

Beyond Empathy: Reading, Bearing Witness, and Testimony

by

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Abstract

“Beyond Empathy: Reading, Bearing Witness, and Testimony” is focused on the audiences of testimony, exploring the relational and ethical imperatives encompassed in audiences’ engagement with creative forms of testimonial accounts. Deeply rooted in colonial trajectories and grounded in confessional and judicial discourses of truth-telling, creative testimonies — from memoirs, to autobiographical poetry collections, documentaries, performance and art installations — communicate urgent accounts of injustice, invoking an ethical demand to bear witness, and a responsibility to carry testimony’s truth to effect socio-political change. In this dissertation, I examine what it means to bear witness to creative testimony, and the ways that audiences are called to do so; or, in other words, how audiences’ ethical responsibilities and political power are framed, mediated, and enacted. I interrogate the prevailing perspective that affective recognition and response fulfill the ethical demands and mobilize the political efficacies of creative testimonies, and argue that to honour the relational and ethical imperatives encompassed in such accounts requires pushing audiences beyond empathy.

To this end, I turn to autobiographical literature and art produced in Canada during the second decade of the 21st century. My attention to a particular moment and place emerges from identifying relationality as a defining trope in contemporary public debate, cultural production, and scholarly discourse in Canada. I identify the past decade as enthralled in a process where the communities who live on this land are exploring what it means to be in relation and are (re)considering their relations to one another, disrupting the shared imaginary of the humanitarian, multicultural or reconciliatory nation, and their responsibilities as citizens of the state. Weaving together the politics of national literature in Canada and the transactions of

creative testimony in the public sphere, my project brings together work in autobiography studies with Indigenous, transnational, and settler perspective on literature in/about Canada, while also relying on research in reading, pedagogy, memory, and trauma studies. In so doing, the project draws attention to the power and responsibilities of both general and scholarly audiences, including the institutional and structural frameworks that are shaped by the politics of national literature, and which in turn direct the production, circulation, and consumption of testimony.

The structure of my dissertation is thus guided by a logic of mapping the problems or risks with current models of reading testimony, and identifying potential ways to move past them. The first two chapters contