from Campbell (“I was ecstatic [upon receiving a reconciliatory card from Campbell], then terrified, spending days trying to word an answer, . . . knowing that . . . if I told her I had already written a draft she’d have a negative reaction. Instead, I wrote that I wanted us to

work on *Jessica* again” [60]), and then – out of impatience with Campbell’s prolonged silence – a thing simply presented, unsolicited, “as a kind of proposition, something on paper to get a concrete response, any response” (60). Griffiths’s overriding priority is not engaging Campbell but managing her response to the reworked (improved?) property of the play.

In glossing over the finer points of her return to *Jessica*, however, Griffiths incites rather than pacifies Campbell’s distrust. This is what Griffiths remembers of Campbell’s reaction to the already re-written script:

Finally I called her, and the call was a horrible echo of the conversation in Saskatoon [following the appearance of the contract]. Again, she told me she was very angry. I can still feel what that word from her did to me, a cringing feeling, it still does it to me; anger as a whip to protect something valuable, often exploited; anger as a way of stopping the project, any time, at any stage. Once more she felt betrayed. I was almost ready to get angry back But suddenly, . . . I knew what she knew, that this time it was a lie. . . . Right or wrong, I’d taken for myself the rights of half a Halfbreed [sic], and had written it as it came. But I didn’t dare say that to her, I didn’t dare. (60–61)

Griffiths expresses fear, but in a way that reads Campbell’s anger as primarily manipulative. The mute acknowledgement of her own theft joins with her description of assault to depict a highly personalized conflict between two individuals, and yet the fallacy of a narrowed, context-less intersubjective exchange remains visible. Campbell

experiences deep assault in the deception Griffiths considers merely strategic as Griffiths continues to undervalue and avoid a substantive engagement with Campbell's position:

Oh, Linda, you have no idea how upset I was [to learn of Griffiths's physical breakdown and Thompson's near loss of his daughter, Sevrin]. So I wrote you that letter. I didn't know what to do about Paul, because my rage and anger had been directed at Paul but now it ended up with Sevrin...? I didn't know how to write and say, 'I'm sorry.' So I didn't. . . . Then you wrote me a letter back, so I was quite comfortable with you. Then along comes the play, with you saying, 'Here it is. Will you look at it?' And then my head...it wasn't inside...it was my head that just blew up, and I thought, 'What in the hell is she doing? She's saying, 'I want to work with you,' on the one hand, and what she does is send me a written script. What am I supposed to do after the fact? I got angry again, then I thought, 'Okay, this time I'm going to tell her why I'm angry and get it out.' I remembered Bear in ceremonies telling me, 'Anger is okay as long as you don't keep it. Talk it out, then you can learn to laugh and be happy.' So I wrote you a long, long letter, but I never mailed it. I still have it somewhere. Do you want to see it?

[Linda] No. No no no no. (61–62)

Though the resultant pain is also highly personalized for Campbell, it is textured by broader contexts of asymmetrical epistemological collision that Griffiths has the privilege to continually disavow. That collision sees Campbell struggling quite seriously with the responsibility – taught by her grandmother – to “[t]hink carefully before you say or think things . . . because the energy you put out can hurt others, and will come back to you”

(61), and Griffiths deliberately avoiding knowledge she expects to find painful while struggling to produce words-as-work at all costs.

II.ii Ideological Property? Epistemological Trade?

If the two women's understandings of themselves in relation to the play encapsulate something of the ideological conflict at work, then their positioning vis-à-vis audience and community stages that conflict. Most forcefully, Griffiths's strident sense of entitlement, which we have seen justified by what she considers to be her outstanding contributions,⁶² directly collides with Campbell's original intent to develop the play for decolonizing community practice. Campbell states early on that watching Clarke Roger's all-white production of Frank Anderson's *Almighty Voice* led her to curiously seek out, rather than denounce, the workings of theatre for Indigenous peoples. Against her own expectations, Campbell finds the controversial play powerfully productive, "something that educated, that healed, that empowered people" (16), and she recounts feeling "desperate for skills and tools to help make change" (16). It is this experience, in short, that leads Campbell to Paul Thompson and "his improvisatory method of creating political theater" (Murray 91). Although Campbell's humbly professed "need" for skills and her subsequent participation in Thompson's "process" suggest an individualistic commitment to the nascent collaboration, Campbell's purpose retains the extra-autonomous value that extends beyond personal gain as guided by "our [Métis people's] need to take this kind of power to the communities" (Griffiths and Campbell 16).

⁶² As referenced earlier, Griffiths's ideas about what constitutes legitimate claims to ownership emerge from Protestant notions of work and labour that were, and have continued to be, central to the colonial project in Canada. The same ideas were foundational to the Indian Act in demarcating title and use of land through the tautological axiom that only "proper" use of land deems that land the rightful property of the proper users.

Griffiths's contrasting de-prioritization of community-level engagement, on the other hand, and her preoccupation with accrued proprietary investment suggest an individualism that is paradoxically not entirely of her own making. Given the genealogy of her justification for privatizing property, Griffiths's self interest in *Jessica* transmits colonial assumptions that link her all the more securely with a dangerously unmarked colonial community. Yet from the text's opening page, Griffiths works to disavow her position as white in a settler colony – even as she acknowledges and, intermittently, reflects upon her whiteness – that maps onto communities of systemic privilege by personalizing her experiences in the collaboration. Even prior to Griffiths's description of "The Beginning" (15–20), she and Campbell provide adjacent, if not quite contradictory, accounts of their coming back together in ways that evoke larger communities quite differently. Campbell states:

She came out to talk about that damn play, she wants to have it published. She's all crippled up from whatever happened and I still feel like some Siamese twin with her. I want her to go away, to leave me alone, but we're by the river at The Crossing and she's dipping her toes in the water and I hear myself saying, 'Let's tell the story of what happened, if we do that then maybe we'll be free of the whole thing, heal everything.' And I kick myself, 'What did I just say? Who could stand to open it all again? Am I crazy?' (13)

Here, Campbell emphasizes painful connectedness to Griffiths even as she situates that connection within broader relations, meeting as they are at Métis leader Gabriel Dumont's now historic site, The Crossing in Batoche, where a provisional Métis

government was formed a century earlier. As we heard in the sequentially later passage above, Campbell's belief in healing through releasing pain derives at least in part from community-located teachings ("I remembered Bear in ceremonies telling me, 'Anger is okay as long as you don't keep it'" (62)); as we see tested through her experience with *Jessica*, a release is also an offering in a context that exploits the gift ("To grow spiritually, to be healthy physically, you have to let go, give away. But it's bloody hard to live that outside, in a society that takes and takes" (91)). Campbell recounts her journey through anger and hopelessness after the collaboration's break by explaining to Griffiths:

Then one day, something...happened to me...because, you see, that was the other thing, I'd stopped having dreams, I'd stopped hearing anything. It was like all the spirits had left me by myself. They'd left me with you. They were Wolverine and Crow and Bear and Coyote, and they were all gone, the grandmothers were gone. . . . Then, that one day...I'd walked so much and raged so much and talked out loud so much, I finally just cried....Then the voices came back, I could hear them. They said, 'It's okay. You did what you were supposed to do and we'll look after you.'
(56–57)

Campbell's own healing depends upon her physical and spiritual closeness to the community that guides her, and her ability to hear and trust where guidance lies.

Griffiths's expression of pain and its resolution, conversely, is one of individuation.

The imagery Griffiths uses to open the text marks her sense of their divergent racializations, for example, but without making broader linkages or disrupting settler stereotypes of embattled safety vis-à-vis the 'native threat': anticipating the conflict that

would re-emerge, for example, Griffiths describes her dread as “that familiar arrowhead point in the pit of [her] stomach” (13). And immediately following Campbell’s interjection above, describing Griffiths and herself as Siamese twins and making the equivocal gesture to “tell the story of what happened,” Griffiths situates herself, first and foremost, as “small and white”⁶³

Open it all up again? And it started to come back, the strangeness of that time, the feeling of being exposed, small and white, stretching myself so that my brain was bursting, being told ‘It’s not your brain where it has to come from.’ Being warped into another woman’s frame of mind, frame of context, feeling some kind of connection with her, the spookiness of it all. . . . I want to write about ‘her’. A ‘her’ who was an actress and an improviser and a kind of adventurer who stumbled into something more profound, more terrifying, more personal and political than anything she ever wanted to know. But she did want to know, badly enough to... (13)

Griffiths echoes Campbell’s equivocality, wanting and yet not wanting “to know” something she implies has been beyond reach. But her concurrent intimation of voyeuristic isolation within the process – as “an improviser,” “a kind of adventurer” – both contributes to what Murray considers to be Griffiths’s project of “build[ing] a character, ‘Linda,’ who grows from fairy-tale innocence, through struggle, to knowledge, however tentative” (Murray 93), and negates her implication in particular ideologies that

⁶³ Laura Murray cites this moment as part of Campbell’s and Griffiths’s joint decision to “put Griffiths forward as herself, not in brownface” (Murray 92), in the process of documenting their collaboration. I argue that foregrounding Griffiths, far from a simple move, allows us to read her assumptions about herself and her work in ways that render their conflict more productively complex.

simultaneously circumscribe her individual authorial agency and situate her within a settler community.

Closer consideration of Griffiths's resiliently un-problematized white subjectivity and its attendant property claims point to the strain placed on cross-cultural collaborations caused by defining subject-positions only in extreme terms. Griffiths consistently positions herself within an either/or paradigm, evading the messier middle zones. Her most dramatic statement ostensibly claims but effectively repudiates accountability: "I'm just like all the other white people, that's true. I'm a gold digger. I was then, and I still am" (Griffiths and Campbell 84). With this taunt, directed towards both herself and Campbell, Griffiths again demonstrates a refusal to take responsibility for her subject-position, performing a culpability that she never inhabits.⁶⁴ By verbally admitting guilt without addressing the underlying failures to account for abuses of power, Griffiths offers a non-solution to the politically and socio-historically fraught violences of cultural appropriation and material dispossession. She goes on to explain: "When the native world got opened up to me, it was like coming home. Here were people that believed the air was thick with things, like I did, that you could listen and hear voices" (84). Griffiths provocatively titles this section "More Stealing" while proclaiming her rationalization for theft:

Then I saw your culture, and it was like a treasure chest opening up, and the maniac romantic in me just dived in up to my elbows. . . . I am a gold digger. I went for that treasure chest with everything in me, my fists were full of your gold,

⁶⁴ Thanks to Michelle Peek for encouraging me to think about possibilities and limitations of inhabiting culpability.

my fingers closed in on your jewels. . . . Somewhere I was at home, and I claim that home. You want to send me back to the druids, find strength in the dispossession of the Scots or the Celts, but I don't feel it. I was born here and the Native way is the way of the land here, right here where I was born. (85)

Like the contract, Griffiths's admission of guilt functions more as a misdirect than a wish to repent, her stealing posited as the guileless act of a "maniac romantic" (85) that precludes negotiation. Interestingly, this position resonates counter-intuitively with Susan Leonardi and Rebecca Pope's caution about the limitations of dialogue as a trope for collaboration:

[C]onversation and dialogue, at least as they are practiced by 'good girls,' seem so often repressed by social convention. One shies away from serious disagreement, one doesn't interrupt, one doesn't too obviously stake out one's territory, one tries not to digress. One never, ever, screams. (Leonardi and Pope 267)

Griffiths does scream. Her screams say "look at my transgressions, accept my justification, and ignore my guilt." Her screams do not, however, disrupt the restrictive social conventions Leonardi and Pope describe because, without allowing for a reassessment of or engagement with Griffiths's position, "serious disagreement" (267) remains impossible.

Murray also focuses on difficult property agreements but frames the discussion in material, rather than ideological, terms. Analysing discourses of trade, Murray argues:

[L]ike gift exchange [especially significant in the "Red Cloth" (110–111)], trade serves as a euphemizing metaphor among Griffiths, Campbell, and Thompson and

needs to be interrogated as well. Trade and gift-giving, one the economic origin of the Metis people and the other a central mechanism of the traditional Native economy, are resonant ways of figuring the exchanges that led to *Jessica* and its book. They are also mystifying because of the particular and conflicting ways they construe exchanges of experience and expertise among the parties and because they misrepresent or do not represent at all the financial and property arrangements between Thompson, Griffiths, and Campbell, which almost sank the project on numerous occasions. (Murray 93)

Trade first appears as explanation for Campbell's entry into the project, via Thompson: "I'd learn from taking part in 'the process,'" Campbell recounts, "and in return I'd give my bag of goodness knows what" (Griffiths and Campbell 16). The proposed exchange poses an explicit pedagogical alternative to more directed forms of teaching (16). But both Campbell's description of her offering (her "bag of goodness knows what") and Thompson's self-positioning as pedagogue belittle Campbell's contributions to the process and work to establish the uninterrogated power relations that structure what follows. Once the play's improvisational development is under way with Native actors Tantoo Cardinal (Métis) and Graham Greene (Oneida) and Euro-Canadian actor Bob Bainborough,⁶⁵ Campbell reports a subsequent trade, also between herself and Thompson,

⁶⁵ This period is captured in the "History" timeline as follows: "July 1982, Edmonton. First full-scale improvisational jam session. Paul directs, Maria feeds in material, Linda plays Jessica. Actors are Tantoo Cardinal, Graham Greene, Bob Bainborough" (Griffiths and Campbell 9). This is a full eight years after Campbell first views Clarke Rogers's production of *Almighty Voice* and becomes interested in theatre for community work, six years after she starts discussing this project with Thompson, and two years after Thompson puts Campbell in contact in Griffiths. Though it is the "[f]irst full-scale improvisational jam session" with *Jessica*, therefore, it is also work whose imaginings significantly pre-date July 1982.

that again rests on unspecified terms (to Griffiths's relief) beyond indicating Campbell's desire to substitute Griffiths out of the project:

MARIA: After the rehearsal in Edmonton, Paul and I drove back to Regina. I tried to convince him to use another actress, instead of you. I told him I wouldn't work with you again. I almost did it, I almost had him convinced, but he said if that happened then he would have to go, and, well, he couldn't go, if he did I wouldn't learn the process. In the end we made a trade, and you stayed.

LINDA: Don't tell me what the trade was, I don't want to know. (43)

In both instances, "trade" figures euphemistically (to echo Murray) so as to obscure and de-concretize the particularities of the experience-based exchanges which Thompson orchestrates. And when Campbell and Griffiths later revisit the second (in a section Griffiths pointedly titles "The Trade"), they retain their focus on protecting Thompson's process, effectively "reinforc[ing] Griffiths's abdication of responsibility within the collaboration" (Murray 99) by positioning her as an object of exchange rather than a negotiating participant. Yet the ephemerality of Thompson's contribution gets used as collateral in this instance, especially where Campbell is asked to decide between working with actors of her choosing and learning Thompson's "process," only to find herself with neither.

II.iii Processes and Accented Intent

This penultimate treatment of property at work in *The Book of Jessica* takes Thompson's theatrical process and Campbell's and Griffiths's respective intents as its triangulated focus, where the elusive process figures as part of the collaboration's

formative trade while anchoring the women's divergent understandings of the collaboration's purpose. Because Campbell is positioned as the novice who capitulates to Thompson's wishes on the promise of learning-through-process, her sense of betrayal is particularly acute in evoking both loss of property and abandonment of care. With some retrospective distance, for example, Campbell describes the infuriating and painful disorientation she experiences as a result of procedural and interpersonal failure:

When the production was finished in Saskatoon, I still didn't know what 'the process' was. I didn't know what the fuck had hit me. All I knew was that there was this play and everybody was excited. The play was good, but I couldn't understand why I went around feeling like I wasn't inside of me anymore. Paul never told me the process meant that. . . . I felt betrayed, and I thought, 'It's my fault. I was the one that believed Paul was my friend, and trusted him.' The anger was at myself. I was empty. But when I look at it now, what absolutely devastated me was that I had been looking after you, because I believed he was going to look after me. . . . Now the play was over, and I stepped back, outside of the theatre, and I didn't have anything, and here's everybody packing up and leaving, and all of a sudden I'm at the other end of this tunnel, it's black and long and I don't even know where my stuff is. I don't know who I am. I don't know where I am. I don't know anything. But I know at the end of the tunnel is a light, and I have to get there if I'm going to survive. I thought, 'The play's over now and we can stop worrying about the actors, I can sit down with Paul and he will explain to me what the process was and I will understand it. Somehow I believed that understanding

the process would help me find myself. But he didn't. He was just blank. There was this man I didn't know looking at me. (Griffiths and Campbell 55–56)

Part of Campbell's sense of betrayal hinges on an expected exchange in care that fails to materialize, adding to the layers of traded experience that remain unarticulated. Campbell unconsciously holds that she can 'afford' to care for Griffiths because that investment would be returned in kind through Thompson's protection of her, but her vision proves insolvent. Campbell does know throughout the play's planning and production that "[e]xplaining wasn't a part of Paul's process" (41); yet once that process leaves her at a point of such disorientation that explicit guidance is required, Campbell reaches out to find an absented interlocutor, "just blank" (56).

Griffiths's contrasting acceptance of Thompson's process, despite her reservations about its function in *Jessica*, both reinforces her settler privilege and points to the kind of "accentedness" that Coetzee theorizes. Coetzee explores "questions of divided audiences and . . . conversation partners who are in conflict over the meanings of their encounters" yet working in tandem through the long ending of South African apartheid (Coetzee xi) and, though focussed on South Africa and not Canada, offers entry points for reading *The Book of Jessica*'s commentary otherwise. Griffiths, capable of some self-reflexivity and even shame in recalling the process, creates just enough distance between her experience and her narration to throw her own accentedness, her particular tenor of enunciation and interpretation, into relief. Griffiths-as-narrator, for example, glosses the pressures placed on Thompson's process throughout *Jessica*'s development as simply the result of uneven familiarity with the particular kind of extemporized theatre practiced with Thompson;

she prioritizes that expertise (derived from white-centric theatre practice) without valuing or seeking to understand the other registers of expertise in the room: “The Native actors were inexperienced at improvisation, while the white actors had been making up material for years. They had to live with the frustration that their culture was being explored, and all too often maligned, without the technique to jump in and say their own piece” (Griffiths and Campbell 33). The standard of excellence, in other words, is yet again a fallacious “Euro-original,” and meeting that standard “requires translation, mutation, conversion, catch-up” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2). Yet the Griffiths who is positioned as Campbell’s simultaneously real-time and mediated interlocutor focuses on her own experience under those pressures to call into question the same “technique” she suggests is so important:

I couldn’t get your body. I couldn’t get your voice. . . . I mean, those flashbacks to Vancouver...I couldn’t imagine that person at all. . . . [T]he person is me imagining myself as this...Métis. Oh, God. Every time I’d go at all the Native stuff I’d be cringing inside. To have the ‘subject’ in the room, plus, they’re Native and I’m as white as the driven snow, the clouds on the prairie, whatever. I mean, it’s outrageous when I think about it. I can’t believe we did it. I can’t believe you sat through it. Scenes with nothing happening, but that’s Thompson’s process, right? You don’t stop a scene unless you’re so far under, you’re ready for the shovels. I believed that I could find it somehow. But I knew it was sounding awful. . . . Oh, I can see that room and I can see me getting up, full of bravado, and buzzing with the things you told me. I mean, I was in heaven. I’d been given the most

wonderful stories, the most incredible character. I'd been to the ceremony. I had my head full of what had happened there. I was on fire with all this stuff. I'd go out and it would be...shit! And I did it without knowing anything, Maria. (33–34)

Griffiths does not go so far as to say what knowledge might have made the process less painful, and Campbell – speaking on the other side of healing through the gift of temporal distance – graciously allows Griffiths her blind spots by taking on that responsibility of vision herself: “You couldn’t see that person fighting back. . . . You couldn’t see that person getting beat up, because I couldn’t either,” Campbell asserts. “Somewhere along the way I’d removed myself from her” (34). Griffiths’s editorial choices very much inflect Campbell’s graciousness, however, such that Griffiths’s own responsibility is muted in her accented version of the process.

For Coetzee, whose object of study encompasses the particular traumas shaping contemporary South Africa, “the ending [of apartheid] is understood as an activity, and as a point of view that needs to be developed and cultivated” (Coetzee x) through a critical approach that can make sense of differentially shared experience:

I call this working ‘accenting’. The way in which I use the term ‘accented’. . . . is to refer to ways of thinking that are aware of the legacies of the past, and do not attempt to empty out the conflicts and violence under the surface. Accented thinking and accented conversations will often, perhaps typically, appear conflictual and overly insistent on difference and disagreement. . . . I argue that it is precisely those discourses that *acknowledge* the asymmetrical legacies of apartheid, and draw attention to the enduring effects of the violent past, that can

bring about the long ending of apartheid. The value of this accented sense of an ending is that it requires a regard for the past and a responsibility to seek out that about which one *chooses* not to be ignorant. It is an understanding of the sense of the ending of apartheid as an activist task in which there is work to be done: precisely the work towards this ending. In other words, it is not enough to uphold the ideal of nonracialism through merely *stating* it ('apartheid has ended'). That position requires constant work; and work that will require a high degree of tolerance for disagreement and discord. This activist work – which includes academic writing and teaching, but is not only that – is a way of countering discourses of failure and disappointment, and of reversing a potential paralysis and silence. (x)

Whereas the structural opaqueness of a capacious history offers Coetzee her analytical starting point (the long ending of apartheid), Canada's colonial context leaks more than strides out from *The Book of Jessica*'s primary preoccupation with personalized conflict such that neither its legacies nor its systemic hold on the two women's lives gain center stage. Yet scenes such as the above where Griffiths acknowledges some failing, Campbell responds in kind, and editorial choices amplify settler 'difficulties' at Métis expense, typify the text for working in the opposite direction, from detail to macro history, in ways that "draw attention to the enduring effects of the violent past" and enable readers to "acknowledge the asymmetrical legacies of [Canadian-style] apartheid" (x) by mining the nuance of personal experience.

Accentedness also helps re-open and re-read the collaboration's conflictual intents by accenting the process itself. Describing a later rehearsal stage situated in multivalently "Dangerous Territory,"⁶⁶ Griffiths again names the process maladaptive when a journalist is invited to watch. Griffiths finds the encounter with a stranger from a Native newspaper, who "watch[es her] struggle with being Native" (Griffiths and Campbell 50), excruciating. But she initially remains quiet, knowing "[i]t was against Paul's process to be insular and private, at any time, in any way" (50). And despite the racial tension that Griffiths accurately reads, Campbell is simultaneously worried throughout this period for Griffiths's safety (49). Neither woman does more than identify Thompson's role in their escalating struggle – "MARIA: He'd just say...that's the process./ LINDA: Yeah." (52) – but both must contend with its impact. In part, this means that neither collaborator can access a guide capable of navigating the various contours of their "Dangerous Territory" or sufficiently mitigating the consequent pain that each experience, as discussed above. Their respective confusion – Campbell's, with what she witnesses in Griffiths; and Griffiths's, with a process that proves unfamiliar – again underscores their divergent assumptions about the project's intent. Griffiths locates her mounting difficulty during the Saskatoon rehearsals, "in the middle of [Campbell's] community and home" (48). "She was my Geiger counter," Griffiths states. "[I]f she doubted me, or was afraid, I lost what little grounding I had found" (48), and validating her individualized theatrical competence remains priority. And although Griffiths's account of her responsibilities in the

⁶⁶ "Dangerous Territory" is the title of the subsection in which these exchanges take place during rehearsals in Saskatoon (Griffiths and Campbell 48–52).

production explicates her sense of the associated stakes, it stands at a remove from Campbell's concerns:

I was supposed to be without ego, a vessel, claiming nothing. The more I tried to be the self-effacing vessel of the piece, the more owly I became. The real gift, as Paul so often reminded me, was Maria's. She had handed me her life, her philosophy and entry to her deepest self. When I complained to him about the restrictions and nudges of racism I felt from her, Paul would say, 'She lives here, you'll go back to Toronto, to a totally different life, and she'll take the repercussions of what we do. You have to understand the enormity of her risk.' I could only agree with him, yet I knew I also was risking something. The dividing line had been lost. (48)

Concurrently, Campbell becomes increasingly alarmed by Griffiths's at once fragile and absorptive state ("You looked as though, if I just touched you, you'd have shattered like a fine piece of glass. But at the same time you were asking me to fill that glass with wine" [48]), and angry at Thompson for placing Griffiths in potential danger while assuming a responsibility, herself, to protect: "I had to give you something to ground yourself with; that was supposed to be my job, to protect you when you went over to those places and you might fall off. But I wasn't happy about what was happening" (49).

Finally, by bringing accent to bear on an early demonstration of Griffiths's densely compromised ability to hear Campbell, we see more clearly how asymmetrically accented expressions of intent and commitment vis-à-vis *Jessica* seep through property-based references to spirituality and racialization, language and identity:

In the discussion after *Almighty Voice*, Maria argued that no one can own the spiritual power in a culture She also argued, . . . that many Native people have white blood, so how could they shut out whites who really want to learn?

MARIA: God, if she only knew. . . how many times I wanted to tell her, ‘Just take all your stuff and get out, you’re white, you have no business here, I don’t know why I invited you, . . . go find your own spirits, your own power.’ But every time I started to do that, I’d see a circle of grandmothers and the circle of grandmothers had no colour.

Then Paul Thompson connected with Maria Paul and Maria wanted the project to deal directly with the spiritual world.

MARIA: What is she talking about anyway? This was not supposed to be a play about spiritual worlds, it was supposed to be a play about a woman struggling with two cultures, and how she got them balanced When I had talked about doing a play with Paul we talked about the prairie, the dancing, the smells We didn’t talk that much about spirits, . . . then all of a sudden we were into spiritual power. That’s why I hate working with the English language, and why I have a hard time working with white people, because everything means something else. ‘Spiritual power my ass,’ I thought, ‘Wait till they find out I don’t have any power.’

Finally, I was part of the idea, about to work with Paul Thompson, director of the maverick Theatre Passe Muraille, and Maria Campbell, Métis writer, activist, teacher, catalyst....

MARIA: What a bunch of garbage. I'm a community worker. A mom.

'Métis writer'? – I should have a giant typewriter? 'Activist'? – I should be throwing Molotov cocktails? It just sounds so...so much like a white professor introducing me at a convention of anthropologists. (17–18)

In this long passage, Griffiths repeatedly marks her interpretive property by performing multiple willful misreadings that depict Campbell in Griffiths's own inadequate yet curiously insistent terms, and emphasizes her imprint by leaving Campbell's contestations in the published text. She effectively manages Campbell's accentedness and (re)constructs the terms of the collaboration within an asymmetrical relationship through her control of the editorial process.⁶⁷ But she also, perhaps more interestingly, draws attention to accents in ways that invite questions about her own editorial and epistemological processes, just as the text's process and Thompson's both point to what reaches beyond effective management.

II.iv Sibyl Trouble

The dense interdependence that arises from Campbell and Griffiths's layered boundary crossings, as introduced in the opening of this section, make the last site of property-related contention discussed here especially troubling. 'Sibylling' emphasizes the instability of Griffiths's desire for clear demarcations between herself, Campbell, and the play: in a process that sees Campbell 'trade' her story with Thompson who then assigns it to Griffiths, Griffiths reassigns her position from performer to owner. Because Jessica is based on Campbell as represented in *Halfbreed*, the character is both heavily

⁶⁷ I thank Katja Lee for her insightful articulation of Griffiths managing the collaboration's published frame by managing the text's editorial process.

anchored in Campbell's experience and necessarily mediated. Sibylling, on the other hand, requires Griffiths to "climb inside other people's psyches" (14) and literally assume the identity of another, the "subject," who – unlike Campbell in this instance – is usually "[not] in the room, [not] a part of the process" (14), and whose subjective input generally remains unexamined. Griffiths's task is deceptively simple: to straddle the divide between the subject (of interpretation) and the object (being interpreted), seamlessly. As Susanna Egan notes, sibylling "suggests the mystery of interpretation with the power of the actress to body forth another's life" (Egan 18). And as the conflicted subject/object of the same experience, Campbell attests to Griffiths's dubious achievement: "[S]he'd jump on stage and she'd play it all back, and I'd stand there feeling like she'd stolen my thoughts. She'd just take it all" (Griffiths and Campbell 15).

Fiona Probyn-Rapsey's analysis of complicity as "a structural aspect of the continuing effects of living in a settler colonial country" (Probyn-Rapsey 76), operating in such a way that it "takes on a spectral presence reminding us of links with the past and the present and responsibility to the future" (78), offers a capacious mode for reading Griffiths's work-as-sibyl generously, even optimistically. As itself a critical methodology, Probyn-Rapsey argues, complicity has the "capacity . . . to disorient and unsettle" (79) and thus work to undo entrenched socio-political relationships. Should Griffiths demonstrate concern with critically interrogating "the inter-subjective nature of being in relation to Others" (70) as a settler in Canada, that interpretive generosity could hold. Yet the text insists that Griffiths's own priorities take precedence, consistently and loudly, irrespective of her "proximity to the problems of colonialism . . . , rather than separation

from it” (71). Campbell’s and Griffiths’s asymmetry is clearly aggravated, for example, by Griffiths’s fidelity to her power to interpret and represent Campbell in a performance whose success depends on the thoroughness with which Campbell-the-subject / Campbell-as-property – again resonant with Harris on the treatment of non-white bodies only as property (Harris 1716) – is appropriated. The asymmetry is also, however, produced by contexts imperfectly overlapping: the theatre context, that demands as seamless an approximation of live subjects as possible, and the racial/colonial context, that entrenches inequalities all the more readily through the appearance of seamlessness in asymmetrical representations.⁶⁸ Sibylling becomes a pivot for these dissonant orientations, foregrounding the operations of theatre otherwise discussed only laterally in the specifics of the contract, the financial arrangements Murray references, the technique Griffiths valorizes, and the ongoing trickiness of the ‘process’ generally. Yet while the conventions of *Passe Muraille* theatre practice also provide a generative frame through which to read this collaborative work, I have centered the racial/colonial optics and read sibylling through those. Whereas Egan argues, then, that sibylling’s “interpretive role is not one-sided” since Campbell must also work “as Griffiths’s mother/shaman to induct and protect her in this shared and dangerous enterprise within the Native spiritual traditions” (Egan 18), I insist on this interactivity’s exacerbation of inequality. Campbell and Griffiths do share a commitment to the interpretative process, but their respective roles retain a division of power that sees Griffiths consume and perform Campbell in an intensification of imperial relations even while – as Egan rightly points out – Campbell

⁶⁸ I thank Daniel Coleman for pointing out these different contexts at work in my discussion of sibylling as appropriative practice.

protects Griffiths. Griffiths's skilled sibylling in effect exemplifies one way in which *The Book of Jessica*, as Helen Hoy argues, "both glosses and itself enacts postcolonial problems of gatekeeping, cultural impasse, and imbalances of power, while simultaneously insisting on the mutual imperative to communicate" (Hoy 48). Through sibylling, Griffiths approximates Campbell's subjectivity whose dramatized experience in the character of Jessica describes "postcolonial problems of . . . cultural impasse, and imbalances of power" (48); by claiming expertise in an-other, Indigenous subjectivity in her determination to sibyl 'properly' while failing to comprehend Campbell's resistance to that work, Griffiths enacts and reinforces those impasses and imbalances.

The collaborators' asymmetrical interdependence is further complicated by sibylling's production of a liminal positionality that ostensibly blurs the separateness between "you and me" (Griffiths and Campbell 91) but in fact disguises that ambiguity in the service of performing an exact reproduction that requires strict delineation of separate selves available for occupancy. Symmetrical or equitable exchange is explicitly absented from this practice; instead, one person acts as a medium for another's subjectivity, a technician for making another's expression public. Arguably, Griffiths's training reinforces an Enlightenment-based reliance on binaries to deter the possibility of sharing a cooperative space with Campbell: "Paul's lesson was, 'Plant your feet on the ground and see what you feel, what images come'. . . . Well, it's very thin soil we have here, and underneath it is you guys" (97). Whether her observation expresses guilt, resentment, or disappointment, Griffiths closes potential openings for productive uncertainty by depicting the 'Other' as an irreconcilably different entity to become or assume. When

Griffiths does manage to play the especially difficult role of Wolverine, for example, she becomes exasperated at the unexpected tension that her credible – and therefore successful – acting creates in rehearsal:

It was like I was having my knuckles wrapped because I'd done something bad, and yet I knew it was good. . . . When I was good, it was bad, because I was transgressing into this other territory. When I was bad and safe, then I was good, because I wasn't transgressing. One of the things that started making me crazy was I couldn't tell any more. (40)

Similar to what she experiences in response to the visiting journalist, Griffiths loses her compass in a now defamiliarized interpretive process when her sense of clarity around boundaries slips while Campbell, on the other hand, redoubles her protective efforts, feeling remiss for not “do[ing] the circle at the beginning and at the end of rehearsals” (40) consistently. When Griffiths begins to interrogate sibylling's limitations, she notes the risk of emptying herself out and the sharp relational challenge created by the subject's contrasting presence (87):

We went into communities and acted out other people, sibyled them. But we, as emotional beings, weren't really a part of it. Paul was reacting against a whole dead area in our culture. Instead of talking to people, artists started imitating other artists, so that they became the whole point of things. And if you do that, you can ignore your own land completely, because you're too lazy or scared to find out how your people actually talk. *But it was dangerous for me, because I really believed myself to be a medium, that I wasn't important.* Not everybody who

worked with Paul was like me, almost blank like that. I take things so literally, but I think ignoring the emotional lives of his actors became the Achilles' heel of his work./ When we brought the person to be explored into the room, it opened the door for there to be a relationship. *I had to be a person to you. But I didn't really believe myself to be a person*, certainly not an interesting person. (87, emphasis added)

By understanding her value to be rooted in a particular variety of self negation, and finding comfort in the expertise that she gains as a multiply-situated medium, Griffiths claims an unease in finding “the person to be explored in[] the room,” calling for “a relationship” (87) that previous productions lacked. In de-centering the artist from the meaning-making process, Thompson's process encourages an ironic lack of preparedness for engaging and working with the communities his troupes seek to dramatize.

Throughout the text, Campbell and Griffiths's collisions are at once intensely personal and broadly generalized, extending far beyond either individual as they carry a differentially shared history and interact with one another as figured by that history. Although Hoy argues that their strident differentiation is deliberately expressed in the text, making “some moments . . . almost feel concocted to provide the full panoply of colonialist assumptions” (Hoy 54), their conflict continues to raise questions about ways in which “knowledge is collective” (Anderson, *A Recognition of Being* 261) and yet simultaneously personal, and how collaborative writing might help bridge the two. *The Book of Jessica* is unapologetic in refusing a happily seamless ‘we,’ but its honesty speaks to many of the underlying factors shaping its failure and begs our responsibility, as

its contemporary witnesses, to continue engaging with the issues it raises. It is thus witnessing itself that gets taken up in the final section of this chapter as a pivot for re-thinking conflictual engagement, or attempts at working through dissonance, otherwise.

Part III Dissonance Read Otherwise: Transformative Potential?

By focusing on two texts that explicitly stage attempts to articulate meaningfully across deeply asymmetrical intersubjective divides, this chapter has been most interested in laying out some of the barriers to comprehension – and, by extension, conceptions of justice capable of enlivening substantive forms of ‘equality’ – that get expressed through conflicts over foundational ideas. I take property and place as my conceptual anchors that generate interfacing sites of epistemological tension; though other foci would also point to fundamentally divisive assumptions at work, property and place carry especial kinds of weight in (post)colonial contexts that draw individual and systemic experiences of oppression into compelling, if messy, co-articulations. What begs further consideration, however, are ways of reading and experiencing the dissonant conversations otherwise: what kinds of strategies might gesture towards the outlines of transformative practice? How might we think through moments of potential change in each text? To help consider these questions, I look to two differently positioned and differently oriented theorists – Kelly Oliver and Daniel Heath Justice – and their arguments for differently modulated forms of relationality in order to re-place the primacy of divisive property lines. I juxtapose claims to placelessness with claims to place (*The Book of Jessica*) and claims to place with and claims to relations (*Mother to Mother*) and consider the tensions that emerge, watching for complicated openings.

III.i *The Book of Jessica and Witnessing*

As introduced in chapter one, Oliver proposes a theory of subjectivity that moves us beyond the “pathology of oppression” (Oliver, *Witnessing* 3) perpetuated through recognition by relying on witnessing as, in part, a unit invoking response-ability and address-ability simultaneously. She argues that “[w]itnessing as address and response is the necessary ground for subjectivity,” and yet “this witnessing is always in tension with another dimension of witnessing, ‘seeing’ for oneself” (16). Witnessing is ethically productive, then, in its dual function of providing and bearing witness:

The double meaning of witnessing – *eyewitness* testimony based on firsthand knowledge, on the one hand, and *bearing witness* to something beyond recognition that can’t be seen, on the other – is the heart of subjectivity. The tension between eyewitness testimony and bearing witness both positions the subject in finite history and necessitates the infinite response-ability of subjectivity. The tension between eyewitness testimony and bearing witness, between historical facts and psychoanalytic truth, between subject position and subjectivity, between the performative and the constative, is the dynamic operator that moves us beyond the melancholic choice between either dead historical facts or traumatic repetition of violence. (16)

For Oliver, this tension enables transformative modes of conceptualizing subjectivity and intersubjectivity by continually unsettling rather than consolidating – without negating – their constitutive elements. This overlaps with the key element of creative instability in my working understanding of conversation. By privileging the historical referent

alongside its messy, unmanaged significations, conversation dislodges fallaciously fixed notions of property and their bearing on subject production.

In relation to *The Book of Jessica*, Oliver's notion of witnessing underscores warnings about recalcitrant binaries that impede transformative understanding. Although Campbell's observation that "Canadians have either got to become good guys or they've got to become bad guys" (Griffiths and Campbell 98) would also appear to reinforce binary oppositions rather than open up something in between, it instead troubles Griffiths's assertion that she has no place of her own. Griffiths expresses a certain nostalgia for an imagined coloniality that would uncomplicatedly provide her with land unencumbered by either Indigenous claims or American imperial interest: "You finally found your ground, and you stand on it. But I feel like a ghost. I go to stand on my ground and find out it's been sold" (94), Griffiths laments, without irony. Having to respond at length to Griffiths's sense of legitimacy in appropriating conceptual and material space, Campbell clarifies the stakes for Indigenous peoples in Griffiths's claim that "[her] community is this stubborn, wishy-washy, sentimental ghost-like people" (94). Griffiths's description of a ghostly Canadianness implicitly mutes but very much carries the violence of colonialism, and Campbell's compassionate insistence on the centrality of Griffiths's European history to her own – and white Canada's – embodied experience continually throws Griffiths's version of self and place into relief. Campbell states: "You did not come here as conquerors. You came here broken down and conquered. And as long as you refuse to look at that history, of course you'll be ghosts, because you have no place to come from" (95). Campbell's assessment risks underemphasizing the conquering work of

settlement, yet it also recalls Butler's argument for delinking historico-political explanation from ethical exoneration⁶⁹ by offering Griffiths a more complex configuration of her situated subject-position. Campbell suggests that Griffiths is part of a simultaneously oppressed and oppressive social group while remaining firm that a thicker self-awareness is needed.

Campbell continues to show Griffiths compassion in the section that follows by acknowledging the difficulty in collaborating for both women – sharing the experience of having been pained without exempting herself from the responsibility of causing pain – while underlining the imperative to relinquish positions of mutual exclusivity and bear witness to one's own history to seek out a potentially productive middle ground or, to borrow Coleman's term, "uncommon ground":⁷⁰

It's easier to go and do it yourself, and face the conflict after...the hard words and stuff, but not the actual pain of trying to do it together. The process has been really gruelling for both of us, and maybe white people don't want to go through that, maybe they would rather just do it themselves, because it's too much hassle dealing with two hundred years of bad times. But if people are to work together they've got to go through that process, or the trust won't happen My mistrust

⁶⁹ I am referring to Butler's discussion in chapter one of *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (2003), "Explanation and Exoneration, Or What We Can Hear" (*Precarious Life* 1–18).

⁷⁰ "Middle ground" does not express exactly what I want to say here. 'Middle ground' assumes that a 'halfway point' is possible, and even desirable; it suggests possibilities for 'balance' and 'equal responsibility' in the historical trauma of colonialism and the work of decolonization that I am not advocating. I am referring, instead, to positions or spaces that are not neatly defined as one thing or another and do not claim to occupy polar sites, where contradictions cannot be easily or entirely resolved. I am interested in this kind of space for its potential capacity to hold conflicting needs and ideas up at once. Coleman's use of "uncommon ground," that draws on Willie Ermine's concept of "ethical space," gets closer to what I am interested in by emphasizing the need to "build" that place of encounter by way of "read[ing] away from rather than towards the self" (Coleman, "Beyond the Book" 219).

comes from our history, but I'll come halfway, because I have to. (Griffiths and Campbell 98)

One of the questions raised throughout *The Book of Jessica* is whether or not, and in what ways, Campbell and Griffiths succeed in disrupting binary oppositions by meeting “halfway” or thereabouts. Locating both the route and the midpoint requires a greater mutual understanding than the text demonstrates, though this passage expresses Campbell’s desire to navigate a shared space and its editorial placement suggests Griffiths’s awareness of that space’s importance. Indeed, Campbell’s very compassion towards Griffiths – her willingness to enter into Griffiths’s emotion, to experience her painful feeling – can serve as reminder of the possibility for being with an-other in a way that is distinct from sibylling by maintaining a counter-appropriative consciousness of the distance separating self from other.⁷¹ Yet as so often happens in *The Book of Jessica*, the implications of the above passage exceed the documented voices and disrupt the pretext of documentary transparency. Because Campbell’s is the only voice heard in this section, a section that Griffiths-as-editor titles “The Process” (98-99) as if to encapsulate an entire methodology and its implementation in the finite space of a single speech act, its positioning belies the intense difficulties experienced by both participants and further obscures the unexamined role of Thompson’s “process” that underwrote the bulk of their collaborative strife. Griffiths effectively extends Campbell’s comments as an empty testament to their process without responding to Campbell’s challenge for greater self-reflexivity.

⁷¹ I am grateful to Daniel Coleman for this insight about the operations of compassion.

For Campbell, part of repudiating polarized positions – socio-cultural, historico-political – involves facing their interdependence despite the pain it generates. She describes her own fear of working together as embedded in a relationship characterized by cycles of absence that neither inspire longing nor provide respite: “I guess what really frightens me is . . . you’re going to come back again. You’ll always keep coming back, and each time you come back, I have to sit down with you, because I can’t let you go, just like you can’t let me go” (99). Their interdependence is particularly difficult to negotiate given Campbell’s insistence on non-competitive forms of ownership alongside Griffiths’s need to stake individual claims, and the tense slippages in between. Campbell states that a “treaty is a sacred thing,” for example, key within both a collective notion of spirituality and a collective process of governance, “but a treaty has to be two equals, two people sitting down and respecting what the other has to offer” (82). The fact of an agreement, then, cannot supersede the particularized human action in its development, even when regarded as sacred. As Murray notes, “[f]or Campbell, the essence of a treaty is its process of creation, not its product; as she says in a discussion of the controversial contract, ‘the very sharing of those things is a contract, and there has to be respect for the sharing’ (p. 91)” (Murray 107). An exchange that follows the conventions of a treaty in Campbell’s terms presumably precludes appropriation and pre-emptes theft. But in aligning *Jessica* with ownable land and declaring herself “the mother that tilled that soil” (Griffiths and Campbell 92) Griffiths continually reinforces an always already hierarchically valued subject/object dichotomy within a colonial context that makes “respecting what the other has to offer” (82) an elusive ideal. To further complicate the

text's partial rendering of exchange along bifurcated lines, however, Lorraine York brings us back to this chapter's epigraph and Campbell's pained assessment that "the world is all ownership" (90–91). Arguing that Campbell herself "locates 'property' as an unstable site of ethical meaning . . . , a site that is arguably associated with her sometimes uneasy negotiation of 'white' and 'Indian' in her Métis subjectivity" (York 179), York opens up a reading of Campbell's hurt as partially located in her desire for clear boundaries around *Jessica* alongside the difficult knowledge that boundaries are imprecise and double-edged, and that she "can never own it either" (Griffiths and Campbell 90).

Oliver's theory of witnessing reframes these sites of contestation slightly by foregrounding the historical, social and political contexts for subject-positions as working in productive friction with the psychological and phenomenological conditions of subjectivity (Oliver, "Witnessing and Testimony" 84), and destabilizing the dichotomous hierarchy between self and other to encourage altered relationalities. "My insistence on subjectivity as response-ability, on the one hand" states Oliver, "is meant as a corrective to political theories that begin with a subject essentially either isolated from, or opposed to, objects including other people" (84). Situating a claim for interdependence within the constitution of subjectivity, that she draws in part from Emmanuel Lévinas and makes key to reimagining non-vertical intersubjective relationality, Oliver argues that a subject's "fundamental obligation is to respond to others in ways that open up rather than close off their response" (85). Reading the intersubjective dissonance in *The Book of Jessica* as part of a dialectical responsiveness and corresponding ethics of opening is not

straightforward, but it does make property driven understandings of relationality hard to maintain.

The Book of Jessica presents numerous acutely uncomfortable examples of interdependence that trouble the isolationism Oliver contests, yet Campbell's abilities to address and respond are curtailed by Griffiths's incompatible assumptions such that manoeuvrable gaps between subject-positions and subjectivities are difficult to envision. The text also, however, conveys limited moments of potential comprehension, or potential witnessing in Oliver's sense – each painfully wrought and short-lived – that suggest intersubjective understanding capable of reaching beyond ownership and ocular forms of perception. The first example evokes Lee Maracle's insight that "[t]he trick is to find the words that allow emotions to move out into the world, where they enable intimate connections with others" (Maracle, Fee, and Gunew 2008). Following Griffiths's repeated disregard of Campbell's command to stop "turn[ing the ceremony experience] into journalism" (Griffiths and Campbell 27) as the "Faust" section – detailing Griffiths's invited interaction with Campbell's wider community – comes to a close, Campbell attempts to make Griffiths understand cultural appropriation and her role in it by pushing Griffiths past either representing the ceremony in the problematic ways she wants or leaving it out entirely. At one point, the struggle over who can say what and how becomes secondary to the object itself, allowing for an opening in their discursive gridlock:

LINDA: You're saying, 'You wanted something,' and I'm saying, 'Then respect that I wanted something,' and you're saying, 'Then respect the something you wanted.'

MARIA: How about that, she finally heard me. (30)

Here, the productivity of conversation gains emphasis as Griffiths allows the verbal exchange to guide her through the discomfort of not immediately knowing the answer or how best to proceed, and Campbell gains the sense that her address-ability has been acknowledged through talk. In a later dialogic instance, however, when Campbell reasserts the need for intersubjective witnessing she is more typically kept from finishing her argument: “MARIA: Why not look at who drove you out of your land? If we’re ever going to make change, like, you know, understand one another..../ LINDA: I know who did” (97). Similarly, when describing the demands of learning to play Jessica, “[s]tuffed with information, . . . fe[eling] like a prize goose” (31), Griffiths rejects dialogue explicitly: “MARIA: And we never talked/ LINDA: Maybe if we talked, we would have never gotten through” (31). Yet even as the sparks of transformation remain limited, the potential power of conversation’s frictive movement lies in creating or protecting spaces for considering interdependence otherwise.

A distinctly different scene generates transformative potential through extra-visual as well as non-verbal expression to create a renewed – or perhaps newly found, and paradoxical – ease between Griffiths and Campbell as premised on sexual violence. The exchange re-enacts the rape of twelve-year-old Campbell, followed by a traumatized Griffiths-as-Campbell singing an accidentally shared lullaby:

LINDA: I knew that was stuff you didn’t want to give, but you gave it to me. I felt
like I knew what happened, I don’t know if I saw the actual room, I saw a

room...I don't know if I sang the song you maybe sang, or if you sang anything, but...

MARIA: You really did sing the song.

LINDA: My mother sang that song.

MARIA: My mother too.... (46)

Griffiths's relief in performing the scene for Campbell – whom she “was afraid to face” (46) – and happening upon an emotionally-charged link between their separate childhood experiences leaves her “able to act instinctively around [Campbell]” (46) and feeling liberated, “not [by] a story, or even acting, but something else” (46). In the scene immediately following – of release and disentanglement depicted by scarves through dance – Campbell attests to a parallel exhilaration as she witnesses Griffiths seeing something in her:

MARIA: That scene was incredible. After the rape it was the most natural thing to do. . . . As I watched you break free of your bindings and dance, my instinct said, for the second time, ‘Yes, she hears the same music that I do.’ The rape broke something inside, the dance healed, erased all the previous hurts of the rehearsal. After that, we started fresh again. (47)

Both Griffiths and Campbell refer positively in these instances to their respective abilities to trust intuition, to enjoy the lightness and the affirmation of hooks's and Childers's dialogic spontaneity in and amongst much straining and despite the difficult weight of continually needing to “start[] fresh again.” Across each of these significant, if rare, traces of potentially transformative practice, Griffiths and Campbell enact something

of the “tension between eyewitness testimony and bearing witness, between historical facts and psychoanalytic truth, between subject position and subjectivity” (Oliver, *Witnessing* 16). Those enactments remind us of the critical possibilities in addressing and struggling through, rather than ignoring or subsuming, difference. They evoke multiple asymmetrical claims on experiential property without resolving the claims’ dissonance or adjudicating their legitimacy. And they allow that competitive notions of exchange and ownership will survive the process, but they insist on reconfiguring that paradigm enough to engender witnessing of partially imbricated spaces and experiences that signal meaningfully without necessitating appropriation.

III.ii *Mother to Mother* and Critical Kinship

As this chapter rounds its final bend, I would like to consider a shifted mode of relationality that responds to the place- and property-framed dissonance of these texts differently again by turning to Justice’s work on kinship. Actively thinking through “an ethical Native literary criticism” (Justice 149), Justice speaks to the “vexed relationship between individuals, tribal communities, and colonialist governments [that] make easy answers or unyielding positions [on Indigeneity, epistemological or embodied] difficult to maintain,” and he does this by glossing “the debates regarding the nature of sovereignty and Native cultural identities between Crow Creek Sioux scholar Elizabeth Cook-Lynn and the late mixed-blood (Choctaw-Cherokee) theorist Louis Owens” (161). But rather than contribute to ongoing conversations in ways that reinforce either Cook-Lynn’s assertion – that only particularly marked and presented (ostensibly ‘pure’) Natives can lay claim to Indigeneity – or Owens’s – that rootedness in particular lands is not the only or

primary means of experiencing Indigeneity – Justice intervenes in the silence of each on questions of kinship. Just as Justice acts as a witness to Cook-Lynn and Owens, seeking to neither entirely qualify nor discredit but to open up each to the other by offering a crucial expansion in the frame of understanding, his argument for kinship also enacts its own version of witnessing. For Justice,

Kinship, like Fire, is about life and living; it's not about something that *is* in itself so much as something we *do* – actively, thoughtfully, respectfully. This essay is one part of a larger project that puts kinship principles into practice. In this essay, my aims are threefold: to propose the interpretive significance of the relationship between kinship, peoplehood, and decolonization; to employ the concerns of this mutually affecting relationship as a critical lens through which to regard recent controversies in Native literary criticism; and to offer reflections on the complicated possibilities promised by work that attends to similar concerns. (148)

I am drawn most to two things here: Justice's verbing of kinship as predicated on attentive respect; and his sense of the "complicated possibilities" (148) that result for Indigenous literary interpretation, or for critical engagement with Indigenous-authored literatures. Both communicate something of my own interest in conversation but otherwise. In relation to witnessing, Justice's generative sense of kinship as praxis also provides a way of reading Oliver's "fundamental [subjective] obligation[, . . .] to respond to others in ways that open up rather than close off their response" (Oliver, "Witnessing and Testimony" 85). Justice's work, however, speaks to the process of constituting communities rather than – or perhaps in conjunction with – individuals.

Although I have discussed a combination of texts in this chapter, I am making the counterintuitive move to consider Justice's argument for kinship as an interpretive guide for *Mother to Mother*, a text not readily defined as indigenous-centred in a North American sense. I am also suggesting that place can be read through relations, through structures and experiences of kinship, in ways that open up rather than foreclose on the interpretive territory of crossings. Taken as a whole, I wonder if Mandisa's novel-long address creates conditions of possibility for kinship between her self and community and Linda Biehl's self and community, or if reading for kinship says something otherwise overlooked about the place(s) of communities in the text. That nascent relationality is quite dissimilar from the kinship practices that ground Justice's work, and yet the text's impetus towards varied points of encounter that exceed the women's single fatal juncture whispers an outline of the "complicated possibilities" (Justice 148) that intrigue and perhaps orient Justice. He states: "It's this struggle between different definitions of community that interests me, and the spaces between, within, and among those definitions" (153). Again, without collapsing the heavily significant distances between Mandisa's site-specific Guguletu and Biehl's unspecified "America," definitional differences do form spaces of productive tension in the novel's tiered historiographies. Magona's retelling of lived events – the forced removals, but also contested interpretations of Nongquwuse and the 1857 cattle killings (Magona 175–183) and Biehl's attack itself (204–210) – are simultaneously pedagogical exercises for her reader that trace situated changes in expressions of kinship and (to use Justice's term)

peoplehood; and excerpts from a necessarily insufficient and halting extension of oneself towards another across impossibly divided experiential landscapes.

The single post-attack encounter between Mandisa and Mxolisi in “[t]he house where [Mandisa] feared [her] son would be” (193), the house unknown to Mandisa but where “[she]’d been expected” (193), offers a material site at which to read kinship’s productivity in speaking through dissonance. Focusing on the narratives told here allows for consideration of community that evokes definitional contestation even within the confines of a single moment’s telling. The establishment of relationality is as important as it is fraught. As such, the secretive meeting between mother and son simultaneously outlines a gathering of optically receding figures upon whom Mxolisi’s safety and Mandisa’s arrival relies. From Mxolisi’s point of view, these figures – including the mfundisi or priest who delivers Mandisa’s first covert instruction, the young woman in the taxi, and the pair who drive her the final stretch – compose a community; from Mandisa’s point of view, a chain link, more collection than community.

Attending especially to Mandisa’s exchange with Mxolisi in their only shared present-day scene, however, we also find a sort of auto-historiography of the text’s foundational single encounter: the attack on Biehl. A tension between the individual and the group, isolation and community, runs throughout this exchange. When Mxolisi finally appears to an anxiously expectant Mandisa, for example, his first concern is whether or not she is accompanied: ““Are you alone? Did you come alone?” he ask[s], casting anxious glances this way and that” (194). His primary kinship protocols have shifted under the unfamiliar exigencies of concealment and its physical location such that

Mandisa “note[s] that [they] had not even exchanged greetings yet” (194). In contrast, Mxolisi insists on citing a non-descript Other as responsible for his own status: ““They say I did it, Mama!’ . . . / ‘They say you did it? Who are they?’/ ‘Everybody. Even the police’” (195). Yet that generic plurality also becomes a part of Mxolisi’s self-positioning as he resists extracting individual action from group responsibility. And just as Mxolisi slips between victim of an accusatory mass and involuntary member of an insurgent crowd, Mandisa re-situates her auditor as a witness to their layered retelling:

Slowly, haltingly, out came the story of the assault on your daughter. The terrible deed of the previous day. And my son told me:

‘Mama, believe me, I was just one of a hundred people who threw stones at her car.’

‘But,’ I said, looking at him full in the face, Skonana’s words loud in my ear, ‘*a knife killed her.*’ I heard myself say those words. Words she had said, oh, so long, long ago. Thunk! Fist striking slightly cupped hand. Thunk! I heard it still.

For a long, long minute, Mxolisi did not reply.

‘So?’

Finally, with a heavy sigh, he said:

‘Even that, Mama, even that...’, then he stopped. There followed a longish pause I didn’t have the strength to bridge, to interrupt, before he continued, ‘...many people stabbed her.’

Again, I looked at him, my heart pounding out in a thousand prayers in different directions all at once.

‘Were you one of them? One of the many people who stabbed the girl?’
How I prayed, even as I asked the question, how I prayed that the answer would be an unequivocal NO. No, he had thrown stones at her car. And that was the only thing he’d done. Not the knife. He had not plunged a knife into her body. Not even one of many, many knives.

But my son did not answer my pointed question. (195)

Significantly, Mandisa insists upon a declaration of individual agency that Mxolisi persistently denies and that she herself is terrified of confirming. But the questioning marks the physical place of encounter a second time by staging an allocution for the listening Biehl that attests to Mandisa’s mode of honouring the dead while also seeking impossible evidence of safety for her own family. Because the questioning shows the slippery pluralities between “us” and “them,” where “everybody” quickly mirrors the generic “many people” with whom Mxolisi acknowledges involvement, Mandisa’s insistence on ascertaining Mxolisi’s guilt from innocence throws his own insistence on a community of attackers into relief. The productivity of both conversational and definitional dissonance here, however, resides less in the tension between an ostensible incommensurability dividing historical from psychological truths – moving away from Oliver’s sense of productive tension – than in the form of responsibility that Justice requires for relationality. Justice focuses on communities’ continued survival as key to kinship, and on the “living kinship traditions and literatures of each People . . . in their

own enduring beauty as a strong but flexible structure that gives guidance for continuity even in the winds of change” (Justice 166). Mandisa’s exchange with Mxolisi enforces a differently situated flexibility but one that similarly speaks to community survivance⁷² at a transitional socio-political moment when definitions are rapidly changing and accepted points of clarity – about justice, for example – are complicated. Following Justice’s argument that “a relational lens might provide us with an option beyond false either/or binaries, where the conversation and the opinions it elicits become part of the process of kinship” (160), I would suggest that Mandisa and Mxolisi foreground a situated relationality that demands consideration for shaping ways of knowing. Through Mandisa’s inability to determine unequivocal guilt or innocence and Mxolisi’s troubling of community boundedness, their relationship shifts under situational pressures. The same shifts in turn become part of the narrative – which is also the relationality, the kinship⁷³ – that Mandisa offers a differently situated Biehl.

At the close of this passage, directly preceding the full narration of Biehl’s attack to close the novel itself, Mandisa leaves her auditor and reader with an image of fearful anguish that crosses familial and political lines and emphasizes an urgent if unsettled relationality despite difficult distances. She says, “[a] hundred years later, we disentangled ourselves. But still, I held his hand. Spent, I looked into his eyes. He didn’t blink. I looked into my son’s eyes. And saw pain and terror” (Magona 197). The uncertainty about Mxolisi’s future, and about the legacies that shape Mxolisi’s present

⁷² I am using “survivance” in the sense that Gerald Vizenor popularized in Native North American Studies, to mean continuance and presence in a resistant sense that emphasizes dynamism and process.

⁷³ I am grateful to Daniel Coleman for sharing this insight, that the narrative Mandisa offers Biehl is also an offering of kinship.

and Biehl's death, is part of what helps us read conversational dissonance otherwise. By bringing kinship into view as a supple interpretive root that both guides and bends in the ways Justice describes (Justice 166), Magona provides a way of reading resilience – in Mandisa's and Mxolisi's community building and kinship practices – as primary to a now secondary dissonance. Thinking through kinship to also underscore an expansive and even contradictory set of ways of experiencing the world thickens an otherwise singularly positioned subject. This thickening can be understood as strengthening in two ways: by broadening the base from which a single subject speaks (without cementing that base as the dynamism of kinship dislodges obduracy); and by densifying the ways a single subject is perceived. Most importantly, kinship practices overlap meaningfully with conversational practices by drawing out altered spaces through encounters. It is the uncertain possibilities in those spaces are where transformative hope is held.

Chapter Three:

Conversations at Work: Fiercely Recursive Knowings in *Coconut* and *Monkey Beach*

“Even if I cry all night, I am fine.
Even though my heart is punctured, I am fine.
Even though it feels like there is no hope, I am fine.
Even though it feels like it will be this way forever, I am fine.
Even though it makes no sense, I am fine.” (Matlwa 183)

“Heartbreak happens when less than 40 per cent of the heart is damaged.”
(Robinson, *Monkey Beach* 275)

“As Daddy hands our payment over to Fikile, who stands impatiently at the edge of our table, I wonder if anybody has ever told her this story.” (Matlwa 38)

Intro Coming of Age, to Know, Across, Around

In a project concerned most broadly with conceptualizing cross-difference work in ways that do not always already reproduce unequal intersubjectivities, Kopano Matlwa’s *Coconut* (2007) and Eden Robinson’s *Monkey Beach* (2000) help imagine relationality otherwise by offering contemporary accounts⁷⁴ of what ‘equality’ might mean in moments marked less by a resistant ethos than by a disorienting sense of resignation. Both novels stage emergent self-articulations that coincide with particular readings of loss in markedly consumptive socio-political and historical contexts without charting definitive routes forward. In so doing, both raise questions about address and legibility

⁷⁴ I flag the term “account” to underline my interest in both its economic resonance and its salient deployment by Judith Butler as primary to relational subject-formation rather than its purportedly explicative function. Butler’s argument that “[n]o account takes place outside the structure of address, even if the addressee remains implicit and unnamed, anonymous and unspecified” (Butler, *Giving an Account* 36), that “the account of myself that I give in discourse never fully expresses or carries this living self” (36), and finally that “[m]y account of myself is partial, haunted by that for which I can devise no definitive story” (40) is relevant to both texts discussed here, as is Butler’s philosophic and psychoanalytic focus on self/other co-constitution for examining ethics of responsibility more generally. Because I am focused on slightly different epistemological genealogies and questions, I do not directly engage this line of argumentation though I am attuned to and aided by Butler’s work.

that explore characters' own interpretive practices as shaped by their broader temporalities as well as readerly relations to those practices. Moreover, because this overall project experiments with conversation as a critical methodology capable of creating openings – of possibility, feeling, interaction, sensation – and troubling calcified, foregone conclusions, it attends to the work of listening actively, and perhaps courageously or uncomfortably, in ways these texts demand. The joint task of reading textual conversations and bringing the texts into conversation, I will argue, also means resting on conversational work as itself the imagined points of encounter. Departing from the previous chapter, conversation here works through more explicitly critical and structural juxtapositions where conversations in and between texts operate by drawing out the epistemological resonances that each text's structure evokes in the other. By juxtaposing the literary texts within their scholarly contexts; the structural and thematic recursive modes in each text; and the reader's participation in knowledge production with each text, this chapter draws out experiences of loss as enacted through productive returns. The result is an uneasy mapping of the past onto the present in recursive processes of coming into knowledge.

As with each of the texts explored in this project, however, *Coconut* and *Monkey Beach* get positioned in quite distinct socio-political and scholarly contexts and their cross-archival conversations may not be immediately audible. *Coconut*'s arguably primary concern with racialized identity formation in a complicatedly post-apartheid and allegedly 'post-racist' epoch differs sharply from a focus on inflected epistemologies in *Monkey Beach* despite critical intersections between race and indigeneity in both.

Matlwa's hyper urban Johannesburg also contrasts with Robinson's small Haisla community and neighbouring town along British Columbia's North Coast. A slower paced Vancouver does figure in *Monkey Beach*, however, and Johannesburg townships do cite the unevenness of South African urbanity. Both settings, moreover, are profoundly shaped by narratively muted resource extraction. Most generally, what the two texts share are young racialized women authors and protagonists raising difficult questions about lived identities in clearly neoliberal and only tenuously post-colonial contexts. More specifically, the texts share formal characteristics that reinforce their thematic alignment: both novels are structured as coming-of-age narratives that evoke but also disrupt the bildungsroman's⁷⁵ generic expectations for self-actualization. As a result, the contested concept of 'empowerment' – tethered to both 'equality' and 'voice' within human rights and activist discourses – lingers in the novels' implicit aspiration for progressive human(ist) development. I argue that these texts work in parallel by holding on to a desire for something empowering even as they explore 'empowerment' as an untrustworthy, if not bankrupt, concept in their respective contexts of disarticulation from more overtly liberationist moments. Each text narrates a coming to knowledge, but one that does not unfold along a linear trajectory. Each text suggests ways of reading post-apartheid and 'post'-colonial coming-of-age novels as enacting productive kinds of loss that invite understandings of larger historical losses into characters' present experiences. And each text, I argue, does this by mobilizing conversation as a key component in processes of coming to know recursively.

⁷⁵ I am following Jed Esty's example of not italicizing the term bildungsroman, except where italics are used in a direct quotation.

Critical interest in the sort of bildungsroman that anticipates but fails to enact or otherwise complicates progressive narratives of development as inevitable and primary is not unique to this project. Joseph Slaughter, Jed Esty, and Allison Mackey, for example, all make important theoretical interventions into the workings of coming-of-age narratives that productively chafe conventional bildungsroman wisdom. Slaughter's persuasive 2007 text, *Human Rights, Inc.*, traces a lucrative interdependency between international Human Rights discourse post-1945, as enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR), and the bildungsroman's universalist conception of the individual's journey through self-development. That interdependency raises questions that are less about the coming-of-age novel itself and more about its regulatory function in reinforcing international(ized) humanist socio-cultural norms. Slaughter's counter-intuitive analysis of human rights as incorporation in a post-colonial, allegedly post-imperial context asks how to get at social justice goals in a global 'justice' order. He critiques the so-called global 'justice' machinery that maintains Eurohegemony without sufficiently critiquing the limits, consequences, and management capacity of human rights frameworks presently conceived. Slaughter claims that:

[I]nternational human rights law appropriated forms and institutions – e.g., the *Bildungsroman*, the public sphere, and human rights themselves – that historically served to legitimate the emergent European nation-state. In its conscription of the *Bildungsroman*, international law retasks the nationalist genre of human personality development to perform its work of incorporation at an international

level, largely in advance of any administrative, institutional formation comparable to the nation-state. (Slaughter 323)

Paying particular attention to the prevalent trappings of post-colonial coming-of-age novels in a globalized but Western-centric marketplace, Slaughter locates an “implicit cosmopolitan model of reading” that “asks relatively little of our [ie. a Western readership’s] literary, humanitarian imaginations” and instead “serve[s] to recenter the traditional subjects of history now as the subjects of benevolence, humanitarian interventionist sentimentality, and human rights – the literary agents of an international human rights imaginary” (324). Indeed Slaughter’s key contribution, according to Jed Esty, is in outlining “the ideological force of the biographical novel to enshrine and naturalize a flawed faith in human rights as the engine or locus of social justice in our time” (Esty 210).

Slaughter illuminates an especially pernicious mode of reinforcing enlightenment-based invocations of Western superiority – through a joint ‘love of reading’ and ‘defense of human rights,’ a “complicity of literature and the law” (Slaughter 328) – that raises caution for projects like mine, yet he stops short of de-centering the gaze on Western consumption. Whereas Slaughter’s argument demands sustained focus on the production and reception of a “projected image of the international human rights person” (328), it shows less interest in the texts’ own modes of non-compliance vis-à-vis grand humanist narratives. To again cite Esty, one of Slaughter’s merits is in “chart[ing] a continuity from the consent-seeking function of the bildungsroman as a genre of universal development in the eighteenth century all the way through to the consent-seeking function of the genre as

a specialized aesthetic commodity in the current world-system of literature” (Esty 210).

Yet Esty opens avenues for reading against that continuity by charting an alternate genealogy that “identif[ies] the special capacity of modernist texts to give literary form to the collapse of progressive historicism as an organizing idea of European modernity” (19). Interested especially in “the aging of the bildungsroman through and past the era of the emergent nation-state” (19), Esty’s *Unseasonable Youth: Modernism, Colonialism, and the Fiction of Development* (2011) looks at an arrested version of self-development in the late modernist bildung that “resists this culturally affirmative role in order to incarnate and expose the negative logic of permanent capitalist transition, a task made all the more urgent in the era of global structural adjustments and internationalized finance” (210).

Post-colonial critiques of progressive development narratives and nationhood find resonance in the European bildungsroman, then, “particularly in its late modernist guise as a novel of frozen youth” (210). Despite a “sedimented logic of organic development [that] lingers on [in its] ideology of form” (2), Esty argues, “[w]hat we call Goethean motifs of the bildungsroman – mobility, interiority, self-cultivation, self-possession, bourgeois-bohemian compromise, integrative realism, soul-nation allegory – are themselves already iterative and self-conscious from their inception” (208) such that the genre’s potential to unsettle deeply entrenched beliefs persist alongside the “original . . . concept . . . of free self-development . . . in [its] postcolonial iterations” (210).

Shifting directions, Allison Mackey explores “a more radical ethical potential” than is allowed in Slaughter’s “emphasi[s on] liberalism and its contradictory legacies at work in the contemporary/post-colonial *Bildungsroman*” (A. E. Mackey 262) or Esty’s

focus on uneven development by framing those narratives within planetary relationalities. Mackey's argument for the genre's generative as well as critical potential draws especially from "contemporary examples of coming-of-age narratives that explore and mobilize the protagonists' contradictory relationship to cultural norms in order to produce and sustain a critical dynamic of unsettlement" (254–255). Such a counter to closure, both narrative and subjective,

[E]mploy[s] specifically spectral and relational narrative strategies in order to allow for such contradictions [critiquing exclusions while plotting the protagonist into the social world] to remain in play, challenging – while at the same time inevitably participating in – generic and market expectations. (255)

The "spectral and relational narrative strategies" of Mackey's interest will sound quite similar to some of my discussion that follows, especially regarding "the ghostly processes whereby relational histories, though overwritten by dominant narratives, have a tendency to haunt the present moment" and "the way that constitutive relationality re-asserts itself despite attempts at individual self-mastery" (255). I would argue, however, that Mackey's insights help prepare the starting points for my own. She closes her project by observing that "these kinds of narratives represent productions of theoretical knowledge and thus have the potential to provide transnational and transformational spaces – contact zones for continual and contingent negotiation – where critical conversations can and do occur" (262). I maintain that following conversation itself – through its sites, practices, limitations, and potentialities – opens us to some of the reimagining work that also preoccupies Mackey.

The conversations I read between *Coconut* and *Monkey Beach*, then, draw primarily on shared formal and adjacent thematic elements. This chapter's work with conversation also borrows from Allen's compelling re-configuration of comparative practice, as introduced in chapter one, in ways that enable analysis "of highly situated interactions created by juxtapositions" (Allen, "Rere ke/Moving Differently" 47). As a result, conversation and juxtaposition, empowerment and loss combine to function as methodology, trope, and theory in guiding my multi-tiered discussion through difficult geographies of learning. What follows are three interlinked sections that consider the scholarly conversations at work around the texts (Part I), the conversational work at play within the texts (Part II), and a pedagogical outward turn oriented by the texts (Part III) that combine to enliven recursively productive readings of coming to know. My hope for this chapter is to follow conversations through their various circuits and reflect on their relationships to enacted knowledges.

Part I The Scholarly Conversations: Reading Distances

The broadest site of conversation that I argue plays a valuable connecting role between *Coconut* and *Monkey Beach* and helps delineate my focus takes place in the realm of scholarly practice. Predominant lines of questioning create a suggestive similarity in the texts' reception by maintaining singular foci and placing attendant pressures on the cultural production of particular communities at particular socio-political, historical, and critical/scholarly moments. With *Coconut*, published in 2007 and winning that year's European Union Literary Award in recognition of new South African novelists, followed by the Wole Soyinka Prize for African Literature in 2010, critics have

been especially interested in Matlwa's treatment of race in post-apartheid processes of identity construction. This critical focus is clearly justified: the novel's title signals the persistence of dichotomous and fraught race concepts, for example, and the novel as a whole pays sustained attention to contestatory experiences of racialization, from the opening scene's devastating consideration of pained beauty and hair to the closing comment on racialized social reproduction and language. As Matlwa's alternating first person narrators – Ofilwe Tlou and Fikile Twala – come to know what it might mean to be young, black women in the so-called 'new South Africa' while inundated with evidence that "*the old rules remain and the old sentiments are unchanged*" (Matlwa 32, emphasis in original),⁷⁶ they rehearse differently classed subject positions that coincide in "foreground[ing] the damaging inscription of whiteness on the[ir] interior worlds" (Samuelson, "Walking Through the Door" 132). In short, I do not question the critical focus on racialization. I do wonder, however, about the subsequent shaping of debates such that racial (re-)categorization and performativity (Kumbalonah), the relationship between race and 'culture' (Raditlhalo), dialectical readings of blackness and whiteness (Phiri), and South African genealogies of 'coconutteness' itself (Distiller)⁷⁷ become sites of anxiously aspirational analysis that assume the possibility of a progressive unfolding of time in which violence can be safely situated at a historical remove or otherwise contained.

⁷⁶ Matlwa frequently uses italics to indicate either an interior shift in address or a temporal shift in the narrative. From here on, my reader can assume that italicized passages cited from *Coconut* appear in the original unless otherwise stated.

⁷⁷ This list is by no means exhaustive.

The *Coconut* scholarship that reads for different forms of futurity while remaining trained on racial complexity provides especially compelling contradistinction to my interest in recursive temporalities. Abobo Kumbalonah's article entitled "'Stop Acting Black!': Black Conscious (Racial) Identities in *Coconut*" (2013), for example, illustrates this anxious aspiration by focusing on structures of racial categorization. Kumbalonah maps out a widely-shared need to distance contemporary conceptualizations of race from their apartheid trappings; yet he responds, paradoxically, by arguing that Steve Biko's articulation of Black Consciousness offers more appropriate categories ("black," "white," and "non-white") for post-apartheid South Africa. In this case, the racialized violence of apartheid – which Kumbalonah sets within a longer historical trajectory to help broaden the context for that violence – is surpassed by way of 'proper' consciousness building: "Tshepo and Ofilwe understand that to be consciously black," he argues, "is the only way they could immunes [sic] themselves to further exploitation and disempowerment" (Kumbalonah 130). Whereas a critical desire to complicate apartheid frameworks for constructing and producing race is evident in Kumbalonah's consideration of performativity in "acting black," an overriding desire to contain the frameworks' consequences by way of a Black Consciousness counter-explanation suggests that *Coconut* can provide a conceptual 'way out.'

Aretha Phiri goes further than Kumbalonah in complicating notions of racial boundedness by arguing for a more robust understanding of identificatory liminality in post-apartheid South Africa, as read through *Coconut*; yet Phiri's concentration on disrupting the binary-based thinking that sustained apartheid violence dovetails with

Kumbalonah's analysis in also reading for movement beyond that violence. In response to Sam Raditlhalo's critique of *Coconut* as evidence of a generalized identity crisis, precipitated by the "de-linking of a discernible number of Africans and their cultural practices both during and after apartheid" which Raditlhalo considers to have been "a critical downside of the liberation struggle" (Raditlhalo 24), Phiri states:

[T] the novel does not . . . articulate 'a crisis in identity' . . . for this presupposes the notion of identity as stable and absolute. Rather, *Coconut* articulates a crisis of identity[; . . . it] troubles at the same time that it thematizes/politicizes identity and so positions identity and the novel itself as ambivalent, evolving and constantly in flux. (Phiri 171, emphasis in original)

Citing Bhabha to suggest that "*Coconut* explores and itself provokes this complex process of existential liminality" (171), Phiri reads a "tension between race and culture as essence and performance" (166) through a discourse of indeterminacy that at once troubles 'blackness' and 'whiteness' and argues for a dialectical relationship between the two. Her line of argumentation becomes tangled – resonating with my own imbrications of poststructuralist and materialist imperatives – as she simultaneously critiques racial essentialisms and calls for a more realistic and "honest" (173) (read: reliable? unambiguous?) assessment of contemporary South African cultural politics. Phiri's mode of reading 'past' the violence of apartheid through *Coconut*, then, does not turn on a particular form of consciousness raising (cf. Kumbalonah). Rather, it distances itself from "the heady euphemisms" of postapartheid discourse – 'Rainbow nation; and 'Simunye – We are one!' – that "belie the continued racially and socio-economically stratified lived

reality of majority South Africans” (164) so as to foreground a differently fraught problematic in the “evolving” (171) present.

Phiri’s reading of an oxymoronic postmodern realism in *Coconut* echoes a third critical site of interest, Natasha Distiller’s book-length refutation of “the binary logic which continues to structure public discourse about who and what South Africans can and should be in relation to each other” (Distiller 13) in the post-apartheid present. By “suggesting that [the coconut’s] logic of outside and inside be refused, and that instead we celebrate what the charge of coconuttiness is trying to name in its derogatory ways” (13), Distiller elaborates a genealogical reading strategy for a densely complicated geopolitical, cultural, and historical site by mapping “a version of South Africanness that has always existed, which cannot be captured by a binary logic, and which may be very productive of *a way forward for our national imaginary*” (13, emphasis added).

Shakespeare and the Coconuts: On Post-apartheid South African Culture (2012) does not map out a future via Matlwa’s *Coconut* so much as it locates the kinds of epistemological interactions that get read through the coconut figure as having a different kind of explanatory power through that figure’s longstanding, and potentially foundational, presence in South African culture building.

One final example of *Coconut* scholarship circles us back to Esty’s work on the modernist bildungsroman’s unseasonable youth. In her 2011 article entitled “Post-Apartheid Modernism and Consumer Culture,” Rita Barnard draws on Matlwa’s text to argue for a “non-progressive[, o]r spatial” modernism, claiming that “one can only emerge from contemporary zones of abjection . . . by going somewhere else” (Barnard

229). Barnard picks up on Esty's claim that "the modernist era should be located at the dialectical switch-point between residual nineteenth-century narratives of global development and an emergent twentieth-century suspicion of such narratives as universalist and Eurocentric" (Esty qtd. 239) to argue that a "great deal of South African literature, even contemporary works that one would usually (by virtue of the current structuring of our discipline) call postcolonial, could be positioned at this particular switch-point" (239). Yet Barnard is interested in staking a differentiated claim on 'post-apartheid modernism' as a rubric for interrogating the literature produced "as we move further away from that dynamic moment full of promises, when a democratic South Africa rejoined the world of global modernity, [and] the relevance of [James] Ferguson's meditation on the decomposed modernity of parts of Africa in an era of neoliberal capitalism, becomes increasingly evident" (239).

Taken together, what these four examples of the scholarly engagement with Matlwa's text suggest is more than a predominant line of questioning: it is a predominant desire to know, and to know somewhere better or more 'now' than 'before,' to resolve or explain the contradictions that make definitive theories of identity and nation building difficult to maintain under the pressure of institutionalized, racialized violence. As such, the significant difference between their approaches and my own is neither the impulse to know nor the desire to productively intervene in intensely difficult political and scholarly debates. The difference is simply my attempt to throw into relief the contours of potentially facilitative scholarship by focussing on texts' processes of coming to know – on their own and in relation to one another – rather than on what exactly that knowledge

says or how that knowledge may best be theorized. Those processes are what enact conversations in this chapter: between parallel critical debates and between different or recurring textual elements, rather than through face-to-face or fictionalized encounters. The recursivity of knowledge production is the same recursivity of productive conversation, examined here through a call and response logic within the structures of the texts themselves.

When we shift attention to the predominant trajectories in criticism on *Monkey Beach*, we find a similar, and not unusual, scholarly desire to know – about the novel's cultural-historical embeddedness, how to read signs of indigeneity, what to feel certain of taking away. But we also find increased emphasis on what knowing requires. Like *Coconut*, *Monkey Beach* takes up questions about how to negotiate asymmetrical bodies of signification but focuses more intently on epistemology than on race as the central register of difference. The novel follows a single protagonist, Lisamarie Hill, through a temporally circuitous emotional journey and physical search for her missing younger brother as she gathers together an episodic tapestry of her own knowledge production. Generalized Indigenous and Euro-Canadian value systems stand in for the racial binaries that gain focus in *Coconut* to trouble Lisa's sense of self and community and stage struggles not unlike Ofilwe's and Fikile's. Also like *Coconut*, *Monkey Beach* is Robinson's first full length novel, set in the author's home environs and looking closely at contemporary racialized youth living through the legacies of colonialism/ institutional

racism, and is the recipient of region-specific literary recognition.⁷⁸ And as a racialized First Nations author of Haisla and Heiltsuk (Bella Bella) heritage, Robinson speaks simultaneously to questions of ‘indigeneity’ – with deliberate ambiguity that gestures towards problems around claimed ‘expertise’ – and a range of corresponding issues impacting on the lives of her characters living between the Haisla reserve, Kitamaat Village; the predominantly white Alcan town, Kitimat;⁷⁹ and the site of occasional return, Vancouver.

In Robinson’s case, critics have shown consistent interest in situating *Monkey Beach* vis-à-vis an Indigenous literary tradition in ways that reveal some discomfort with Robinson’s refusal to speak definitively in the name of Haisla or Heiltsuk, let alone broadly ‘Indigenous,’ communities. While reading for celebratory representations that might act as signposts through potentially exploitative terrain, non-Indigenous scholars have most often analyzed the novel in relation to European literary genres and approaches such as the gothic novel (cf. Andrews, Castricano); deconstruction or cultural hybridity (cf. Appleford, Howells, Visvis); “eco-cultural restoration” (cf. Soper-Jones); and

⁷⁸ *Monkey Beach* was the recipient of the 2001 Ethel Wilson Fiction Prize, which is given to work by writers from British Columbia (see <http://www.bcbookprizes.ca/winners/2001>). The novel was also nominated for Canada’s two largest literary prizes: the Giller Prize (2000) and the Governor General’s Literary Award (2000).

⁷⁹ As Robinson alludes to in *Monkey Beach*, first on page 5, the Aluminum Company of Canada built the town of Kitimat in the 1950s for aluminum smelting. J. Kendrick’s *The People of the Snow* (1987) details the history and impact of Alcan in Kitimat with some attention paid to socio-cultural effects. Though industry scope and population size in Kitimat, BC and Johannesburg, SA register on vastly different scales (Kitimat’s 2012 population was 9,009 [town’s official website, <http://www.kitimat.ca/EN/main/residents/facts-statistics/population.html>] and Johannesburg’s 2011 population was 4,434,827 [Statistics South Africa, http://beta2.statssa.gov.za/?page_id=1021&id=city-of-johannesburg-municipality]), both sites were created expressly for mining-related industries. I do not take this issue up more closely here; I do think, however, that there is much to be learned by theorizing cultural production alongside deeply invasive extractive industries – industries that are simultaneously hailed as key contributors to the improvement of socio-economic “Human Development Indicators” in UN-speak and responsible for UN-recognized human displacement, ecological degradation, and monopolized commercial alignments – across geopolitical sites.

postmodern feminist ethics (cf. Roupakia). Many have approached the text as at once ‘Native Canadian’ and in need of explicit positioning as such, claiming that the text is or is not sufficiently ‘Native Canadian,’ or that it complicates assumptions about ‘Native Canadian’ literary production, or that its discernible ‘Native Canadian-ness’ plays a pedagogical role with readers. Labrador Métis scholar and member of the NunatuKavut Nation, Kristina [Fagan] Bidwell, together with non-Native scholar Sam McKegney, observes that

Eden Robinson is part of a new generation of Native writers in Canada . . . increasingly willing to diverge from [Indigenous] nationalist expectations. Robinson’s [second novel] *Blood Sports* insists on expressing its author’s autonomy, thus constituting a symbolic victory for the creative freedom of Native writers. Despite being well-reviewed, however, the novel has not achieved anything approaching the critical response of its predecessor *Monkey Beach* (2000), . . . which graces more Canadian Literature syllabi than any Native-authored text except *Green Grass, Running Water*. Incorporating Native language, intergenerational Native familial relations, political resistance, the legacy of residential schooling, and a culturally specific traditional landscape, *Monkey Beach* is readily recognizable as “Native” to readers, publishers, teachers, and critics attracted to clear, if potentially reductive, categorization. (Fagan and McKegney 36)⁸⁰

⁸⁰ Kristina Bidwell published this article under her previous surname, Fagan.

Though Bidwell and McKegney de-emphasize the unease *Monkey Beach* can also afford Indigenous literary nationalist scholarship, their depiction of its uptake as a ‘Native’ text ready for classroom consumption speaks to a scholarly preoccupation with its categorization. Similar to *Coconut*, *Monkey Beach* has incited critics’ anxiety about potentially enduring binarisms, associated tensions between identity politics and poststructural iterations of subjectivity, and cultural insider/outsider delineations. While the combined scholarship on *Monkey Beach* tends to read for recuperation – whether that be of a somehow coherent Haisla/ Heiltsuk identity, or a resistant ambivalence appended to representations of indigeneity, or a mixture that posits importance in the Haisla and Heiltsuk learning Lisamarie ostensibly masters – I aim to think about the critical conversations otherwise by focusing on the texts’ circular engagements with empowerment and loss in coming to knowledge.

It is knowledge generally, and Lisa’s relationship to Indigenous epistemologies specifically, that has proven especially interesting to non-Indigenous critics who have variously considered the extent to which Lisa successfully counters colonialism’s effects by deftly navigating the contradictory demands articulated through contending belief systems (cf. Andrews, Appleford, Castricano, Kramer-Haamstra, Purhar, Roupakia, Soper-Jones⁸¹). These debates about oppositionality in the novel suggest a range of ways in which Indigenous literature in Canada is perceived, like Native American literature, “as a relatively undeveloped area of inquiry, which can benefit from the application of the

⁸¹ I should note that Soper-Jones does caution against an “easy assimilation [of the novel] into the Canadian postcolonial canon” (Soper-Jones 17). However, she also provides a different kind of interpretive closure, be it careful and cautious, by suggesting that “Robinson imagines the possibility of a culturally centred restoration of the Haisla traditional landbase . . . even as she critiques romantic notions about Indigenous peoples and their ‘balanced’ relationship to the land” (28–29).

longer tradition of European-based literary theory to its growing field of texts” (Brooks 234). As Abenaki scholar Lisa Brooks reminds us, this orientation belies the fact that Indigenous literatures are “part of an extensive indigenous intellectual tradition” (235) and are not nascent or in need of integration into more securely canonized archives (including postcolonial ones). It also obscures ways in which Lisa’s facility with Indigenous epistemologies is not merely an offering for critical assessment of her viability as an appropriately resistant or instructive Indigenous character in a contemporary novel. Lydia Efthymia Roupakia argues that the site of such an anxious critical impulse to assess and to know is itself worth considering and calls for a kind of methodological caring in approaching this novel. She asks: “How easy is it for Western [non-Indigenous] readers of contemporary Native literature to suspend their goal-oriented consciousness when approaching Native ‘otherness’?” (Roupakia 280). How difficult is it, asked otherwise, to relinquish a critical desire for Lisa or Robinson to map out a way past colonialism?

Noting that “[e]xisting critical interpretations of . . . *Monkey Beach* attest to the ways in which cultural difference elicits politicized reading practices and romanticizing hermeneutical gestures,” Roupakia argues that the novel does a different kind of work that “alerts the attentive reader against the pitfalls of approaching difference through inherited interpretative templates” (280). I am intrigued by the way this argument moves in a direction that feels similar to my own, by calling into question the “interpretive templates” brought to bear on Indigenous-authored texts, while also deploying assumptions about a progressive critical correctness that I hope to trouble. Roupakia’s

claim, for example, that “Eden Robinson refuses to enlist her protagonist as a player in the inherited politicized ‘games’ of cultural authenticity, postcolonial resistance, or commitment-abjuring hybridity” in favour of “portray[ing] Lisa’s struggle to judge her situation carefully and with caution” (287) both over simplifies “postcolonial resistance” and hybridity and postpones delineating “careful judgment.” Roupakia effectively reads Robinson’s text as speaking back to non-Indigenous scholarship, recentring the colonial imaginary as Robinson’s primary focus and herself as Robinson’s interpreter:

Monkey Beach performs a critique of the hermeneutic practices that the novel’s Native content elicits. It challenges the reader’s facile recourse to established critical templates structured around perceptions of cultural authenticity, postcolonial resistance, and poststructural hybridity; and it foregrounds the necessity of careful adjudication. (291)

Roupakia contends, as a result, that *Monkey Beach* “poses new questions about the ethical claims of heritage (cultural, ideological, and familial) on individual judgement” (294).

Yet in so doing, Roupakia stakes her own claim on interpretive innovation that resonates with frontier discourse to overwrite existing iterations of those same questions.

Though her particular evocation of care/fulness may be instructive, then, it requires its own attentive “adjudication” capable of opening up rather than foreclosing interpretations of sovereignty and resistance that Roupakia dismisses in Womack’s work and claims are absent from Robinson’s.⁸² While I agree with Roupakia that “*Monkey Beach* invites the

⁸² This absence, Roupakia argues, is due to the degree of epistemological negotiation that Lisa performs: “Most importantly, *Monkey Beach* confounds the claims that a Native politics of ‘recognition’ stakes on practices of literary hermeneutics. It challenges arguments such as the one proposed by Craig Womack, who insists that Native literary aesthetics ‘must be politicized and that autonomy, self-determination, and

reader to pause and consider the premises underlying approaches to identity which constitute the reader's own hermeneutic inheritance" and "thus involves the reader in the exercise of 'responsibility' . . . by demanding that the reader attend carefully to what is outside the familiar" (291), including questioning a too easy celebration of Lisa's relationship to Haisla epistemologies, I argue for careful consideration of the fine grained detail of what happens across points of (un)familiarity.

But I would like to widen the scope of this discussion to again think across archives. Te Punga Somerville and Allen, model a critical practice that is especially apt for working through *Monkey Beach* alongside *Coconut*. In their "Introductory Conversation" that opens the *Journal of New Zealand Literature* special edition on "Comparative Approaches to Indigenous Literary Studies," Te Punga Somerville and Allen discuss some of the ways in which "comparative work [can be approached] as both a micro- and meta-methodology" (Te Punga Somerville, in Te Punga Somerville and Allen 15). Allen's interest in "trans-Indigeneity" and Somerville's "desire to find alternative modes of Indigenous orientation and expression" beyond "discussions of the Indigenous that endlessly reference, and thereby centre, relationship with the colonizer" (Te Punga Somerville, "The Lingering War Captain" 21) begin the conversation at an analytical distance from those scholars cited above. That distance reinforces the imperative for what Te Punga Somerville describes as "horizontal, Indigenous to Indigenous encounter." She explains that "[b]y constantly imagining that we are

sovereignty serve as useful literary concepts [. . .]' (11). Robinson's representation of her young Native Canadian protagonist as a perplexed reader of cultural signs undermines normative accounts which support the efficacy of 'cultural sovereignty' as a unifying political concern that ought to condition the production and reception of Native writing" (286).

encountering Indigenous people, thought, and culture for the first time, . . . we occlude the fact that we are no longer in a moment of first encounter” (qtd. in Coleman, “Toward an Indigenist Ecology” 21), but that looking at Indigenous texts across disparate contexts works to disrupt what Coleman, following de Sousa Santos, Nunes, and Meneses, describes as “colonial epistemicide” (Coleman, “Toward an Indigenist Ecology” 6). To trouble either/or assumptions regarding Indigenous positioning within or without colonial discourses, Te Punga Somerville goes on to argue that “[o]nce Indigenous communities have come together within the context and space of colonialism, the negotiation of collaborative and comparative relationships can begin” (Te Punga Somerville, “The Lingering War Captain” 38). I find this comment particularly instructive for a project that manoeuvres in and among, but seeks to disempower, persistent recourse to ‘traditional’ (read as Indigenous in the Canadian archive, more often as black or African in the South African archive) vs. ‘modern’ (colonial/ imperial/ white) binarizing and attendant assumptions about ‘authenticity’ as the necessary, exclusive, and inert property of the former. Taken a step further, the “collaborative and comparative relationships” that Te Punga Somerville and Allen theorize are closely related to, and could be considered parts of, the model of conversation under development here. Focusing on conversation as itself “both a micro- and meta-methodology,” like Te Punga Somerville and Allen’s conception of comparative work (15), means intentionally seeking out and listening to the disparate articulations that compose each interaction; it means paying sustained attention to interactivity as itself a site of analysis (despite the unstable dynamism characterizing that site).

Consider, for a moment, some of the Indigenous-authored scholarship relevant to *Monkey Beach* as examples that help us read conversation as a methodology and points of encounter as conversations. Looking first at Lee Maracle's foundational 1996 Indigenous feminist treatise, *I Am Woman*, we find implicit – if temporally inverted – engagement with Roupakia's 2012 sense of readerly responsibility. Whereas Roupakia identifies responsibility as "the reader's ability to respond to particularity" (Roupakia 291), Maracle defines responsibility in broader terms.⁸³ But an emphasis on considered action infuses each citation: "As mature adults," Maracle states, "we are responsible for cleaning up the mess in which we historically have allowed ourselves to become enmeshed. Responsible: having the ability to respond to a given situation. (This has nothing to do with laying blame)" (Maracle, *I Am Woman* 91). The scholars' shared focus on ability as intersected with thoughtfulness and deliberate motion brings their ideas into unintentional proximity even as a directed scholarly conversation never developed. What remains striking about this absented engagement, and Roupakia's disregard of Indigenous scholarship generally, is the valued space that 'responsibility' is given in Indigenous-authored criticism and Indigenous-articulated epistemologies as both a concept and a guiding principle. Indigenous Studies scholar, feminist, and anti-violence activist Andrea Smith provides but one expansively resonant example when she argues that, "[w]hereas nation-states are governed through domination and coercion, indigenous sovereignty and nation hood is predicated on interrelatedness and responsibility" (A. Smith 129). Focusing the issue of

⁸³ to gesture towards the term's dense usage, Elizabeth Jackson also picks it up to discuss a later Maracle novel alongside Anderson's use of Kimberly Blaesus's term "reader response-ability" (Anderson, *A Recognition of Being* 49). The article by Jackson that I am referring to is called "'Magic Moments': Temporal Modelling and the Call for Responsibility in Lee Maracle's *Daughters Are Forever*" (*Studies in Canadian Literature* 38: 1 (2012) 226-247).

responsibility on textual analysis, Bidwell constructs an “Aboriginal Trauma Theory” capable of articulating humour amidst suffering. Bidwell grounds her analysis in “traditional Aboriginal ethics around communication,” to suggest that Eden Robinson, Tomson Highway, and Richard Van Camp “use storytelling to explore connections between the traumatic past and troubles in the present and to self-reflexively examine the potential and limits of such indirect and humorous communication” (Fagan 204, 205). Readers are invited to read responsibly, in Roupakia’s sense, by taking seriously the context-specific stakes in applying an undifferentiated (Eurocentric) trauma theory to *Monkey Beach* while also reading for the workings of responsibility in the epistemological shapes that Bidwell outlines. The optimal result, for Bidwell, is a particular kind of theory that is responsive to Indigenous people’s experiences with trauma, at once individual and generalized. This approach, importantly, also refuses to reductively bind humour to “tradition” as a mode of address and circumvents assumptions about tradition as static: “I am not suggesting that the writers are passively or inevitably carrying on in a traditional mode . . . Aboriginal societies have evolved their own theories to explain the connection between past traumas and current misfortunes” (204, 206). Fagan’s phrasing here speaks to Brook’s contemporaneous argument, cited earlier. Brooks grounds her work in the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century critical and literary production of northeastern Indigenous nations, centering ways in which Indigenous peoples are “part of a philosophical conversation which did not emerge only in the last twenty years but has been ongoing on this continent for millennia” (235). As such, Brooks clearly refutes recourse to the overly represented non-Indigenous knowledge sites

as inevitably foundational genealogies and argues that “[w]hat we have at stake is not only the recognition of the validity of our knowledge, but the sustenance of indigenous epistemologies” (235).

The collection in which this Brooks article is published – *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective* – stages a series of conversations between the contributors that gather questions related to responsibility, and to modes of carrying out academic work responsibly, in an inspiring project that realizes the title’s promise. While I am not directly engaging any particular reading of responsibility, corpus of trauma theory, or Indigenous intellectual tradition, I am committed to centering Indigenous-authored and -oriented approaches to Indigenous cultural production. My hope is that a focus on what might be learned by using conversation to read a text can enable an interpretive stance that is located in a set of concerns and contexts but flexibly so. It takes seriously Battiste’s and Henderson’s position on Indigenous Knowledges (IK) as structurally, qualitatively, and genealogically incommensurable with Eurocentric ways of knowing (Battiste and Henderson 35–36) (introduced in chapter one), and Waziyatawin Angela Wilson’s argument that Indigenous Knowledges are absolutely crucial to empowerment, however conceived: “Indigenous knowledge recovery is an anticolonial project. It is a project that gains its momentum from the anguish of the loss of what was and the determined hope for what will be” (W. A. C. Wilson 359). I follow these leads without attempting to resolve the theoretical divide between strategic essentialism and a poststructural hybridity or provide an annotated reading to a Eurocentric readership of an

epistemologically othered text. My annotated commentary focuses instead on the workings of conversation within a lexicon of loss.

Finally, my earlier statement – that scholars’ desire to know ‘better than before’ is different from mine only in terms of focus (on facilitating versus directing debates) – was, in part, disingenuous. I am motivated to question ways in which literary criticism participates in its own developmental logic even as I am part of the process. And so I will turn to the primary texts to continue to think about ways of creating small openings in which to consider how we speak to and of one another as well as about our coinciding interests.

Part II Conversations in the Texts: Combative Losses, Recursive Knowings

My hypotheses about conversation are put to the test in their application to texts, where I read conversation as a formal device that emphasizes back and forth movements in circulatory processes of coming to knowledge. I argue that those processes work through experiences of loss that are not neatly resolved or subsumed into a coherent self but instead impel a way of reading loss and violence as part of one’s own narrative, sideways. By framing the combined narrators’ struggles within larger questions of legibility, both *Coconut* and *Monkey Beach* actively work through the dense detail generated by interiorized narrativizing such that the intricacies of reading are foregrounded. Each of the characters sketches out her emerging personal and political identities as racialized, gendered, and classed youth such that distinctly confusing experiences of loss are expressed in narratives at once bound within a single day (Matlwa) or week (Robinson) and spread across complex historical and personal depths.

By interspersing storylines in the present with memory excavation, both authors work temporal shifts into their narratives that animate multi-layered conversations between time frames, characters, and themes that are themselves part of larger structural conversations. For example, although neither novel is divided into chapters *Monkey Beach* is composed of four sections; each section opens with a direct address that invites readerly consideration of Haisla epistemologies while gathering individual meanings into a changed relationship. The respective openings, strung together, read as parts of a story told by way of interruption, or insertion: “Six crows sit in our greengage tree. Half-awake, I hear them speak to me in Haisla” (Robinson, *Monkey Beach* 1); “Contacting the dead, lesson one. Sleep is an altered state of consciousness” (139); “Weegit the raven has mellowed in his old age. He’s still a confirmed bachelor, but he’s not the womanizer he once was” (295); “We were a half-hour’s snowshoe tramp from the logging road when Mick found the ugliest pine tree in creation” (367). *Coconut*, on the other hand, is divided by narrator – the first section given to Ofilwe and the second to Fikile – and follows the same day through those divergent perspectives that intersect along points of experiential similarity and a single physical encounter. Interior self-narrations, then, are seen to be anything but solitary as the three narrators – Matlwa’s Ofilwe and Fikile and Robinson’s Lisamarie – rehearse or enable multiple modes of conversational interplay that guide them through otherwise isolating battles for understanding. The loss that each text explores helps construct readerly understanding, conversely, of the factors weighing most heavily on each context. Whereas Ofilwe and Fikile lose their respective dreams of classed whiteness, or racialized – whitened – class privilege, through a series of quotidian

humiliations that empty out the promise of a “post-racial” rainbow nation, Lisamarie loses both her brother and her culturally amorphous sense of self in disorienting experiences of disappearance and reappearance that ignite in her a sense of responsibility without adequate knowledge of its demands.

II.i *Coconut*: Ofilwe’s Privilege Slippage

“[T]he equation of decent living standards with whiteness and its perceived materialism provide a gauge through which the contradictions of the post-apartheid black communities may be recognized” (Raditlhalo 24), argues Tlhalo Raditlhalo, whose diagnosis of racialized disaffection in contemporary South Africa simplifies, but provides one way of discussing, the frictively thorny aspects of “entanglement” (cf. Nuttall). In *Coconut*, both first-person narrators struggle with the loss of empowering self concepts at a historical moment that promises the opposite, dovetailing with Mackey’s claim that “[d]isappointment is the prominent tone of post-national coming-of-age narratives” (A. E. Mackey 11). Their points of view, however, are separated by more than textual distance. Ofilwe is a middle-class, private school student whose family lives in a prestigious Johannesburg neighbourhood; Fikile is also high school age but lives with her uncle in a Johannesburg township that she eagerly leaves daily for work at what she fervently believes to be “the classiest coffee shop this side of the Equator” (Matlwa 117). It is at that café – sardonically named the Silver Spoon – that Ofilwe and Fikile cross paths on the story’s single Sunday afternoon.

The class differences that partially demarcate the young women’s experiences are poignantly expressed at a café table where Ofilwe uncomfortably sits with her family,

after attending church, and Fikile resentfully provides service. Seeing the Tlous seated in her section, Fikile exclaims inwardly:

The family I hate with everything in me. Where is Ayanda? This is his family, he knows I do not serve the black families, they're just an annoyance and a waste of my time. Especially this specific family. I hate them. I hate them so much. I don't know why they come here. Every Sunday they come, nobody knows who they are, they do not fit in here, everybody can see it, everybody knows it, I am sure they know it too, but they come anyway. Such forced individuals. New money is what they are and that is why I hate them. That is why I avoid them. (164–165)⁸⁴

The first part of the novel guides the reader through Ofilwe's own thoughts about her social position and personal struggles, but this postponed moment in Fikile's narration complicates Ofilwe's earlier depictions by providing a third-person perspective that is both cannily insightful and markedly unsympathetic. Notably, Fikile's anger speaks unintentionally but directly to Ofilwe's shame. It is Ofilwe who notes the persistence of "old rules" earlier in the novel – evidenced by "*that crisp air of hatred and disgust [that] crawls into our wide-open nostrils still*" (32) – and she does so at the Silver Spoon, in the narrative moment of Fikile's castigation. Ofilwe is herself humiliated to regularly

⁸⁴ Ayanda, as we learn later, is a middle-class 'model C' private school student like Ofilwe who, like Ofilwe's brother Tshepo, works without needing the income and is an anomaly among Fikile's co-workers. Fikile's derision for Ayanda renders her contempt for the Tlous all the more explicit. See, for example, the episode detailing Ayanda's angry indictment of South Africa's enduring racism following demeaning treatment received by a customer (150–153), and Fikile's analysis of the situation: "*He didn't mean any of it . . . Ayanda had gone to a white school, lived in white neighbourhoods all his life. He had the life that everybody dreamed of. The ass was just talking out of his arse. And we all knew it . . . So after that, he got back to work*" (153).

frequent that space while remaining outside its ‘culture,’ reminded in countless thoughtless ways of racism’s tenacious hold in the country that is her home:

I hate it, Lord. I hate it with every atom of my heart. I am angry, Lord. I am searing within. I am furious. I do not understand. Why, Lord? Look at us, Lord, sitting in this corner. A corner. A hole. Daddy believes he enjoys this food. Poor Mama, she still struggles with this fork and knife thing. Poor us. Poor, poor, poor pathetic us. It is pitiful. What are we doing here? Why did we come? We do not belong. . .

They laugh nastily, Lord. You cannot hear it, but you see it in their eyes. You feel the coldness of it in the air that you breathe. We are afraid, Lord, that if we think non-analytical, imprecise, unsystematic, disorderly thoughts, they will shackle us further, until our hearts are unable to beat under the heavy chains. So we dare not use our minds. (30–31)

While Fikile remains unaware of Ofilwe’s pain and Ofilwe misinterprets Fikile’s derision, the anger of both coheres to suggest a wide scope for practicing gendered, critical race analysis among post-apartheid black South African youth. Structurally, Ofilwe and Fikile’s narratives develop in tandem, intersecting only in this scene that reads as a meeting point between the text’s halves, a moment of potentially empathic encounter that does not come to pass. The two young women are mutually provoked by one another and never directly speak, yet they share a deep – and complicated, differentially experienced – desire to live lives like those of the white kids in Ofilwe’s school and of the white customers in Fikile’s café. Moreover, both are continually shown the enduring distances

that keep them apart. By the end of the novel's central Sunday, Ofilwe and Fikile each suffer sufficient assault on their modes of understanding to have to regroup, experiencing loss as a destabilization of their interpretive foundations.

One critical contribution in Ofilwe's narrative is its refusal to present class as supplanting race as a stable marker of privilege. Sarah Nuttall argues that the term "post-racial" is not immaterial but should be "use[d] with caution." She suggests that,

while South Africa in general is not a 'post-racial' society, aspects of its culture are experimenting with spaces one could tentatively refer to in this way, in that the imperative, driven increasingly by what is patently a cross-racial market for goods, is that race no longer signifies as it did before, and that class, based on money, increasingly structures certain kinds of social relations. (Nuttall 172, ftnt 18)

David Theo Goldberg's ongoing analyses of the "co-articulation of race and the modern state" (Goldberg, *The Racial State* 4), on the other hand, sound a stronger note of caution against an even hesitant adoption of 'post-racial' discourse. In work on "racial neoliberalism" more specifically, Goldberg argues that

South Africa is unique . . . in demonstrating in a historical blink the self-conscious shift from – or between, as the shift is hardly complete – racial absolutization and racial secularization, between "all is race" and racelessness, explicit racial emphasis as state architecture and neoliberal privatization as individualized relation. It offers, in a nutshell, a crucial experiment of – a social laboratory for observing – what the shift might look like. (*Threat of Race* 321)

Instead of arguing that individualizing neoliberal economics and attendant class rearrangements weaken the structural hold of racisms, however, Goldberg maintains the opposite as race continues to occupy the poles in a shifted but preserved binary. Although I do not argue that Goldberg's astute – if sweeping – assessments of racial neoliberalism account for *Coconut*'s racial complexities in their entirety, I share both his and Nuttall's sense of learning from the experiment that is *Coconut*'s context.

In Ofilwe's case, racial consciousness gets tracked through sadness and confusion in a narrative emphasizing the empty space created by her older brother's "feigned absenteeism" (Matlwa 83) and her own growing disillusionment. Whereas Ofilwe remembers her excitedly confident eight-year old school composition about "her favouritest friend" (88) – her older brother, Tshepo – she sits alone in a much more tempered present, thinking: "My head is full. My heart burst a long time ago. When I watch, when I listen, when I read, I must hold back. I cannot fall too deeply, believe too strongly or hold on too tightly to anything. . . . I hate this cynicism that seeps through my veins. My mind is tired of reading through that barbed wire" (89). The circuitous development of Ofilwe's cynicism acts as a connecting thread throughout her narrative where we witness a growing conflict between her tightly-held peer- and school-based convictions and her family-based lessons directed by Tshepo's emerging political consciousness. It is primarily Tshepo's instructive voice that propels Ofilwe's begrudging self-reflection that leaves her depleted. She ends her narrative with the resigned statement that she is "done with doing calculations. . . . For now it is no longer a goal of [hers] to find answers. It is what it is" (93). Tshepo, however, plays a key role in orienting that

final analysis and cultivating her sense that “[i]n every classroom children are dying,” infected by “DNA coding for white greed, blond vanity and blue-eyed malevolence” leaving “IsiZulu forgotten” and “Tshivenda a distant memory” (93). Indeed, these last comments from Ofilwe sound most like her brother, suggesting that although Tshepo has opted for silence in favour of writing over speech, his spoken voice lives through an unwilling protégé in the form of his sister.

Importantly, this sibling relationship allows for a productive mode of argumentation that counteracts their parents’ futile fighting, demonstrating the difficult yet painfully transformative work that conversation can potentiate. When Tshepo initiates a loudly divisive family battle in choosing to study African Literature and Languages rather than Actuarial Science, “*which he and Daddy had agreed upon*” (Matlwa 79), “*Mama shrieked and screamed so many sentences[;] Daddy roared a thousand others[; and] Tshepo slipped between the panels of wood on the floor and disappeared*” (81). But what impacts Ofilwe most is the sheer volume of words exchanged:

It was the longest conversation Mama and Daddy had ever had and it went on for days. . . making me wake with delight. The words would swish up and come crashing down. . . . I thought it was fantastic. . . . Walking around the house in a warm and pleasurable drowsiness, hoping that it would never fade away, I quietly thanked my brother again for being so selfish. (81)

This younger Ofilwe begs for open, verbal conflict over muted isolation, foregrounding an extra-individual possibility that language can create; her slightly older self adjudicates language differently, however, as she experiences difficult self learning through painful

exchanges. In acting as her guide, Tshepo effectively shatters the righteous illusions that Ofilwe fights, but finally fails, to hold on to, especially in relation to the kinds of learning gained through formal schooling. Gugu Hlongwane argues that “the psychological state of the black students who are educated in these very white spaces of learning [that is, ‘model C’ semi-private schools] are worthy of study” (Hlongwane 13) and that, through *Coconut*, “Matlwa insists that educators in South Africa conduct frequent conversations on race in their schools and classrooms” (22). Though school becomes an increasingly contentious site throughout Ofilwe’s narrative, school also acts as her anchor, preoccupying her as a barometer for social positioning in ways that Hlongwane intimates. An early diary entry dated September 1997, for example, witnesses Ofilwe desperately desiring to be a part of “*Tim Browning’s sleep-over party*” (Matlwa 6), an event she sees as her “*big chance*,” feeling encouraged rather than violated by the host’s declaration that she “*was not like the other black girls in [their] class*,” described as “*calmer, cuter and . . . a little like Scary Spice*” (8). Shifting to the school grounds themselves, a later memory centers on another white boy, Stuart Simons, whom Ofilwe generally disregards as baselessly arrogant. On this afternoon, however, Ofilwe decides to greet Stuart in proud excitement about her father’s new Mercedes-Benz. Ofilwe recounts the fury that quickly replaces pride in response to her peer’s openly off-hand racism: “*As I open the boot to put my bag in, Stuart walks over and says something like ‘Nice wheels, Ofilwe, who did your father hijack this one from?’*” (16). Tshepo’s unsolicited insight – “*You do not know who you are*” (42) – has not yet been offered to Ofilwe when she is faced with Stuart’s automatic racism. Ofilwe’s immediate response is re-directed anger “*at Daddy for picking*

[her] up late” (16); her longer term response, however, percolates with the increased clarity that Tshepo drives.

The relationships that are most difficult for Ofilwe to disentangle also become the sites of sharpest perception. Whatever their express intent, people Ofilwe considers friends also express superiority and contempt, as do the presumably safe voices of teachers, to Ofilwe’s initial bemusement. In these instances, language itself recurs as a troublingly emblematic site of racialization in support of Tshepo’s lesson that Ofilwe is “*[s]tuck between two worlds, shunned by both*” (93). Belinda Johnson in particular, Ofilwe’s earliest “BFF,” subjects Ofilwe to distressingly ordinary forms of colonial oppression by insisting that Ofilwe “*learn how to speak properly,*” pronouncing “*[n]ot ‘b-erd’, but ‘b-ird’*” or “*‘uh-vin’, not ‘oh-vin’*” (49). “I am not used to hating” (49), Ofilwe replies in retrospect, but the novel demonstrates ample opportunity for developing that response. As a much younger student, Ofilwe had already learned that her knowledge is as unreliable as her version of events in the eyes of institutional authorities. When her grade one class is surveyed by education administration to determine “*how many different types of boys and girls*” (56) are enrolled, linguistics present the dividing lines. Even without Ofilwe’s response, this scenario replicates the apartheid logic that “racial classification [is] a situational judgment [for bureaucrats’ discretion,] drawing on multiple sources of evidence [that include] ‘Does he use one or other Native language as the customary and natural mode of expression?’” (Posel, “Race as Common Sense” 92, 93). An unsuspecting Ofilwe, however, confidently indicates that her home language is

English – the truth as she understands it – only to be publically reprimanded and effectively overwritten:

Mrs. Kumalo [the Physical Education teacher] sent me to go stand with my nose against the tall green court wall. As I walked away from the three white unidentical men in serious suits, Mrs. Kumalo and the rest of my grade one B class, my nose getting itchy, thinking that now Mrs. Hill would never choose me to tickle her back, I heard the one who had not said a word until he did, say, “Just tick her under ‘Zulu’, it’s all the same.” (Matlwa 57)

The child guards this memory, framing it as her teenage self with the question “Where does an unused language go?” (57) when deciding to actively learn Sepedi. She experiences the shame this memory evokes as the culmination of shorter memories about language and power in South Africa: memories about speaking “*the TV language; . . . the one Mama never could get right, the one that spoke of sweet success*” (54) and maligning the language that “*bounced berserkly from Koko to Tshepo to Malome Arthur to Mama and back to Koko again*” (54); about keeping her mother away from open houses at school “*where children . . . display to each other their accomplished parents*” (51); about her embarrassment at Mama’s excitedly overzealous attention when white friends stayed the night (53). And Ofilwe moves through these reflection cycles while thinking in the present about Mama’s “foreign . . . metallic blue-black skin” (52) as they walk together to withdraw Mama’s infantilizing allowance, and Ofilwe wishes they could hold hands, publically laying claim on her mother’s beauty, but knowing that “is not something we do” (53). Whereas Ralph Goodman maintains that Ofilwe “is as tough-minded in her

intransigence as the nut after which the text is named, and she lives with a divided consciousness” (Goodman 111), I read her as complicatedly vulnerable in these passages, defined less by a “divided consciousness” than by a perhaps “tough-minded” intuition that courageously opens on to painful acknowledgments, in turn.

Although Ofilwe remains vocally resistant to Tshepo’s analyses, her closing memory communicates a concurrence with Tshepo’s central claim that “[f]riends . . . know your name. Friends do not scoff at your beliefs, friends appreciate your customs, friends appreciate who you really are” (Matlwa 43). This final scene recalls a time when she was “a little younger, a lot more foolish, but nevertheless happier” (91), cheerfully hanging pictures of celebrities on her bedroom wall, oblivious to the absence of people of colour and gaining insight only through her brother’s intervention: “*In his eyes I saw what was only to hit me many years from then. I think it was on that day that Tshepo saw me for what I was. I wish I had then too; maybe things would have worked out differently*” (92–93). Ofilwe’s sense of loss, then, is bound up with unsettled assumptions about education as opposed to learning, and historico-politically overdetermined social interactions transcribed onto changed economies of racialized signification as opposed to ‘equality’ or ‘respect.’ Tshepo’s pedagogical work is complicated by his own ambivalence about carving out politically viable spaces for himself but it serves the unequivocal role of introducing dignity to Ofilwe’s repertoire of self understanding. As a teacher, Tshepo dislodges his sister’s confidence in epistemic whiteness; as a learner, Ofilwe admits loss into her experience. Loss is most poignant for Ofilwe in rethinking self in the context of school and the associated knowledges produced; losing the anchor of

school, however, allows Ofilwe to consider the epistemic orientation of academic learning in a post-apartheid, post-transitional – yet still transitioning – South Africa and the responsibility demanded of thinking and being otherwise.

II.ii *Coconut: Fikile, Willed*

Chronologically, both Ofilwe and Fikile and operate within “post-transitional” literary imaginaries. More interestingly, however, their narratives also “advance a recognition of the imbrication of public and private, and of the unhomely spaces that ensue, without foreclosing women’s rage against the structures in which they have found themselves entrapped” (Samuelson, “Walking Through the Door” 132) that white South African theorist Meg Samuelson suggests marks the post-transitional epoch. Their stories forego the celebratory discourse of reconciliation that so characterizes writing from South Africa’s transitional years while remaining “highly politicized,” Gqola argues, “foreground[ing] complex, and sometimes uncomfortable, mental landscapes rather than the spectacular” (Gqola, “The Difficult Task of Normalizing Freedom” 62). Reading conversation as a formal device within Fikile’s narrative especially brings interiority – as a post-transitional signifier – together with the period’s rise in consumer culture while also emphasizing the unstable, cumulative, and historically situated character of Fikile’s neoliberal common sense. Deborah Posel argues that “the issue of newly acquired wealth within the black population and the conspicuous consumption associated with it” (Posel, “Races to Consume” 158) opens up important analyses of “its articulation with South Africa’s freedom struggle” (158) to “consider how, if blackness was produced as in part a restricted regime of consumption, the politics of enrichment could readily adopt the

discourse and symbolism of emancipation” (173). Ofilwe’s and Fikile’s ‘born free’ generation, moreover, seems uniquely positioned to imbibe and perform “the aspiration to demonstrable wealth” (158) that Posel places within an apartheid lineage without themselves having any “working memory of apartheid” (Mattes 133). As Robert Matte maps observes,

[a]lmost one-third of South Africa’s present electorate [known as the ‘Born Frees’] is now too young to have any direct memory of race classification, passes, official segregation of churches, schools, residences and interpersonal relationships, the drastic repression of dissidence and resistance, or of the armed resistance and popular struggle against apartheid. Nor does this cohort have any experiential memory of F.W. de Klerk’s historic release of Nelson Mandela and the unbanning of liberation movements, the searing violence of the transition period, the momentous 1994 election, or of the conclusive 1996 passage of the country’s Constitution. (135)

The consequence of these experiential divides that most interests Matte is a curious decline in democratic commitments amongst the ‘Born Frees.’ I am interested in a simultaneous increase in this generation’s commercial participation that spells out – for figures like Fikile – an “emancipatory significance of black acquisition” (Posel, “Races to Consume” 173) even as democratic principles related to basic human rights are, arguably, forfeited. The turn inwards that Gqola discusses in the context of Njabulo Ndebele’s theory of the ordinary suggests that “South African literature has veered away from a preoccupation with the spectacular contest between dominant and disempowered to a

textured exploration of emotion, possibility and entanglement” (Gqola, “The Difficult Task of Normalizing Freedom” 62) and, moreover, that “alternatives [to the spectacle] must highlight the importance of interiority” (72). My own reading suggests that interiority offers a range of starting points for re-positioning the spectacular – perhaps understood here as a materialism that supplants systemic political oppression and organized resistance – such that both self- and meta-narratives are clearly historicized as a formal recursivity draws apartheid into the experience of those who have succeeded its official end.

Fikile takes up her narration in a fiercely expectant mood that markedly contrasts Ofilwe’s; we leave Fikile similarly shaken but we travel different routes to do so, sensing strikingly differentiated learning processes within their overlapping cityscapes. The morning begins with a series of minor pains that Fikile welcomes as necessary: “The blinking of the [clock radio’s] electronic red numerals hurts my eyes,” she states, “but I squint hard to stop them from closing. The pain will harden and make them stronger” (Matlwa 99). Becoming acquainted with Fikile means navigating a contradictory mix of awe for her strength, empathy for her actions, and disquiet about her determined alignment with neoliberalism’s promise of material success in exchange for hard work. “Yes, I have been weak and lazy of late,” Fikile relates in a confessional tone, “feeling tired and crying into my pillow. But all that has come to an end and I am officially back in the game” (110). For Fikile, “[w]aking up is always a thrilling time . . . because it presents a new and fresh chance at life filled with endless possibilities” (109). Expressed early in the day of narration, alongside painful stories of ongoing battles, Fikile’s

remarkable motivation makes clear some of the ways in which an economics-driven logic offers her a (limited and temporary) source of strength that helps galvanize personal autonomy despite potentially overwhelming structural barriers.

What Fikile does own, in fact, is a plan: “Project Infinity” (109). Because she believes that “[o]nly infants and senile people really need sleep,” then “[s]leep is an unnecessary luxury” where one “lose[s] all control” and “waste[s] precious hours that may have been used to plan great things and make purposeful strides towards [one’s] dreams” (109). As derisive as Fikile is about not living in a hard-edged reality – like Uncle, she believes, who “*had messed up his own life*” (101) and “*should be bloody grateful*” (109) to be used as a Black Economic Empowerment (BEE) pawn – her struggle, interestingly, relies on the imaginative work of aspirational mapping. Her dream becomes her companion and guide, compelling her to “push the boundaries, be creative, stretch [her] resources and take the road less travelled to get what [she] want[s]” (119). And what Fikile wants, ironically, is not unlike Ofilwe’s whitewashed dreams of belonging except that Fikile’s desires rest on a resolute investment in the model of self-reliance. Regarding Uncle’s home where she lives, for example, Fikile states:

[P]erhaps it is for the better that the conditions in this dump never improve. They can serve as a constant reminder to me of what I do not want to be: black, dirty and poor. This bucket can be a daily motivator for me to keep me working towards where I will someday be: white, rich and happy. You see, that’s the difference between Uncle and me and in fact between me and most of the hopeless,

shortsighted people in Mphe Batho. I know what I want in life and am prepared to do anything in my power to get it. (118)

Fikile's alignment of "dirty and poor" with blackness to define her goal of happy white wealth echoes the apartheid-shaped thinking that characterizes much of Fikile's self presentation; it also, however, dovetails with Posel's analysis of consumption as itself historically racialized to suggest that Fikile's "whiteache"⁸⁵ is more complicated than simply an expression of internalized racism. Precisely because Fikile so doggedly positions herself as upwardly mobile, determined to be the post-racial neoliberal subject she imagines can de-structure and re-make an individual life, she engages with a hostile world armed with a plan as her sole weapon: "I have not a cent in the bank nor very much of an education," she states, "but a heart so heavy with ambition that it may just fall to the depths of my stomach if Project Infinity is not realized" (109–110). Fikile lists each item that she has carefully accumulated and deposited in her precious box as a personalized investment scheme – "[m]y magazines, . . . my contact lens case, . . . dainty little emerald-green coloured lenses, . . . [m]y Lemon Light skin-lightener cream, my sunscreen, my eyeliner, mascara, eye-shadow, blush, eyelash-straightener and the pieces of caramel-blond hair extension" – to reassure her of progress and provide "hard evidence of how much closer [she is] to Project Infinity" (117, 118).

In part, Fikile's determined self-construction illustrates Sarah Nuttall's claim that, for racialized youth post-apartheid,

⁸⁵ Tlhalo Radithalo adopts this term from Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o's *The Wizard of the Crow* (2006) in his analysis of *Coconut*.

[t]he conception of the body as a work of art, an investment in the body's special presence and powers, . . . marks Y culture [wherein s]elfhood and subjectivity are presented less as inscriptions of broader institutional and political forces than as an increased self-consciousness about the fashioning of human identity as a manipulable, artful process. (Nuttall 108–109)

Yet this youth's ambition is fuelled by a complicated self-loathing that is signaled by her white-centered beauty products but that long pre-dates Project Infinity, shifting her self-styling away from the realm of black-targeted hybrid Y/*loxion kulcha*⁸⁶ that interests Nuttall. Y culture's resistant register in positively reclaiming *loxion kulcha* is what distinguishes Fikile most sharply from an actually upwardly mobile youth demographic, more clearly reflected in Tshepo's or Ayanda's political and socio-economic positioning than her own. Fikile's classed relationship to conceptions of race, we learn, dates back to primary school; in Fikile's memory of a rather ordinary scene, her teacher asks the students what they each want to be when they grow up. Fikile's definite response, however, surprises:

"White, Teacher Zola. I want to be white."

"You so stupid, Fikile, don't you know you going to be as black as dirt for the rest of your life! Tell her Mrs. Zola . . ."

⁸⁶ Nuttall explains that "Y culture, also known as *loxion kulcha*. . . , is an emergent youth culture in Johannesburg which moves across various media forms. It articulates the clear remaking of the black body; its repositioning by the first post-apartheid generation. More specifically, it signals the supersession of an earlier era's resistance politics by an alternative politics of style and accessorisation, while simultaneously gesturing, in various ways, toward the past. . . 'Loxion' is an SMS-type contraction of the word 'location', a synonym for 'township'; 'Kulcha' is an ironic deformation of the word 'culture'. The brand name invokes a remixing: an infusion of black township culture, long kept at a violent remove from the urban centre, into the heart of the (once-white) city itself" (Nuttall 108, 112).

“Shut up, Ntombana. Mrs. Zola said we can grow up to be anything our hearts desire. . . . I will be white if I want to be white. I don’t care what anybody thinks.”

“But why would you want to do that, dear?”

“Because it’s better.”

“What makes you think that, Fikile?”

“Everything.” (Matlwa 135–136)

Far from self-styling an oppositional blackness, Fikile’s defiant aspiration to “be white” sets her at a remove from the Tshepos in a post-apartheid BEE landscape, yet that aspiration, I argue, is less a revocation of blackness than it is an embrace of whiteness as an orientation towards privilege and material gain in a barely post-apartheid South Africa. While Fikile’s turn underscores the limited, classed access to a newly stylized black youth culture for black youth, it also emphasizes the operation of whiteness as ideology such that Fikile consumes the ideas in the hopes of obtaining the status to which those ideas adhere. In effect, Fikile’s internal conflicts around race reflect individual experience with “the limits of political power in a country characterized by centuries of social and economic inequality and racial domination” that has so challenged the “revolutionary seizure of power” envisioned in “the militant language of national liberation” (Robins 184).

Fikile’s express disgust at her own racialization is further complicated by a concurrent experiential consistency: whereas Ofilwe has generally experienced privilege as a racialized child in a newly middle class family, Fikile has primarily witnessed privilege as the domain of white ‘Others.’ For Hlongwane, “the black parents in the novel

are largely absent parents and the teachers are also problematic” (Hlongwane 20), and for Fikile, making sense of a racialized context does feel like an independent project. Her own family history forms concentric circles around the violent dependencies she so fervently wishes to supersede by realizing her precious self-reliance, and her present goals are closed to the critical interrogation that could trouble her self-analysis. Uncle, whom Fikile interprets as having “*messed up all the grand opportunities he once had to be something*” and is now simply unable to appreciate that “*some kind white people had been nice enough to give him a job*” (Matlwa 101), plays a key role in exemplifying the dependencies Fikile wishes to leave behind. Because she knows Uncle as having grown up amongst the white Kinsley children – employers of Uncle’s mother, Fikile’s Gogo – and having gained entry into the University of Cape Town’s prestigious medical school only to be sent home after one semester, she reads him as embodying failed opportunities. When a young, confused Fikile is later subjected to Uncle’s ongoing sexual abuse while under his care, those perceived failings combine with his unspoken violence to cement Fikile’s revulsion for everything Uncle represents. Uncle “*never hit [Fikile] like [her] mother used to*” (114) and a solitary Fikile must learn on her own that “*when Uncle had that sorry, pathetic look on his face*” (112) and would “*take [her] little hand and gently slip it into the loose tracksuit pants he wore at night*” r that she was being violated, something she comes to understand only later, “*in grade seven, after those Childline Ousies had come to our school and talked to us about rape*” (115). Even without language for her abuse, however, Fikile “*hated that Uncle was such a sorry and pathetic and weak man and hated even more that [she] was the only one who was able to comfort*

him” (114). Her critical awareness emerges as links in a chain that combine to comment on power and disempowerment in ways she does not entirely intend or direct. Fikile remembers Uncle’s return from university, for example, as “*the end of it, the end of Uncle the smart one, the one who spoke the white man’s language, the one who would save us*” (126); without having experienced the differential access that racialization has long created in South African institutions, Fikile cannot comprehend how gaining entry into the ‘white world’ might not be the great equalizer. Being subject to the violent consequences of Uncle’s socio-symbolic emasculation without any accessible protection of her own, moreover, further solidifies Fikile’s response that ‘white is better’ in a context formed by “the most comprehensive racist regime...the world has ever seen” (Fredrickson 133, qtd. in Erasmus 171). Returning to her own childhood memories, Fikile recounts experiences with her grandmother that prompt her to question the feasibility of ‘equality’ – rather than cultivate a sense of racial injustice – and wonder if Gogo’s ceaseless prayers for liberation were short-sighted, if “*perhaps God made some races superior, as an example for other races to follow*” (Matlwa 157). Her interpellated devaluation of blackness is only reinforced through these early experiences that are shaped by the systemic racism limiting her grandmother’s actions and remaining insufficiently explained. Fikile remembers, for example, accompanying Gogo to work during school holidays in the Kinsley household where Fikile would have to help bake cupcakes for the white children knowing Gogo could never bake for her, and help walk the family’s dog who frightened her and made Gogo sick (162–164). Being so close to patently differential treatment in a context that strips her grandmother’s power to resist

teaches the child Fikile where easy luxury lies. It also teaches Fikile to feel less important than “*madam’s children*” (164) whom she believes Gogo loves more, conscious only that her own desires feel out of reach and ignored.

In the present moment of her narrative, Fikile’s externalized disgust – towards the Tlous as customers and Ayanda as a colleague – expresses a general disgust towards the newly privileged black classes in South Africa. Ayanda, to Fikile, “*had lived the life that everybody dreamed of*” (153) by attending white schools and living in white neighbourhoods; the Tlous are similarly cast as “*new money*,” people who “*sicken. . . [Fikile and] remind [her] of everything [she] do[es] not want to be*” (174). Whereas the imagined bio that Fikile delivers to her preferred Silver Spoon customers – the story of “*Fiks Twala . . . [who] grew up in white environments . . . [and] lived in England for a while . . . [but] couldn’t stand the weather*” (146) – is also one of privilege, it is a back story cobbled out of details gleaned from white customers’ lives and, most importantly, intends to set Fikile apart from “*other black South Africans [to whom she feels she] never could relate*” (146). Being born into the inherited privilege of “the Silver Spoon world” (180) is as desirable to Fikile as new wealth is detested. The irony of her own impossible position within these tense contestations, however, is aggressively sidelined in her determination to meet her goals. And so, indicative of the foundational imaginative work in Fikile’s fight for a different “*[e]verything*” (136), Fikile’s combined sense of the power that whiteness represents and the access to power that white-based consumerism promises remains forcibly outside her critical scope.

The loss, then, that Fikile comes to experience results from a narrowing of the gap between fixed beliefs and self-reflection, and loosely parallels Ofilwe's by hinging on a distressed self-concept. Before and after the core primary school memory – of declaring whiteness as her career goal – Fikile narrates different segments of her present tense journey to work in ways that characterize her determined sense of self-as-separate. She speaks disparagingly of her fellow passengers, for example, noting that the “train trip into the suburbs is always the hardest part of [her] day to get through” due to the “offensive body odours” of “labourers’ sweat and . . . urine and soaked sanitary towels that should have been changed days ago” (134). Fikile’s interpretations of each encounter resound with the racist and classist assumptions that undergird her secure, if problematic, sense of self that adopts a position she emulates but cannot occupy. Objectifying those around her as “these people” (134), Fikile further distances herself by mimicking apartheid logic, exclaiming: “Black people! Why must they always be so damn destructive? And to think, they have never invented a thing in their squalid lives and yet they insist on destroying the little we have. Just look at how scummy the townships are. Have you ever seen a white suburb looking so despicable?” (135). In effect, Fikile’s commute provides the moving site for imagining herself otherwise as she temporarily but repeatedly transitions between worlds. Conceiving of her travels as preparation for an eventual permanent departure, Fikile is careful to continually reassert her contradistinction from the surrounding people and landscape. “*I am not one of you*” (140) she itches to tell the boys selling newspapers: “Some day will see me drive past here in a sleek air-conditioned car, and I will roll up my windows if you try to come near me, because *I am not one of you*. You are poor and black

and I am rich and brown” (140). Yet these same travel passages also challenge Fikile’s internal narrative of certitude by integrating the reactions of those she scorns in the present moment, set alongside but liberated from her filter of memory. Appearing prior to the primary school memory, for example, Fikile’s encounter with a man on the train elicits disgusted suspicion in her but offended surprise in him. First rejecting the man’s efforts at conversation and reacting angrily to his taunt – that she is “[one of] those *abo mabhebeza* who are always wishing to be something that they ain’t never gonna be” (133) – Fikile proceeds to produce one of the many points of conversation between Ofilwe’s narration and her own. She inverts Ofilwe’s debasing exchange with Stuart Simons by charging her fellow passenger with stealing the engraved, designer briefcase in his lap, empty but for an apple that he attempts to offer. Echoing Stuart, Fikile demands: “[A]re *you* one of those thieving black men who just can’t keep their hands off white men’s property? . . . Which poor white man did you steal that pretty little briefcase from, Mr. Fishwick?” (133, 134). The man “stares back. . . in disbelief,” then “sighs, shakes his head and slips the briefcase behind his feet and underneath his seat” (133, 134) silently, tempering Fikile’s righteousness by registering a knowing disappointment.

The remainder of Fikile’s morning commute directly follows the primary school memory and Fikile’s resolute declaration of white desire to express the same attempted superiority that the other passengers refuse. Now in the mini-bus taxi (that Fikile chooses for the phrase “*First Class* spray-painted on his back window” (136)) and frustrated at the sleeping child lying on her shoulder who is “steadily dampening [her] Silver Spoon T-Shirt” (138), Fikile commands the exhausted mother to shift her son: “Is she deaf? Does

she not understand English? ‘Lady, please! This is my seat and that is yours! I paid for this seat and I would like to enjoy it, please’” (138). Not only is this an instance when Fikile uses English pointedly rather than usefully (having just prided herself on overcoming intimidation and “*speaking in the English language even when [she] do[es] not need to*” (137)), it is also a moment in which strangers gather against her. Although the public resistance makes Fikile hold her position more resolutely – as it did in primary school – it also calls attention to the precarity of her dominance:

Everybody in the taxi looks back to see what the commotion is about. . . .
“*Haibo! Mare*, he’s just a child. *Kganthe*, what kind of woman are you?” she says.

I cut a look at her, my eyes now frosted over: “The kind that doesn’t want another woman’s filthy child dirtying her work clothes with sweat and spit. But exactly how do you feature in this, mama?”

“*Mo lebale, mme. O ke satane*,” the nosy fatty whispers, turning back around.

Yes, call me Satan, but next time mind your bloody business, I think to myself. (139)

The fact that Fikile thinks but does not speak her final retort may indicate a degree of self-assuredness that allows her to bypass dispute. Leaving her opponent with the final word, however, suggests that the norms shaping that context contest rather than uphold Fikile’s position. Unlike Ofilwe’s self-derisive retrospection, Fikile appears to lack a critical sense of whiteness at this juncture, and yet the unsolicited community surrounding her helps to throw that presentation into relief.

By the novel's close, we witness sufficient interiorized and vocalized conversation to read Fikile's confidence – both in herself and in the mythic guarantee of success through hard work – as a vital link in her personal armour. That same confidence, however, aligns with a refusal to question her interpolated vision to create a forced front that renders her final state – and loss – so painful. It is during Fikile's literal return home that she faces the possibility of insight through a subsequent train conversation with the man from the morning. Having endured an accumulation of humiliations throughout the day and unjust treatment from her white boss "*Miss Becky*" (119), Fikile is predisposed to vulnerability when she meets the same "V&CX" (187) briefcase owner whom she had antagonized earlier. Notably, the man is friendly despite their morning encounter and Fikile, commenting on his daughter, betrays a willingness to engage his friendliness. Fikile learns that the "pretty" young girl's name is Palesa, finds the man's laughter "contagious," and feels that she "must apologize" for her earlier behavior but uncharacteristically admits to feeling "ashamed" and "not know[ing] how" (185, 186). When the man begins his final story Fikile goes so far as to "turn around and face him, like people do when they speak to each other" (187), remarking on his kindness. Yet these modes of tentatively opening up and suspending her suspicion leave Fikile temporarily defenseless against the unintended – and unintentionally productive – betrayal that follows. Fikile enters into the dialogue on an assumption of safety, relaxing into a comfortable space where "for some reason it's just so good to listen to him speak" (188); but she shifts to feeling her worldview threatened when the man clarifies the intent of his tale: "'I've been thinking of home-schooling Palesa,'" he explains. "'She refuses to

speak a word of Xhosa and I know it is the influence of that school’” (188). Fikile’s ensuing destabilization is predicated less on the experience of school itself, as it is for Ofilwe, than on pressures that school-based language questions place on her plan for self-empowerment. Having equated “*speaking in the English language even when [she does] not need to*” with definitively overcoming all forms of intimidation (137), Fikile is unsympathetic to the man’s fears for his daughter in a school that denigrates their language and all that coheres around it and his protective gesture that Ofilwe’s experience has shown to be warranted. Yet Fikile is visibly affected by this conversation that is, notably, not subject to her usual censure. Although Fikile is upset by the man’s words, she merely receives them in silence and responds with flight:

“Standing at the edge of that playground, I watched little spots of amber and auburn become less of what Africa dreamed of and more of what Europe thought we ought to be. Standing at the edge of that playground I saw tiny pieces of America, born on African soil. I saw a dark-skinned people refusing to be associated with the red soil, the mud huts and the glistening stone beads that they once loved.”

The train suddenly comes to a stop as he finishes that last sentence. Mphe Batho Station, the end of the line. We have finally arrived. I have never been so glad to be back. I pick up my bags and quickly get out. I do not say a word to the man, not even goodbye, not even to the little girl. No, I get out and walk home as fast as I can. (189–190)

Fikile's deliberate non-engagement in this closing scene suggests the possibility for a different kind of engagement through an altered self-consideration. Resembling her complicated rejection of a racialized self, Fikile's complicated relief upon 'arrival' sheds a changed light on the contours of her escape plan. "Home" signifies as an unsafe and tenuous site of escape throughout the novel but, at final mention, becomes an almost welcome destination. Concurrently, the failed conversation that follows from a hesitant attempt at trust after experiencing multiple violent abandonments – by her mother, who *"slit her wrists and let her blood soak through to [Fikile's] skin as [Fikile] slept against the hollow of her stomach"* (114) and Uncle, her *"only real family"* (115) left but who proves devastatingly cruel – compounds Fikile's experience of loss by forcing her to see the world not as she wills it to be. In this way, Fikile helps illustrate Hlongwane's argument that, "[i]n the postapartheid context the act of assuming agency and 'becoming' a new person rather than the confined object of apartheid is complicated by the paucity of signs that point to that freedom" but that there may be, "for black South Africans in particular, a tortured identity [needing recognition] as such so that it can be mourned and recovered in different ways" (Hlongwane 15). In the present tense of Fikile's closing remarks, it is home that gestures towards potential for situating "a tortured identity" alongside possibilities for mourning and recovery. That site of Fikile's return holds the possibility for signifying familiar if not protective – or empowering – refuge without needing to produce self-knowledge through the Silver Spoon's world.

II.iii *Monkey Beach*: Reading Loss Sideways

Lisamarie's struggles in *Monkey Beach* move us away from *Coconut*'s psychic loss, but they converge at sites of negotiated knowledges in Ofilwe's and Fikile's narratives that force each protagonist to rearticulate her self-understanding. The loss in *Monkey Beach* is primarily related to death and pivots on the disappearance of Jimmy Hill: seventeen year old Olympic hopeful from Kitamaat, Haisla territory, British Columbia and younger brother to Lisamarie. Ofilwe and Fikile also suffer human loss: Ofilwe overhears conversations about divorce that rupture her sense of familial security, and she becomes estranged from childhood friends; Fikile's experience is shaped by an absentee father, a deceased mother, and abused bodily integrity. Yet Lisa's familial losses – of her Uncle Mick, her Ma-ma-oo, and possibly her brother – more consciously structure her narrative process. Moreover, the resultant shifts in Lisa's self concept are arguably more empowering and potentially less painful than either Ofilwe's or Fikile's even as her immediate circumstance is more emotive. The difficult co-relation between loss and empowerment that emerges in Lisa's narrated experience, however, resonates strongly with Matlwa's text by circling ever more closely around non-colonial – in this case Haisla – modes of making meaning.

Spending time with Robinson's novel alongside Matlwa's with an eye on conversation means shifting the critical voices addressed earlier to a still audible but backgrounded soundscape. It also means moving slowly through the intricate terrains of textual detail that generate the micro-methodology of comparative work described by Allen and Te Punga Somerville. Taken together, these moves to listen intently and puzzle

through the texts' modes of making sense through – and of – conversation help sketch out meanings that take shape laterally. This sense of looking sideways at the focus of analysis resonates with the “indirect discourse” (Roppolo 316) that Kimberley Roppolo – literary scholar of Choctaw, Creek, and Cherokee descent and contributor to *Reasoning Together* – theorizes as central to Indigenous modes of knowledge production. According to Roppolo, stories impart knowledge through indirect discourse, which she defines as “[a] common Native American speech phenomenon in which the speaker avoids directly stating something to the listener or listeners, instead implying meaning and expecting those hearing to make meaning for themselves” (323, ftnt. 18).⁸⁷ Lee Maracle makes a similar claim in her preface to *Sojourner's Truth and Other Stories* (1990). By emphasizing the listener/reader's actively participatory role in finding a heuristic way around a story, Maracle demands acknowledgement of the weight borne by stories and their carriers, pointing to the potentiality of narrative's social function. She writes:

The listeners are drawn into the dilemma and are expected at some point in their lives to actively work themselves out of it Our stories merely pose the dilemma. . . . As listener/reader, you become the trickster, the architect of great social transformation at whatever level you choose” (Maracle, “Preface” 12, 13).

This participatory imperative in engaged storytelling also circles us back to the South African archive and its position within broader African cultural productions that use antiphony, or call and response, as part of an applied aesthetic apparatus. Though

⁸⁷ I initially read this passage in Kristina [Fagan] Bidwell's article, “Weesageechak Meets the Weetigo: Storytelling, Humour, and Trauma in the Fiction of Richard Van Camp, Tomson Highway, and Eden Robinson” (pg. 207). Because Bidwell cites an unpublished version of Roppolo's chapter, however, the published details have been used here instead.

referencing African American literature, Maggie Sale argues that “call-and-response patterns provide a basic model that depends and thrives upon audience performance and improvisation, which work together to ensure that the art will be meaningful or functional to the community” (Sale 41). Collectively, these shared emphases on storytelling’s pedagogical and socio-cultural richness overlap with my reading of a conversational imperative that gives shape – in Matlwa and Robinson – to expressions of loss.

When we approach the opening pages of *Monkey Beach* in this interpretive posture⁸⁸ of reading closely and sensing sideways, we find that these shapes – of loss – signify through conversations that are at once contained in the text’s beginning and extend across the narrative to the end. An assemblage of references introduces the text and resurfaces meaningfully throughout, but gains particular import when circling back from the closing pages: crows, language, voices, knowledges, conversations, wakefulness, water, and absence. The opening encounter, first, reads as follows:

Six crows sit in our greengage tree. Half-awake, I hear them speak to me in
Haisla.

La’es, they say. *La’es*, *la’es*.

I push myself out of bed and go to the open window, but they launch
themselves upward, cawing. Morning light slants over the mountains behind the
reserve. A breeze coming down the channel makes my curtains flap limply.

Ripples sparkle in the shallows as a seal bobs its dark head.

⁸⁸ My sense of “interpretive postures” borrows from Daniel Coleman’s discussion of reading postures, where he argues that a critical scholarly practice grounded in humility can shape discerning readers who learn to navigate between the hermeneutical poles Paul Ricoeur characterizes as either affirmative or suspicious to engage texts, instead, with a potentially countercultural hermeneutics of discernment (see Coleman, *In Bed with the Word* 32, 61–62).

La'es – Go down to the bottom of the ocean. The word means something else, but I can't remember what. I had too much coffee last night after the Coast Guard called with the news about Jimmy. (Robinson, *Monkey Beach* 1–2)

This first reported communication introduces a conversation between Lisa and several crows, Jimmy's and others crows, that gets expressed in fits and starts throughout the novel. As such, the initial interaction also positions conversation as a mechanism operating between a variety of human and non-human life-worlds. Lisa hears the crows "speak" to her at what appear to be random moments, and though an attentive Lisa feels the moments to be quite meaningful her responses remain mute and inert until her final journey to find Jimmy. Her concerted movement through attempted discovery reads as an equally tentative response to the crows' message. "*La'es*," Lisa hears them saying, although at this early point in the narrative she remains skeptical of what she senses are guiding prompts, and unsure of her interpretive capacities: "I used to think that if I could talk to the spirit world, I'd get some answers," Lisa relates. "Ha bloody ha. I wish the dead would just come out and say what they mean instead of being so passive-aggressive about the whole thing" (17). That the crows are understood as making utterances in Haisla is particularly significant alongside Lisa's self-conscious lack of Haisla knowledge broadly. Her paternal grandmother, Ma-ma-oo, provides Haisla instruction in her own fits and starts that Lisa develops and partially shares with her reader – illustrated by her opening translation of *la'es* that indirectly allows the reader to witness her ongoing working through of epistemologies and experiences – but Lisa often conveys frustration with her eclipsed literacy. Ma-ma-oo is Lisa's main source for "the old stories" – that Ma-

ma-oo explains are “less raunchy than they used to be” – but Lisa is also told that, “to really understand the old stories, . . . you had to speak Haisla” (211). As Lisa recounts, “[s]he would tell me a new Haisla word a day, and I’d memorize it. But, I thought dejectedly, even at one word a day, that was only 365 words a year, so I’d be an old woman by the time I could put sentences together” (211). Ofilwe’s parallel anxiety about language loss similarly reflects on conversational work as Ofilwe also struggles to utilize the limited resources around her to learn one word of Sepedi at a time: “Sitting here silently at the back [of the room as her parents argue], listening to them ask me questions they answer for me, I use their debates to collect words for my Sepedi vocabulary list” (Matlwa 69).⁸⁹ In this opening passage, the crows, the presence of Haisla, and the process of exchange – even without Lisa’s overt involvement – combine to anticipate Lisa’s difficult relation with knowledges that gain legibility outside Euro-Canadian frames as recursive trajectories draw lateral material into view.

Alongside her engagement with the crows, Lisa long experiences responsibility-laden dreams that loosely correspond with a “little man’s visits” (Robinson, *Monkey Beach* 26) and invoke another key site of contested knowledges:

Now that I think back, the pattern of the little man’s visits seems unwelcomely obvious, but at the time, his arrivals and departures had no meaning. As I grew older, he became a variation of the monster under the bed or the thing in the closet, a nightmare that faded with morning. He liked to sit on the top of my dresser when he came to visit, and he had a shock of bright red hair which stood

⁸⁹ For more exploration of Ofilwe’s difficult attempts to learn Sepedi, see Matlwa pp. 57-61 and 69-70.

up in messy, tangled puffs that he sometimes hid under a black top hat. When he was in a mean mood, he did a jerky little dance and pretended to poke at my eyes.

The night before the hawks came, he dropped his head and blew me sad kisses that sparkled silver and gold in the dark and fell as soft as confetti. (27)

Lisa learns to read these experiences as premonitions, each warning of an impending death (the hawks, for example, reference the day the Hills' chicks were all killed). Yet she continually struggles with articulating those experiences to the adults around her who discourage non-Euro-Canadian modes of interpretation. Although Lisa "[s]ometimes . . . want[s] to share [her] peculiar dreams with [her father]" (20), and did – as a child – try telling her more receptive Uncle Mick about the ghosts in her life (106–107), she generally is held back by the loud unreceptivity that she has learned to expect: "when I bring [the dreams] up, [Dad] looks at me like I've taken off my shirt and danced topless in front of him" (20). The novel's opening pages are again instructive here, establishing this tension through Lisa's interrupted conversation with her father about the crows:

"Did you hear the crows earlier?" I say. When he doesn't answer, I find myself babbling. "They were talking to me. They said *la'es*. It's probably –"

"Clearly a sign, Lisa," my mother has come up behind me and grips my shoulders, "that you need Prozac." She steers me to a chair and pushes me down.

(3)

The proposed psychotropic response to what the novel suggests are experiences embedded within Haisla cosmologies is itself recurring, and is notable here as the first spoken conversation – a multivalent failure – in the novel. Lisa's mother steers Lisa both

physically and mentally, if only residually; her sardonic tone and pathologizing language get echoed in Lisa's later complaint about passive-aggressivity amongst the dead (17), for example, in direct contrast to Ma-ma-oo's seriousness about what she calls Lisa's dangerous gift (371). Read humorously, Lisa's comment implies a wry knowingness of Ropplo's "indirect discourse" that leaves room for appreciating something of the difficult work demanded by stories and their tellers. Read otherwise, however, her comment flags the scope of the epistemological gaps that Lisa struggles to make her own sense of within a social structure that seeks to support, but cannot attend to, her needs.

The question of responsibility intensifies Lisa's difficult need to reconcile her knowledges, emergent and tenuous, with the work that each entails. Feeling unable to hear and respond adequately, Lisa holds herself responsible for the loss of loved ones – despite her proximity to Ma-ma-oo's teachings – and consequently experiences a sense of powerless that marks the interpretive stakes at play. To further complicate those stakes, Lisa learns from Ma-ma-oo part way through the novel – soon after Mick's death – that her mother shares her gift. Although Lisa experiences her responsibility alone and Gladys ostensibly dismisses Lisa's sense of things, Gladys also knows differently:

“Ah, you have the gift, then. Just like your mother. Didn't she tell you about it?”

“What gift?”

“Your mother's side of the family has it strong. Do you know the future sometimes? Do you get hunches?”

“Predictions? From the little man. He comes, then something bad happens.”

She eased herself down onto a stump, then patted the space beside her.

“Here, sit.” She frowned. “Your mother never said anything?”

“She just said he was a dream.”

“Hmmp,” she grunted. “He’s a guide, but not a reliable one. Never trust the spirit world too much. They think different from the living.” (153)

We do know that Lisa grapples with the weight of her portentous encounters, however, and tries to attend to their unreliable meanings even without her mother’s support. Lisa veers from a hyper vigilance that she uses to protect Jimmy upon mistakenly reading the little man’s visit (that, instead, signals the death of her cat Alexis) (222–230) to a resigned unresponsiveness, ironically appropriate to the psychiatry in which she feigns belief, prior to Ma-ma-oo’s fatal fire (266–268, 272–275, 289–293). And we hear at various points that Lisa dreamt of Jimmy at Monkey Beach the night of his possible drowning (6–7, 17, 137), though her receipt of warning is buried in the urgent action of going to find him. Lisa does not, in other words, listen directly to or know how to interpret the premonitions she receives, and she wants to believe her mother – reducing the little man to “just a dream” – but is not allowed that comfort. Because Lisa’s retelling is loosely sequential, we also know that she has been told of her mother’s gift before being taken to see the “shrink” (272) Ms. Jenkins at the hospital, yet she does not ask her mother about their potentially shared challenge at this stage, or fight further for her family to understand her vivid dreaming and elaborate sleepwalking outside of a bio-medical frame (265–266). While Lisa struggles to both comprehend and align her experiences with what the adults in closest proximity say, and consistently fails to read her messages accurately

(unfamiliar with a frame that could render accuracy meaningful), she also inadvertently wrestles with the implications of Ma-ma-oo's statement: that spirits are unreliable. It seems significant that Ma-ma-oo is Lisa's primary source of Haisla epistemological material although she declares herself sadly under-versed in the stories (154) while Gladys suppresses the stories' knowledge in her treatment of Lisa even as her own grandmother "was a real medicine woman," "the one people went to" to "talk to [their] dead" (154). Unreliability is clearly not the sole domain of the not living. In developing a responsive interpretive strategy, therefore, that functions simultaneously as a mode of narration, Lisa develops her own compelling practice of perceiving sideways and learning slowly. In this process, circling back gains especial significance by allowing the reader to learn alongside Lisa in the text's non-explicitly pedagogical moments.

The novel's opening, again, provides a cogent example that mediates sideways reading and recursivity in expressing the weightiness of loss. It is lateral rather than direct observation that shapes our knowledge of the novel's oxymoronic anchor, Jimmy's disappearance. Lisa narrates her day with a focus on the crows and only an indirect look at the circumstance that permeates her telling: "I had too much coffee last night after the Coast Guard called with the news about Jimmy. People pressed cups and cups of it into my hands" (1–2). Only after Lisa gets out of bed, is reminded of a birthday gift from Jimmy, has her first cigarette, watches the route of her neighbour's cat, notices the sound of a speedboat, and thinks of her recurring ocean dreams does she finally – and still indirectly – state that Jimmy is lost: "Weather reports are all favourable for the area where his seiner went missing. Jimmy's a good swimmer. Everyone says this like a

mantra that will keep him safe” (2). Just as we do not access Jimmy’s possible drowning head on – layered as it is beneath a louder insistence on his exceptional swimming skills that render death by drowning “the worst kind of irony” (40) – we witness Lisa looking only obliquely at the fact of his disappearance at sea, a fact which takes the novel’s duration to harden into itself. One muted way in which this fact gains weight is through repeated reference to its unlikelihood. As a child, for example, Lisa remembers being held back in the public pool’s shallow end while the younger Jimmy literally swam circles around her (47–48): “I never understood Jimmy’s implicit trust that the water would hold him safely” (46). Considered more broadly, Lisa’s ongoing narrative movement between her present tense immediacy and carefully culled memories provides a structural indirectness to her own, and thereby our, consideration of what she nevertheless presents as the central problem.

Thinking through the novel’s opening-closing relationality by attending to the closing, however, brings a more bounded set of linkages back into view. Crows, language, voices, knowledges, conversations, wakefulness, water, and absence were introduced earlier as relational components that flag Lisa’s recursive coming to knowledge; each also infuse the ending with continuances. The crows who instruct Lisa in the opening, for example, are also Jimmy’s good luck (125, 126, 354) and return at the end to perhaps witness, perhaps guide, perhaps simply accompany Lisa through her exhausted battle with the “thing [that] waits in the shadows” (370): “Crows, as far as the eye can see, waiting on the beach. Crows still, as if they were statues. Then they hop out of my way to give me a path to the speedboat” (370). Lisa sees the crows again when she

is suspended under water and is reminded of a certain beauty: “The crows fly in circles above my head. They are silent as they swoop and dive and turn and, finally, I realize that they are dancing” (372). In her final moment back on the beach, however, the crows are gone. The crows’ positivity contrasts with the stark danger enacted by the slinking, slithering thing draining Lisa for its own sustenance – feeding on her in return for access to her dead (360–361, 366, 368–369) – but their significance remains ambiguous. Having willed Lisa to the bottom of the ocean, the crows help lead Lisa to answers about Jimmy but place her in the perilous position of interacting in the “land of the dead” (244) with insufficient knowledge to protect herself, and return. As Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa while “haul[ing her] up” towards the water’s surface: ““You have a dangerous gift It’s like oxasuli. Unless you know how to use it, it will kill you”” (371). Ma-ma-oo’s now vital warning recalls an earlier conversation about oxasuli, not as a figure of speech but as itself a dangerous thing, a “[p]owerful medicine” capable of both keeping ghosts at bay and killing novice users (151). The process of teaching through conversation, in turn, places Lisa’s opening instruction – *la’es* – alongside Ma-ma-oo’s late, worried attempt to convince her that “[w]hen it’s time to go, you go. . . . Nothing you can do or say will change it. We’re where we belong, but you have to go back” (371–372). A spirit-world Mick also speaks with Lisa, taking her to find a Christmas tree with Ba-ba-oo whom Lisa meets for the first time (367–368) and finally sending her off with the Haisla farewell song that a grieving Ma-ma-oo had sung to Mick years earlier: “*Aux’gwalas*, the others are singing. Take care of her yourself, wherever you’re going” (374). A less comforting

exchange – perhaps misconversation, or ruthless negotiation – transpires between Lisa and the parasitic “things in the trees” (360):

“You said you would help me!” I yell, but my voice cracks, and I don’t know if they heard me so I yell again.

They snigger.

I push myself up with my right hand, cradling my [cut] left hand against my chest. The bushes rustle.

“More,” a voice says from the shadows.

I stand. “You tell me where Jimmy is first.” (368–369)

It is a silent Jimmy, however, who provides Lisa the certitude of his passing and sends her back to the living: “He almost wrenches off my arm as he takes hold of my shoulders and shoves. . . . His upturned face glows in the water, pale white, then pale green, then a shrinking grey spot against the dark water, until he is swallowed” (373). Lisa is not afforded the closure possible through speech in this ‘final’ section; she does, however, narrate Josh’s death and the *Queen*’s sinking from Jimmy’s point of view to suggest a way of hearing from Jimmy that is predicated on temporarily coming “too far into this world [of the dead]” (372) and then returning to shore, alone.

Part III Conversation Turned Outwards: Responsive Pedagogy, Generative Genealogy

The multivalent conversations supported by Robinson’s opening/closing frame extend beyond my discussion to pose evocative questions about liminal consciousness, proximities of absence, and the text’s final scene: Lisa alone on the beach, “no longer

cold” (374), hearing a nearby b’gwus in tandem with a distant speedboat.⁹⁰ This third and final section, however, changes directions. It stays with Robinson a while longer before turning back to Matlwa, but it does so in order to bring us around to a starting place – now altered – and a relational focus that has shifted from writer and scholar to reader and text. Like Lisa’s return at the end of *Monkey Beach* to a world we cannot yet know, our return to *Coconut* at the end of this journey leaves us alert to flexibly rooted understandings. Our role as readers also gains especial significance here: by focusing on the work of pedagogy in Robinson’s text and genealogy in Matlwa’s, this section explores ways in which readers are brought into processes of coming to know. In (re)turning, we see the reader more clearly as an active witness to imperfectly empowering engagements. Each character deliberately experiments with ways of knowing that are directed outwards, drawing us into their particular modes of resistance: Lisamarie addresses her reader explicitly as the recipient of her lessons, Ofilwe and Fikile address their readers implicitly as a secondary audience for genealogical storytelling. Yet in all cases, the learning/teaching praxis remains indirect about the knowledge that is produced, underlining the weight of interpretive responsibility – so easily and likely mishandled – assigned to the reader.

⁹⁰ The novel’s ending has attracted considerable critical attention (cf. Andrews, Appleford, and Castricano for example) which reads, in part, as a desire to either resolve the text’s complexities or read those complexities as particularly salient to the way in which Lisa leaves the reader. Although I am also interested in the end, I do not argue that it holds a single, or isolated, interpretive key. I do argue, in contrast, that the ending works with a whole range of narrative indicators that the novel deliberately calls our attention to throughout its development.

III.i *Monkey Beach*: Lisa as Pedagogue

Though offset by her less direct teaching/learning explored earlier, Lisa delivers a series of addresses that set up a relationship with the reader that challenges the feelings of powerlessness accompanying her search for Jimmy. The novel's four dispersed lessons on "contacting the dead" perform what may be Lisa's most palpable pedagogical work and form the core of this discussion. Each passage uses the imperative tense, reads as urgent, and integrates both bodily imagery and everyday references in resolute attempts to impart purportedly impalpable experience.⁹¹ These passages also act as semi-isolated storehouses that provide the space needed to display those pieces of knowledge that Lisa has gathered throughout her time with stories and storytellers, knowledge that culminates in playfully didactic instruction for what becomes her most weighted task. When dislodged from their textual locations and considered in direct proximity with one another, the curated lessons provide their own instructive arc that moves between attentive and altered consciousness; self-critical positioning and interaction; the terror of control lost and the power of names spoken; expansive concentration and open willingness; and the risk of not removing yourself when need be despite temptation. Although the passages combine to create an exceptionally long citation, I am reproducing them here to facilitate closer reflection:

Contacting the dead, lesson one. *Sleep in an altered state of consciousness.*

To fall asleep is to fall into a deep, healing trance. In the spectrum of realities, being awake is on one side and being asleep is way, way on the other. To be

⁹¹ The four passages under discussion appear on pages 139, 179-80, 212, and 366 respectively. All but the fourth passage appear in Part Two which is titled "The Song of Your Breath," interestingly suggestive of creativity, conversation, embodiment, and the ephemeral all at once.

absorbed in a movie, a game, or work is to enter a light trance. Daydreams, prayers or obsessing are heavier trances. Most people enter trances reflexively. *To contact the spirit world, you must control the way you enter this state of being that is somewhere between waking and sleeping. . . .* (139, emphasis added)

Contacting the dead, lesson two. You are in a large mall near closing time. It's Christmas Eve. You turn away for just a moment, look back and your toddler is gone. Even through the noise, even through the confusion of bodies bumping and swearing as you push through the crowd, even as you yell your child's name, you are listening for that one voice to call for you. *Names have power.* This is the fundamental principle of magic everywhere. *Call out the name of a supernatural being, and you will have its instant and undivided attention in the same way that your lost toddler will have yours the second it calls your name. . . .* (179–180, emphasis added)

Contacting the dead, lesson three. *Seeing ghosts is a trick of concentration. You must be able to concentrate on nothing and everything at the same time. You must be both asleep and awake. It should be the only thing on your mind, but you can't want it or expect it to happen. It's very Zen.*

Lie down. Wear loose clothing. Don't play any music. Especially don't play any of that New Age, sounds-of-the-humpback-whale music. Be still. Close your eyes. Keep your arms flat by your side, your legs uncrossed and relaxed. Begin by becoming aware of your breathing. Then your heartbeat. Then the blood moving through your body. Expand. Hear the traffic outside, or the wind in the trees, or

your neighbour taking a shower. Then concentrate on both your body and the outside world. *If you have not contacted the dead after several tries, examine your willingness to speak with them. Any fear, any doubt or disbelief will hinder your efforts. . . .* (212, emphasis added)

Remove yourself from the next sound you hear, the breathing that isn't your own. It glides beneath the bushes like someone's shadow, a creature with no bones, no arms or legs, a rolling, shifting worm-shaped thing that hugs the darkness. *It wraps its pale body around you and feeds. Push yourself away when your vision dims.* Ignore the confused, painful contractions in your chest as your heart trip-hammers to life, struggles to pump blood. *Ignore the tingling sensations and weakness in your arms and legs, which make you want to lie down and never get up.* (366, emphasis added)

Thinking about what these lessons teach in relation to their textual locations, first, draws attention to continued structural conversations between adjoining passages that help elucidate the material of instruction. The sense of gaining perception through lateral attention also returns. Lesson one, for example, begins Lisa's reader-oriented primer course in contacting the dead while also opening the novel's second section ("The Song of Your Breath") that, in turn, launches Lisa's search for Jimmy in the present tense narrative. Lisa's journey follows the arc of her course, ending in "The Land of the Dead" at Monkey Beach; traveling alone, on the ocean, in a small speedboat, preoccupied with premonitions and an unconfirmed death also suggests an experience with the trance-like states that Lisa theorizes in her urging to "control the way you enter this state of being

that is somewhere between waking and sleeping” (139). Lesson two, on the power carried by names and the utmost attention commanded through their use, directly follows Lisa recalling visiting Ba-ba-oo’s grave on his birthday, cutting her hair to mourn Mick, and being alienated by Erica but befriended by Frank, Pooch, and Cheese. The memories of Ba-ba-oo and Mick form part of Lisa’s process of learning to think of the dead as present and attentive in particular ways. The memory of her initiated friendship constitutes a kind of live naming via unexpected recognition: “I was officially cool,” is what Lisa remembers, associating the fact of having new friends who admire the traits that Erica ridicules with moving out of social obscurity, however marginalized those new friends may be (179). Lesson three complements while gently complicating Ma-ma-oo’s preceding epistemological advice – that “to really understand the old stories you had to understand Haisla” (211) – by emphasizing the difference between what Lisa describes and popular/commercial associations with attentiveness, concentration, stillness – “It should be the only thing on your mind, but you can’t want it or expect it to happen. It’s very Zen. . . . Don’t play any music. Especially don’t play any of that New Age, sounds-of-the-humpback-whale music. Be still” (212) – yet asserting her ability to communicate knowledge despite her only partial literacy in its fuller genealogy. Lisa focuses our attention on attentiveness and a kind of self-attendance⁹² that needs developing for successful metaphysical commune: “If you have not contacted the dead after several tries, examine your willingness to speak with them. Any fear, any doubt or disbelief will hinder your efforts” (212). The textual location also intimates that the deceased whom Lisa

⁹² Thanks to Malissa Phung for drawing my attention to the phrase “self-attendance” in relation to Lisa’s pedagogy.

misses so terribly are securely on Lisa's mind; memories of the first Christmas following Mick's death (and a perfunctory search for a tree, fulfilling Mick's favourite task) and of the "first time [Lisa and Ma-ma-oo] took off together" (213) on what would become important journeys for Lisa bookend the lesson. The position of Lisa's final, untitled instruction in the series mirrors the first by closing Part Three ("In Search of the Elusive Sasquatch") and beginning the end of Lisa's search. It follows the last passage in Lisa's narrative recall, the sole passage that openly names the sexual violence originating in residential school and circling back to underwrite Jimmy's disappearance, and Lisa's own self-inflicted physical pain in the present transaction: "The cut I make in my left hand is not deep For a moment, there is no pain, and I wonder if I'm dreaming this, then the cut begins to burn, to sear I turn around in circles, offering this to the things in the trees, waiting. When I'm about to give up . . . , I hear a stealthy slither" (365–366). This lesson that speaks directly to the stakes involved in "contacting the dead" immediately precedes Lisa's own dangerous, but also affirming and revelatory, experiences at Monkey Beach.

In relation to one another and to my own project, the lessons are most interesting in the way they move from preparation (notes on sleep, altered consciousness, and appropriate ways of approaching, entering, and using names – behaving – in this unfamiliar state) through to implementation (physically lie down, "be still," attempt contact) and finally to ways of bringing the work to an end (how to know when to leave; what indications to heed; why timely departure is imperative). They tell their own cumulative story despite the narrative gaps between and in addition to the discrete

wisdom of each. Furthermore, Lisa's presentation of the lessons as a whole, I argue, performs her own experiential empowerment by staging epistemological production in ways that both express valuable knowledge (emergent 'expertise') and determine limits for cross-epistemological access (decides how to shape the knowledge being shared, where to withhold, and why). She is able to articulate navigational modes between states of consciousness and realms of possibility, in part through attempts to render ephemeral experience concrete through a kind of exegesis that shows knowledge of, but is focused away from, Western and Eastern theologies. If read as a metacommentary on her own learning process, Lisa's lessons indicate a willingness to share knowledge that she struggles to obtain experientially without a dedicated instructor like the one she provides in herself. The guides from whom Lisa receives support include each of the important people in her life, as well as the spirits whose messages she labours to apprehend, but none lay out a set of instructions for her to follow in the way that she provides her reader even if her lessons also retain opacity. This begs the question: why engage her reader so generously? What does this process mean for Lisa and how does it function in the larger structure of the novel? To further complicate these considerations: how do we read Lisa's shift away from the reader in the final section ("The Land of the Dead") in what appears to be a space, or stage, in her journeying – amongst the not living – when she is unable to allocate any attention away from her immediate surroundings and interactions. Here, Lisa's present tense address becomes brief and halting – "I wake"; "They snigger"; "I stand" (368, 369) – and read less as attempts to keep her reader with her than an insistence on self-anchoring through self-narration, positioning herself as her own

primary reader. In this way, the lessons' espousal of self-attendance appears to gain priority over the reader's learning; however, I would argue that Lisa's late inward focus continues to invite pedagogical engagement from onlookers should those consumptive gazes work to digest and not merely take in what is offered.

III.ii *Monkey Beach*: Indigenous Knowings, Temporal Mappings

Situating Lisa as a pedagogue also foregrounds the role of Indigenous Knowledges in empowerment processes and calls careful attention to each term. As introduced earlier, scholars such as Waziyatawin Angela Wilson align "Indigenous knowledge recovery" with decolonization in a direct and imperative relationship. Lisa's own knowledge production incorporates a deliberately partial and complex variety of IK recovery into a personalized pedagogical project: we see Lisa experiment with mobilizing and enacting power by articulating a certain command over significant material while refusing the weighted façade of expertise by remaining attentive to her own learning. Yet Lisa's role as teacher/ learner also counters disempowerment broadly as a gendered and classed Indigenous youth in two important ways: first, by re-writing myths of absence; and second, by disrupting racialized assumptions about who holds and imparts knowledge and who receives allegedly valuable, if unsolicited, truth. The myths of absence that Lisa's pedagogy contest relate to the epistemological and intellectual genealogies among Indigenous peoples that colonizing peoples, structures, and relationships have insisted are irrelevant, if not non-existent. In response, the authors of *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective* referenced above work to "present a credible theoretical integrity" (Womack 6) for reading their scholarship that compels all readers to dislodge racist and

sexist prejudice about – most simply – who reasons, and to put in its place an active willingness to (re)learn. Part of this work of contestation requires a reconsideration of who historicizes what, and to what end. According to Womack:

The most consistent and damaging critique against Native intellectuals involves labeling them as “essentialists.” . . . This [opening] chapter [of *Reasoning Together*], however, makes dates, and particular events, a cornerstone of its approach because I want it to be an embodiment of the kind of antiessentialism we hope to uphold in this volume Instead of making universal, overarching assumptions about Indians, we want to delve into particulars. . . . We want to show some kind of commitment to archival sources and other kinds of knowledge rather than atemporal, nonhistorical, clichéd analyses such as, “Well, . . . I think the frybread probably symbolizes” Indeed, many of the essays that follow can be located within particular geographies and historical moments If we were to scrutinize our own theory, the following questions might define it: What date did it occur? Can you locate it on a map? How is jurisdiction exercised in this particular space? . . . I want to create a theoretical milieu that has the sense of a story unfolding, a history of ideas, rather than philosophy in a timeless vacuum. I am interested in the culture of theory, the places it lives in, the people it hangs out with, though I know this will be less than a perfect process. (Womack 6–7)

The story Womack tells in this work is about “Book-Length Native Literary Criticism between 1986 and 1997” (its title) and is “an attempt to say something about [the contributors’] authorial ancestors, even if we can only examine them through one decade”

(8). That set of stories irrevocably contests the epistemic violence executed through the denial of Indigenous intellectual traditions just as Lisa, in a much more modest scope, enacts that contestation by claiming her place as a knowledge practitioner, actively teaching and learning complex processes as part of “a story unfolding” (7).

Womack’s insistence on historical particulars, moreover, finds refracted reflection in the references Lisa uses to anchor her instruction. To help make her lessons legible, Lisa conjures images of a context shaped by commercialism, film and music, popular culture’s branded appropriation of spiritualities, and semi-urban living: “a movie, a game, or work” (Robinson, *Monkey Beach* 139), “a large mall . . . [on] Christmas Eve” (179), “New Age, sounds-of-the-humpback-whale music,” “the traffic outside, or the wind in the trees, or your neighbour taking a shower” (212). Even her description in the final lesson situates the learner by using familiar terms like “shadow” and “worm-shaped” to create a readily accessible visual of an only questionably visible spirit: “It glides beneath the bushes like someone’s shadow, a creature with no bones, no arms or legs, a rolling, shifting worm-shaped thing that hugs the darkness” (366). Though devoid of concrete historical reference, this last lesson joins the others in speaking through the present tense to hold the listener/reader in her/his own immediate moment. While this runs the risk of re-inscribing a universalist interpretation of dehistoricized ‘facts’ through a dislocation from Euro-Canadian time, it also does the opposite by calling attention to the reader’s present, historicized, moment. Lisa responds even more directly to Womack’s call for specificity, however, in a pedagogical passage that precedes these lessons where she purposely traces the etymological history of her geographical location, a history

profoundly shaped by colonialism and multiple manifestations of mis-conversation. Her instruction begins as follows:

Find a map of British Columbia. Point to the middle of the coast. Beneath Alaska, find the Queen Charlotte Islands. Drag your finger across the Hecate Strait to the coast and you should be able to see a large island hugging a coast. This is Princess Royal Island . . . [which] is the western edge of traditional Haisla territory. *Ka-tee-doux Gitk'a'ata*, the Tsimshians of Hartley Bay, live at the mouth of the Douglas Channel and surrounding areas just north of the island. During land claim talks, some of this territory is claimed by both the Haisla and the Tsimshian nations – this is called an overlap and is a sticky topic of discussion. But once you pass the head of the Douglas Channel, you are firmly in Haisla territory.

Early in the nineteenth century, Hudson's Bay traders used Tsimshian guides to show them around, which is when the names began to get confusing. "Kitamaat" is a Tsimshian word that means people of the falling snow, and that was their name for the main Haisla village. So when the Hudson's Bay traders asked their guides, "Hey, what's that village called?" and the Tsimshian guides said, "Oh, that's Kitamaat." The [sic] name got stuck on the official records and the village has been called Kitamaat ever since, even though it really should be called Haisla. . . . To add to the confusion, when Alcan Aluminum moved into the area in the 1950s, it built a "city of the future" for its workers and named it Kitimat too, but spelled it differently. (4–5)

While providing socio-political historical and economic context to her geographic map, this early lesson foregrounds the foundational mis-conversations that shape Haisla territory literally and figuratively. It also situates Lisa's intertextual reference to ways names hold power, so central to her second lesson on contacting the dead, along a particular temporal continuum that disrupts colonial assumptions about who knows: the colonial traders' naming constitutes a misnaming, the knowledge received is not understood. Moreover, by imbricating her geographic, historical, and genealogical space with both the Hudson's Bay Company and Alcan, Lisa intimates the significance that commerce has had in shaping her life, her sets of references, her humour, and her modes of illustration. Finally, this pedagogical opportunity situates Lisa's most personal present moment within the broader geopolitical map that she wrests from a colonial productiveness to function as her own: she ends her cartographic session by locating "the village," "[her family's] house," "[her family's] kitchen," and the area in which "[her] brother is lost" (5).

Reflecting on Womack's evocative call to "scrutinize" the theories we use by considering such things as their dates of use, geographic locations, and juridical influences (Womack 7) also orients us towards the historical moment in which *Monkey Beach* itself was developed. Published in 2000, the novel began as part of Robinson's MA thesis (which became *Traplines*, a collection of short stories published in 1996) but regained attention after graduate school as its own project.⁹³ Given those dates, Robinson would have worked on her novel throughout a period that was significantly punctuated –

⁹³ Robinson talks about this process in *The Sasquatch At Home: Traditional Protocols and Modern Storytelling* (30–31).

if not directly shaped – by the 1996 release of the final *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP),⁹⁴ a government document which took five years to produce and “called for a public investigation into the violence and abuses of residential schools” (Corntassel and Holder 472). Government response to the report’s extensive recommendations, as Cherokee scholar Jeff Corntassel and settler scholar Cindy Holder point out, was neither immediate nor strictly voluntary. By 1998, however, official gestures started appearing: “While the cultural and physical violence of residential schools was well-documented by numerous interviews and sources [in the Royal Commission’s report], the Canadian government did not formally respond to these charges until 1998, shortly after the first 200 residential school survivors’ litigation claims were filed” (472). That delayed but well known response constitutes the Government of Canada’s first official, and still controversial, apology – or “quasi-apology” (473) – to Indigenous peoples, referred to as a “Statement of Reconciliation” that appeared within a more comprehensive address made by then Minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, Jane Stewart, on 7 January 1998. Neither Stewart’s full address – called “Gathering Strength – Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan”⁹⁵ – nor the enclosed “Statement of Reconciliation,” carry legal weight yet both have remained symbolic of settler power consolidation by delimiting the context in which colonial abuse and dispossession can be publically imagined and acknowledged. Corntassel and Holding’s work reminds us that

⁹⁴ This report can be found in full at through Library and Archives Canada at http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/webarchives/20071115053257/http://www.aainc-inac.gc.ca/ch/rcap/sg/sgmm_e.html

⁹⁵ The full address, “Gathering Strength – Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan,” can be found on the Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada website at <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015725/1100100015726>

the government's "policy-based approach [to reconciliation] intended to address Canada's culpability in the creation and administration of residential schools" (473). In other words, by focusing on policy rather than enforceable legislation, or on the terms of governance or sovereignty or restitution, the Government of Canada avoided raising larger, more difficult questions about its continuing colonial relationship with Indigenous peoples; and by paying special attention to the residential school system, and – more specifically – to the abuses enacted therein, it diverted public attention away from those larger questions and implied that the most devastating source of trauma demanding attention was related to individual educators and administrators in individual residential schools, and not to the structural violence that produced the Residential School system. Finally, the 1998 'apology' places abuse in the past and "restructuring the relationship"⁹⁶ to work together in the present and future, basing that potential collaboration on existing state terms that are hostile to sovereignty rights. Keeping those limitations in mind, the 1998 "Statement of Reconciliation" and its associated "action plan" are significant to the context of *Monkey Beach* in that they made discussion about the Residential School system more broadly public; by "earmark[ing] \$350 million in funding to establish the Aboriginal Healing Foundation to support community-based residential school healing initiatives" (473), the action plan also foregrounded Indigenous communities' involvement in addressing the residential school system's legacy. Finally in 2006, "the Canadian parliament approved a final Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, which included the establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission to be

⁹⁶ This is the title of one of the RCAP's sub-sections.

established with a budget of \$60 million over 5 years” (474) – at least indirectly resulting from the 1998 ‘apology.’ As discussed in chapter one, Canada’s TRC is a highly imperfect and limited a tool for substantial socio-political transformation; what remains important here, however, is the way in which residential schools have increasingly become shorthand in popular discourse for colonial trauma, and the chronological mapping of this discourse onto *Monkey Beach*.

While I would not argue that official Government of Canada plans and policies directly shape Robinson’s fiction, I would argue that the violence and trauma of residential schools underwrite the novel’s central event and create an additional, macro, level of loss that permeates the text and shapes Lisa’s response. Because the structural violence of colonialism on one hand and the quotidian violence that characters experience on the other find expression through the shared lens of the residential school, Lisa’s pedagogy carries particularly high stakes as a challenge to the effects of residential school ‘learning’ – abuse and interpolated shame – that weigh on her family and community. And because broader public discourse about colonialism focuses on residential schools in the historical moment of the book’s publication, Lisa’s pedagogical intervention potentiates compelling connections for her readers/listeners to draw. In short, the historical context neither creates nor determines the novel’s resonance but it does add volume to particular aspects of the text. I would argue, further, that the text’s interrelation with its historical moment challenges Roupakia’s claim that Robinson “confounds” the kind of political literary work that Womack calls for (cf. Roupakia 286), and simultaneously points to the complex forms that political work – and support for “cultural

sovereignty” specifically – can take as itself an “indirect discourse” (cf. Roppolo). This historical contextualization also deepens the illustration of Indigenous Knowledge production by staging a response to Euro-Canadian historicization while challenging the disproportionately accredited intellectual weight afforded non-Indigenous teachers and researchers about Indigenous peoples, epistemologies, and histories. As Waziyatawin Angela Wilson argues:

If Indigenous cultural traditions had been deemed to be on equal ground with the colonizer’s traditions, colonialist practices would have been impossible to rationally sustain. . . . [T]heir sense of peace required the muting of Indigenous voices, the blinding of Indigenous worldviews, and the repression of Indigenous resistance. To meet their aims, our capacity for producing knowledge had to be diminished into nonexistence. (W. A. C. Wilson 360)

Though her resistance may seem humble, Lisa’s acts enlarge her knowledge into visible existence to directly oppose the work of colonial education such that assumptions about how knowledge is nurtured and shared can be re-written. Whereas race-, class-, and gender-based hierarchies shape the ways in which colonial forms of instruction rely upon a giver-receiver paradigm, Lisa’s teaching/learning praxis contests a disembodied, decontextualized, vertical didacticism. Rather than position the learner as an empty receptor awaiting knowledge from without and above, Lisa’s work reaffirms the rich ranges of learners’ knowledge and the ongoing interrelatedness of learning with

teaching.⁹⁷ In so doing, Lisa-as-pedagogue comes into compelling proximity with Lee Maracle, for whom the reader of stories holds the responsibility of making those stories mean. It is not the storyteller who ‘instructs’ or guides along a linear trajectory, according to Maracle; it is the reader/listener who works that trajectory out through inference and an accumulated immersion in the metaphors of movement. (“When our orators get up to speak, they move in metaphorical ways. . . . The silent language of physical metaphor is a story in itself” (Maracle, “Preface” 12, 13)). In *Monkey Beach*, Lisa plays the combined roles of reader/listener and storyteller/orator/teacher, attuned to opportunities for interactive learning and participating in knowledge production through story engagement. Her active reaching out in the novel’s explicitly pedagogical passages, together with her demand for readerly involvement in other modes of narration, resonate with Maracle’s depiction of the reader’s pedagogical importance: “In the writing of these stories [*Sojourner’s Truth and Other Stories*] I tried very hard to draw the reader into the centre of the story, in just the same way the listener of our oral stories is drawn in. At the same time the reader must remain central to the working out of the drama of life presented”

⁹⁷ My reading of Lisa’s pedagogical work is shaped by Paulo Freire’s discussion of critical pedagogy as liberatory and transformative due, in part, to its ability to acknowledge, validate, and build upon existent forms of knowledge that participants bring to the learning process, and his concurrent reconfiguration of ‘teacher’ away from positions of presumed ‘expertise’ by emphasizing the interactive praxis that teaching and learning enact together, within both individuals and groups (as Freire first explored in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* [*Pedagogia do Oprimido*], 1968). It is also influenced by Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o’s conception of learning, and language acquisition specifically, as firmly contextualized – politically and socio-economically – such that “[l]anguage, any language, has a dual character: it is both a means of communication and a carrier of culture” (Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o 13). As the latter, language can either enact or combat what Ngũgĩ describes as alienation, a fundamental cognitive tool for the establishment and continuation of colonialism. Ngũgĩ’s now-famous image, following Franz Fanon’s focus on the psychology of colonization, underscores the urgency with which teaching/learning must seek liberation from their colonial moorings: “But the night of the sword and the bullet was followed by the morning of the chalk and the blackboard” (9). While teaching her reader in English, Lisa challenges colonizing uses of the English language by asserting her place as a nascent Indigenous scholar refusing confinement within the disempowered legacy of (colonial language only) residential school.

(“Preface” 13). Because Lisa’s “contacting the dead” lessons similarly require the work of circling around and back through surrounding passages, they relate not only to Maracle’s positioning of the reader-as-trickster struggling to find a transformative way out but also, and again, to Waziyatawin Wilson’s conception of Indigenous Knowledge recovery as empowerment. They each talk about, and simultaneously demand, an immersive thoughtfulness that engages difficult histories.

Though Robinson’s protagonist does not experience any uncomplicated sort of liberation by the end of the novel, she does – I have been arguing – access an important mode of empowerment in applying her learning through teaching. By leveraging a voice that articulates and shares knowledge, teaching allows Lisa to explore nascent forms of self-reflexive power. I have also suggested that Lisa’s less explicitly instructive moments express something of her own vulnerability in ways that allow for her own growth while situating the reader as witness. These processes take on gendered importance, moreover, when read within an Indigenous iteration of feminism that focuses on interrelatedness, living through connections, and circling through critical understandings and both resonates personally for Lisa and gains traction in her broader community. Without explicitly proposing a feminist project or overtly engaging debates about Indigenous feminisms – as outlined, for example, by Cheryl Suzack and Shari M. Huhndorf in their 2010 piece called “Indigenous Feminism: Theorizing the Issues” (discussed in chapter one) – Robinson does foreground Lisa’s gendered construction of empowered self understandings that turn on conversation. Those conversations taking place between speaker and reader, between characters and temporalities, and between the living and the

dead promulgate a form of interrelatedness that proves key to Lisa's emerging sense of things. Enacting a teaching/learning praxis as a young woman coming into understandings about herself in the world is in itself potentially empowering; Lisa's process intensifies that empowerment, however, by meaningfully engaging the reader in the learning that she does through Indigenous Knowledges and thus directly contesting the racist, hierarchical, colonial education regime of residential schools. Without naming particular Indigenous feminist conversations, Robinson centers the role of gender in her characters' knowledge production by outlining the perniciously masculinist and emasculating violence that is experienced in residential schools and re-perpetrated in home communities, and by creating particular spaces for women at different stages in their lives that help attend to the burdens of loss and the shapes of continuance.

Before leaving Lisamarie Hill and her own form of indigenized pedagogy, I would like to pause at a moment in a different text, *The Sasquatch At Home: Traditional Protocols and Modern Storytelling*, where Robinson's feminist practice finds expression through conversation with *Monkey Beach*. As the distinguished 4th annual Henry Kreisel Lecture (2010), Robinson's published talk speaks to a difficult range of audiences, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, academic and otherwise oriented. The lecture circles her relationship with *Monkey Beach* and, like the novel, includes at once thoughtful and playful discussion of community lineages as documented by non-Indigenous researchers and understood through her own experiences; content and expressions of Haisla stories; and medicines, practices, and knowledges, all with attention to "the stickier issues, like Haisla copyright" (Robinson, *The Sasquatch at Home* 31). Robinson opens her talk by

stating her name, followed by her mother's (and then father's) nation, and her maternal grandmother's home. The story that follows tells of naming traditions – and variations on traditions – and *nusa* more broadly: “the traditional way of teaching children Haisla *nuyem*, or protocols” (43, fnt. 4). Uncle Mick's beloved Graceland appears in this story as a personal and historical anchor that – though changed – reaches across Robinson's fiction to her lecture. Here, it is Robinson's mother who substitutes Mick to secure the reference and shape its meaning as an adopted site of pedagogy about holding knowledge in relations:

We spent a week in Memphis, and I got the immersion course in Elvis. But there, at that moment, while Mom was telling me stories about Elvis and his mother, I was glad we'd come here together. You should not go to Graceland without an Elvis fan. It's like Christmas without kids – you lose that sense of wonder. . . . More importantly, as we walked slowly through the house and she touched the walls, everything had a story, a history. In each story was everything she valued and loved and wanted me to remember and carry with me.

This is nusa. (11–12)

This passage allows us to accompany Robinson's learning about, and through, *nusa*; the scene itself, moreover, finds itself “commemorate[d] . . . in *Monkey Beach* where [Mick] took off for Graceland when he found out Elvis died” (43, fnt. 6). Interestingly, the fictionalized adaptation of this episode also works through a mother-daughter relationship where it is a not-entirely-sympathetic Gladys who must explain to Lisa why Mick can suddenly no longer babysit, and why he temporarily disappears: “She slammed her seat

belt in and gave the ignition a yank. ‘The world has come to an end,’ she said very dryly. ‘Elvis is dead’” (*Monkey Beach* 63). By signaling nusa without fully working out its methodological parameters, and by meaningfully shifting one experience to another location without directly transcribing its significance, Robinson’s texts invoke LaRocque’s argument about the necessary changeability of ‘tradition’ with which Indigenous women must engage. LaRocque argues that “Native women [are] caught within the burdens and contradictions of colonial history” and are “asked to confront some of [their] own traditions at a time when there seems to be a great need for a recall of traditions to help [them] retain [their] identities” (LaRocque, “The Colonization of a Native Woman Scholar” 14). But LaRocque is clear that “there is no choice – as women we must be circumspect in our recall of tradition [and remain] challenged to change, create, and embrace ‘traditions’ consistent with contemporary and international human rights standards” (“The Colonization of a Native Woman Scholar” 14). Returning us to questions of human rights, LaRocque’s comments juxtapose the learning enacted through tradition with the learning required of traditions’ actors as bound up with life learning and the contextualized bildungsroman that opened this chapter’s discussion. The decolonizing knowledge production that Robinson and her protagonist enact, experienced through and preserved within matrilineal relationships, tells yet another story in the layers of Robinson’s text about Indigenous feminist work, partially concealed, that holds loss at a productive remove from disempowerment.

III.iii *Coconut*: Genealogical Praxes

In moving from Robinson and Lisamarie back to Matlwa, Ofilwe, and Fikile to think through one last question – how expressions of gendered empowerment, or contestations to gendered disempowerment take shape in a highly racialized post-transitional moment – I am reminded of Allen’s statement about “comparative methodologies for Indigenous literary studies” being “all about the power of juxtaposition to help us to see and understand differently” (Te Punga Somerville and Allen 15). Demonstrating Ahmed’s claim that “[i]mproper juxtapositions” (Ahmed, Tuori, and Peltonen 263)⁹⁸ can be productive, Allen and Te Punga Somerville perform juxtapositions through their critical conversations that draw attention to the uneasy co-existence of different knowledge systems within as well as between texts. In staging this conversation between Robinson and Matlwa, I have followed a different route, leveraging my own privileged though contentious position as researcher – experientially adjacent to but still removed from both contexts – to play a part in bringing juxtapositions into view and reflecting on the possibilities that emerge. Whereas Robinson’s Lisamarie, I have argued, responds to her deeply textured experiences of loss in part by taking on an empowering role as a critical pedagogue, Matlwa’s Ofilwe and Fikile respond by engaging genealogy as story. Working with juxtaposition to see and understand contextualized losses differently also helps us see responses linked to coming into knowledge differently, leading us through some final considerations of situatedness, temporality, and relationality that locate genealogical thinking as generative for *Coconut*’s protagonists.

⁹⁸ This Sara Ahmed passage was discussed in chapter one.

Craig Womack's questions that were asked of Robinson – "What date did [the theory] occur? Can you locate it on a map? How is jurisdiction exercised in this particular space?" (Womack 7) – also help frame the context for Matlwa in ways that signal the weight of presentist thinking on Ofilwe's and Fikile's generation. Part of reading *Coconut* as post-transitional, set after the euphoric moment of 1994 and in the wake of the TRC,⁹⁹ means attending to what it might mean to come of age in an unprecedented national moment when living through hypothesized changes starts to take shape. Without having experienced the anti-apartheid struggle or been old enough to grasp its most foregrounded versions, Matlwa's protagonists hold senses of their histories but are not conversant in the stories that so powerfully shaped their parents' and grandparents' ways of knowing. Because Ofilwe's and Fikile's engagements with knowledge production are not predicated on accessing a past that readily tells a resistant narrative, their processes are tentatively circular and indirect. In contrast, feminist historian and cultural scholar Yvette Abrahams tells quite a different story, one that signals what born frees – though surely born into a kind of freedom – lack:

I was born in Cape Town in 1963 to struggle parents. I grew up in exile but made it home in 1983, just in time for the exciting part of the liberation struggle. I dropped out of varsity due to the state of emergency but was fortunate enough to return in 1991 until I completed my doctorate in history at the University of Cape Town in 2002. I have lived to see freedom, something we never dared hope would materialize in those exile days. Now, I grapple with building this unknown thing,

⁹⁹ See Deegan 153-156 on highlights in, and reactions to, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 1998 five-volume report.

freedom, concretizing it in the form of land, water, housing and a garden to dream in. (Gasa 453, “Contributors”)

The certainty Abrahams expresses in having “lived to see freedom” offsets the disorientation of “this unknown thing” that Matlwa’s characters enter into as a part of its construction. For Ofilwe and Fikile, freedom is not the culmination of painful struggle but a static descriptor of their still painful ‘now.’ Yet inhabiting the hard-won present leaves Ofilwe and Fikile looking backwards in order to re-conceive their uncharted routes forward.

Routes and charts, orientations and schemas: additional sites for juxtapositional consideration across these texts open up in the vicinity of mapmaking. Whereas Lisa evokes physical maps to trace multivalent locations, Ofilwe and Fikile outline cognitive maps that trace epistemological pressures, all of which signal the density of ‘here’ and ‘now.’ Each of Matlwa’s novice knowledge producers begin ‘looking back’ through modest processes of reflecting on (Ofilwe) and modulating (Fikile) their own pasts. For Ofilwe, one example appears in memories of Belinda and a particularly suggestive alphabet game the two had played:

After-Sun. Bikini. Ballet. Barbie and Ken. . . . Fettucini. Frappé. Fork and Knife. . . . Khaki. Lock. Loiter. Looks like Trouble. Maid. Native. Nameless./ No, not me, Madam. Napoleon. . . . Occupy and Rule. . . . Queen of England. . . . Unwrap them all at once! . . . Yoga. Yo-yo Diet. You, You and You. Zero guilt. (Matlwa 40–41)

About this passage, described as “a kind of primer, an alphabet of the language that must be acquired in the world of the Happy Valley gated community,” Barnard makes the point

that “the language required for self-transformation [in *Coconut*] is . . . the English of global commercial culture: the language of the fashion magazines that are Fiks’s treasured how-to-books” (Barnard 227). Commodity culture’s expression of racist and classist value systems is also evident in this passage, however, such that Ofilwe’s immersion in “*After-Sun. Bikini. Ballet. Barbie and Ken*” and “*Lock. Loiter. Looks like Trouble*” are clearly racially marked in ways that her recitation’s broken rhythm suggests have become uncomfortably evident. The alphabet’s selections convey an epistemology that at once shapes Ofilwe’s self knowledge and provides a silhouette against which to know otherwise; the line break placed between “*Native. Nameless*” and “*No, not me, Madam,*” for example, creates a pause in the thought pattern that sets a script expected of Ofilwe – had she not been of the upwardly mobile middle class – at a remove from Ofilwe herself. Fikile, in contrast, seeks to incorporate that dominant epistemology into her self making project and use it to repudiate – rather than reflect on – her past. As we have already seen, Fikile fictionalizes her family tree and modifies her name in an effort to re-chart her future. The self-teaching takes an inward turn for both young women, especially in the absence of more viable pedagogical models. Yet both examples see individuals grappling with the same colonial epistemologies embedded in Lisamarie’s mapping – drawing on the figures of childhood friendship and bourgeois relations rather than family contours to locate the intimate influences of those epistemologies – and sensing some value in looking back in order to look forward.

Looking back, then, becomes entangled with desire for something other than the visible horizons. Because *Coconut*, like *Monkey Beach*, articulates some of its historical

tensions through family relations, it also positions genealogical thinking as generative in re-projecting possibilities that remain a part of, but are not determined by, received lineages. Fikile offers the most direct reading of this re-direction: perceiving powerful potential in managing her own genealogy, Fikile manipulates her factual lineage as a way of resisting normative versions of her life. Fikile's memories of her mother, for example, focus only on her death, which we first learn of in relation to Uncle's violence, minimized in comparison: "He never hit me like my mother used to" (Matlwa 114). The rare hearing afforded Fikile's painful past gains meaning in the context of Uncle's ongoing abuse and intimates Fikile's reasons for tenaciously revising the narrative overall:

Back then, when I was very young, I actually sort of liked Uncle, especially when he was in a happy mood. Uncle had always been kind to me. . . . After my mother slit her wrists and let her blood soak through to my skin as I slept against the hollow of her stomach, Uncle was the only one who was willing to take me in. Gogo, my granny, had too many of her own white children to take care of and my father had run off long before I had even implanted into my mother's womb. So to me, back then anyway, Uncle was a pretty good guy. Ja, he had his bad qualities like most people, but he was Uncle, the only real family I had./ But then again, I was only a child and didn't know any better. (114–115)

Fikile's effort to realize Project Infinity – as "Fiks," raised "in white environments" as the daughter of UK-based lecturers (146) – becomes her consolidated response to suffering at the hands of others. The severe limitation of that response is not lost on her reader, nor is its perpetuation of racist, classist, and sexist assumptions about what registers as valuable,

as consumption alone is proven unable to either shift inequalities or secure the analytical tools necessary for critically perceiving inequalities, despite Barnard's argument that "both [protagonists are] engaged in a project of self-making that is determined in the finest detail by contemporary consumer culture" (Barnard 225). Rather, I maintain that Fikile's manipulation of consumerist logic to re-project her genealogy serves to draw us into her acts of story negotiation that replace an otherwise passive acceptance of what here and now can possibly allow for the future.

Ofilwe also explores the significance of relations in ways that posit genealogical thinking as generative – and potentially empowering – while showing the emerging analyst to be more obviously troubled by, if not exactly troubling, hegemonic expressions of power. Two particularly evocative examples see Ofilwe questioning cross-cultural conceptions of royalty and recounting a politically resonant parable as learned through her surrogate mother figure, Old Virgina, via Tshepo. The first passage follows directly from Ofilwe's humiliation at the hands of her white classmate, Stuart Simons, to meditate on socio-economic positioning and racialization. Ofilwe thinks of Makhulu, the street vendor she passes every Sunday on the family's drive from church to Fikile's Silver Spoon, "who sells ready-to-eat *Maotoana* at the notorious Schubert intersection" (Matlwa 16) which is also Fikile's mini-bus stop. Unlike Fikile's disdainful description – "the revolting smell of the chicken feet which the peculiar, wrinkled old lady with charcoal-black skin and an odd orange umbrella sells at the corner" (140) – what strikes Ofilwe is that, "[u]nlike the other street vendors . . . , Makhulu sits motionless underneath her generous orange umbrella, waiting for us to come to her" (16). Introduced by age, race,

and gender – as “a vintage jet black lady” (16) – Makhulu, a name that means “big” in isiNdebele, prompts Ofilwe to think of stateliness:

Her leathery skin, folded into a hundred-and-two deep lines, makes it difficult for one to read emotion off her face. Her bold bead-like eyes stare straight ahead, suggesting a mind preoccupied. Her chin is always slightly raised, her back strikingly straight for someone her age and her hands are always neatly placed in her lap. I secretly believe that Makhulu is of royal blood. (17)

In contrast to Ofilwe’s silent – presumably unwelcome and unshared – impressions, Grandmother Tlou openly admires the British royal family and, accordingly, mourns Princess Diana’s death for a prolonged period that no one else in the family observes but all respect:

Although Daddy chided Grandmother Tlou for appearing to be more devastated over the death of a princess than that of her own husband four years earlier, he returned from a business trip in London with 18-ct white-gold loop earrings similar to those that Diana once wore, in an attempt to ease Grandmother’s suffering. (18)

Reflectively aligning Makhulu with the Princess of Wales causes Ofilwe to reach outwards, wondering “Who is my own Princess Di?”(18) and calling on her listener for input:

Does my royal family still exist, some place out there in barren, rural South Africa? Please, do tell me about their dynasty. I am afraid my history only goes as far back as lessons on the Dutch East India Company in grade two at Laerskool

Valley Primary School. Were they once a grand people, ruling over a mighty nation, audaciously fighting off the advance of the colourless ones? Do you perhaps know where they are now? (18)

Her semi-public reflection ends with a cruel ‘rumour’ about dispossession outliving apartheid that she hopes her listener can dispel: *“I have heard some hiss that the heirs to their thrones sit with swollen limbs and emaciated limbs under a merciless sun, waiting for government grants. Surely that cannot be true”* (18). And Ofilwe’s final move in this passage – temporally changed again, out of italics and into her present moment as the family “cross[es] the intersection” (19) and leaves Makhulu behind for another week – imbricates Sepedi royalty and Princess Di as she considers her “future children” and confesses that they appear in her dreams “painted in shades of pink,” making her fearful “of what that means” (19). Whereas Ofilwe works to locate a commensurate value in her own national and genealogical history as is apparent in British royal history, her anxious dreams about her own familial directions suggests a consciousness about the difficult degrees to which unequal histories and value systems coincide in her life and shape her possible imaginings. What remains key, though, is her attempt to think through these histories in tandem within the context of what she sees and experiences in her every day.

The final passage considered in this chapter illustrates community being built through stories that are themselves about community building, and dividing. It also brings family, community, and kin relationships together to further broaden genealogical thinking beyond blood lineages. *“When Tshepo grew too smart for Old Virginia and found it inappropriate to follow her around,”* Ofilwe recounts, *“he led me into the garden*

to tell me stories of the stories Old Virginia once told” (32). Thus begins Ofilwe’s transcription of a polyvalent parable about racialized hierarchies, apartheid, ‘passing,’ betrayal, and transition that moves from peaceful if unequal co-habitation to violent conflict with differences foregrounded:

Let us remember that time of old.

...Nkano

We will all appreciate that things were a lot quieter then.

...Nkano

We will recall that we could hear then,

...Nkano

We remember the story of the Green Apples and Pears.

...Nkano

How great it was to be a Green Apple. How unfortunate to be a Pear.

...Nkano

. . . . We remember that then it was thought that there was no reason for them to grow on separate trees.

...Nkano

. . . . But the Green Apples grew bold,

...Nkano

. . . . It was only after much growing had been done that the Pears awoke.

...Nkano

. . . . We recall how many Pears were found smashed against the stony earth.

...Nkano

. . . . *But do we recall?*

...Nkano

*The day a Pear tore off a Pear from the Green Apple and Pear tree and threw it
against a rock?*

...Nkano

. . . . *The traitor Pear, sensing his life was in danger, ran before the king of the
Green Apples and begged for his protection.*

...Nkano

"I am a Green Apple, my King," the Pear pleaded.

...Nkano

*"Do I not possess the long neck that is common to those worthless Pears and their
raindrop-shaped body?*

...Nkano

And so a Pear became a Green Apple.

...Nkano

. . . . *With time the traitor Pear grew the neck that was common to Pears.*

...Nkano

. . . . *And of course he, being a Green Apple for so long, forgot to be careful.*

...Nkano

. . . . The traitor Pear, sitting out in the sun, looking up at a clear sky, unaware of a few Green Apples drawing close, his neck grown long, his lower body raindrop-shaped, was yanked off the tree and thrown against a rock.

...Nkano

Just like any other Pear.

...Nkano

This is where the story ends. (32–37)

The cautionary tale, as Vicki Briault Manus calls it (Manus 227), clearly speaks to the dangers of both protagonists' aspirations for whiteness and consequent repudiation of those parts of their lives that demand a different rubric. Especially important for this discussion, however, is the participatory imperative in both the tale and its telling. The call and response form that was discussed earlier evocatively appears here, such that Old Virginia, Tshepo, and Ofilwe are all positioned as both tellers and listeners at different stages in their respective experiences, alternately inviting and reciting the story's refrain – Nkano, "indicating active participation, . . . roughly translated as 'I may (just as well)'" (227) – such that the story is also a pedagogical conversation had between a central family employee and the children of the house, then passed on to be told between children, intimating the story's own genealogy. The parable's lessons – potentially about self-respect, about belonging, about a sort of truthfulness, about ways of understanding possibilities and limitations – are left for the multiply-layered audience to work with, drawing that dense readership into a kind of community that in turn shapes the text and its significance. At the end of this passage, Ofilwe gestures towards her distance from Fikile

and a possible, faint bridge, in reflecting on their strangely shared learning processes:

“As Daddy hands over our payment to Fikile, who stands impatiently at the edge of our table, I wonder if anybody has ever told her this story” (Matlwa 38). The moment of textual proximity – discussed earlier – operates through a story about the perils of internalized racism, a parable about lineages in transition, that asks each protagonist to reconsider their identificatory histories and intended futures.

When considered in proximity with one another, the evocations of gendered resistance in *Monkey Beach* and *Coconut* underscore multi-situational creativity, flexibility, and insight in the protagonists’ processes of coming into knowledge while navigating socio-historically and politically shaped constraints. One way to read these texts’ recursive engagements with knowledge production, I have suggested, is to trace the interplay between what happens in the present tense story lines and the memories, or passages of remembrance, or written self-reflections that read partially as day dreaming and partially as thoughts triggered by the present moment. Ofilwe’s and Fikile’s narrative structures often appear to generate more pedagogical interchange than do their direct words – as in Lisamarie’s case – but all three protagonists draw readers into their processes of coming to know. In reading *Monkey Beach* and *Coconut* through a ‘conversation’ lens, I have been most interested in circular modes of coming into knowledge that, in turn, signal intersubjective engagement between entities at once physically outside one another and constructed, read, affected, modulated by one another – or, in this cross-textual instance, interpretations that are modulated by one another – and conversation’s creative potential of opening outwards. I have not intentionally overlooked

sites of intersubjective disalignment or failed conversation. Fraught questions of empowerment and loss have instead gained attention in my consideration of recursive knowings such that the protagonists in these not-quite-coming of age novels are seen to enact their own limited forms of resistance through epistemological experiments. The texts' narrativized experiences of loss easily operate metaphorically in each context to mark colonialism generally or Canada's residential school system more specifically; the failed dream of a post-apartheid rainbow nation or of teenage desire for 'simple' belonging. In both contexts, however, loss also demands a literal reading that elicits, in turn, a situated response. Whether that response turns on pedagogy, or on thinking about one's own experiences in longer or changed historical trajectories, opens something up in quite significant ways. Perhaps most importantly, these texts comment on the productive kinds of opening that can happen when space is enlarged around a point of tension, when a problem gains consideration with some expansiveness, when an experience can be inhabited with enough space to breathe. Lisamarie, Ofilwe, and Fikile all create their own sorts of breathing room – imperfect and contingent, but generative – that open up in front and behind, allowing them to look around as well as at or back in making sense of things.

Conclusion: Reverberations; or, Adjacent Change

“Some ideas I write about are not completely formed; others still need to be thought out. All are risky in that words, like actions, have consequences which I cannot completely foresee. These are notes, written from the frontline of learning by doing.” (Abrahams, “Learning by Doing” 71)

“An ethical communication is about a certain way of holding proximity and distance together: one gets close enough to others to be touched by that which cannot be simply got across. . . . It is through getting closer, rather than remaining at a distance, that the impossibility of pure proximity can be put to work, or made to work.” (Ahmed, *Strange Encounters* 157)

“. . . I remain hopeful that there are other ways for imaginative and progressive people to work together, against the forces of the prison-military-religio-industrial complex (or sometimes through and around them) and with one another.” (Lai 227)

“What we have all learned since then is a hard lesson about criticism as a culture of risk. The lesson is this: all that one risk does is to lead you to another one.” (Appadurai and Breckenridge 351)

The work of conversation has preoccupied me throughout these extended considerations of engagement, but the work of leave-taking now heightens the project’s thorny stakes and unclear after-effects. Having focussed so intently on conditions for animating social justice, I now wonder how to leave a conversation about conversations without pronouncing on the meanings of the encounters. I also wonder how to read, or to prepare for, the reverberations that follow. A certain tension between holding on and letting go, and between not knowing and remaining capable of learning, resonates strongly with the overarching work of this project and yet it is risk that emerges most clearly as I signal my own interpretive pause.

The project has set up the challenge of working and understanding across multivalent differences somehow well – anti-oppressively, non-hierarchically – in an attempt to unpack those foundations that reproduce systemic inequality and reorient justice-seeking approaches to the world broadly, and to literary scholarship specifically. That challenge remains at play, I hope, neither entirely satisfied nor irrevocably emptied. But where has the challenge taken us? If I opened the project on a bus to Beira commenting thoughtlessly on baobabs, where am I, where are we, now? The texts’ scenes of departure offer one response: in *The Book of Jessica*’s tenuous conclusion (“Peace?”), Maria Campbell and Linda Griffiths explicitly discuss how to end their shared story, what impression to leave their reader about what Campbell calls “a wound [that] we want to be healed sooner than is possible” (Griffiths and Campbell 112). Magona leaves her reader with the ostensible finality of Amy’s death but alongside Mandisa’s reflection that, “[b]ut for the chance of a day, the difference of one sun’s rise, she would be alive today. My son, perhaps not a murderer. Perhaps not yet” (Magona 210). Robinson’s Lisamarie is left alone on Monkey Beach, unmoving, without the family so recently re-encountered in the Land of the Dead, but alive. And Matlwa leaves her reader with Fikile’s ambivalent return to the home she so wishes to escape. A kind of continuance resonates in each ending that emphasizes the fallacy in ‘ending,’ or departing, definitively; it also, strikingly, suggests the promise coupled with responsibility and weighted with pain that is continued.

A second response to “where is here?” is more specific to the project’s production: the unceded Hodinohso:ni and Mississauga territory that Hamilton continues

to claim and the university within that space that reproduces the claim-justifying knowledges this project attempts to challenge. Yet the latter is also the (fraught) space of reflection and conversation and difficult learning that has paradoxically – or hopefully – enabled this project’s articulation. Nuttall’s image of entanglement returns with force.

What becomes clear to me only now (but has likely been clear to the reader throughout) is that the project’s own settings for continuance and violence and risk and possibility – on Mozambique’s national highway and in McMaster’s offices – mark entry points as also departures that emphasize the most prominent point of encounter between these literary archives and socio-political contexts: the work of circularity within processes, and facts, of survivance, resistance, resilience. The phrase “We should forgive but not forget” (Mandela n.p.) made famous by Nelson Mandela soon after the closing of South Africa’s TRC, comes to mind as expressing a kind of survivance that acknowledges historical trauma as carried forward, not to be continually re-experienced but to be allowed to change. In Indigenous contexts broadly, circularity signifies more emphatically across many nations within Canada through the significances of such images, objects, and practices as the medicine wheel, the four directions, the healing circle, the sacred hoop, and others. The kind of circularity that Maria Campbell works through in her story of the red cloth is a direct example from this project, offering the gift as a sacrifice that invites a spiritual filling out while encouraging a material letting go, an opening as premised on a closing; or the sheer weight of her own returns to Griffiths and the play. Hodinohso:ni scholar Kaitlin Debicki observes that, “[b]y emptying our minds of individualistic, finite concerns, sacrifice reminds us of our interdependence and

interrelatedness with all Creation” (Debicki 22). Here I run another risk of oversimplifying circularity in Indigenous-centric texts for which non-Indigenous critics before me have been thoroughly, and justifiably, criticized. But I take that risk in the hope that conversation might offer a related opening within which to read across returns.

To return to this conclusion’s opening, I feel that the tension between claiming and letting go and between proximity and distance that emerges across the chapters in this project is especially significant. If learning sideways is a part of productive conversation, as I argue in chapter three, and if hardened claims (for example to property and place, as discussed in chapter two) create part of what goes into conversational dissonance, then can a critical practice of conversation facilitate a willingness to de-harden what feels foundational? And can that softening carry sufficient traces of the material which grounds? This partially echoes Spivak’s notion of strategic essentialism, perhaps in reverse (moving outward from rather than towards a firm position), but I argue that it is more interesting for drawing out the critical potential of adjacent proximities. If multiple sites and modes of engagement can bring multiple contexts and histories into sight of one another while troubling a facile celebration of multiplicity, might we come closer to dislodging and reconfiguring foundationally normative notions of what is valuable, who we are, and what the world can be? In theorizing the anti-racist cultural and activist work of the 1980s and 1990s, especially as organized in Vancouver, Asian Canadian writer and scholar Larissa Lai draws out one of the major challenges that also centers this project: to take seriously the tensions in encounters – for Lai, encounters based on shared political commitments across differently racialized identity categories – without creating an

impasse at the tension or subsuming the tension, uninterrogated, into the work. Lai argues that “[c]oalition-building work has been ignored largely because the framework of understanding, at least at a mainstream level, was one that privileged the binary of white versus colour and could not see any real difference within the marginalized side of the split, in spite of all the rhetoric of ‘diversity’ in that historical moment” (Lai 4). By focusing on a sort of coalition-building without assuming any uncomplicated utility in discourses of solidarity or allyship, this project seeks an anti-oppressive interpretive register that might, as Lai says of re-reading historical events, “indicate the need for a different kind of practice, although the form that that practice might take is not totalizable or prescribable” (Lai 213).

The practice that this project has lead me through suggests that conversation can offer a helpful approach to actively working through the risks of either isolating one’s sense of a text, an experience or a context to the point of exaggerated exceptionalism or – on the other hand – dislocating and decontextualizing that same text, experience, or context to a similarly distortive universality. It reminds me that returns are powerful and not accidental, that promise carries with it responsibility, that safe handling of knowledge or experience cannot be guaranteed but that risks can be taken knowingly and carefully. Beyond method, though, it also teaches me to think more closely about aspirational relationalities. This is not a project that claims an ethical knowing that is impervious to what it cannot know. It is, instead, a project invested in processes of knowing through a logic-sense of juxtaposition. As I both return to and come into this leave-taking, I wonder if the next risky step, reverberating outwards, would be to move away from working

across situated distances and towards the work of relationalities themselves. Though relations are of course central to conversation and relationality remains visible throughout this project, relations as sites of building – through the writing, reading, and teaching of texts – raise similar sets of questions about power and process and engagement but with a fuller immersion in risk. As I pause, I wonder how the risk of this leave-taking and its weighty promise of continuance might be changed through the relations that are built through, but are not themselves, conversation.

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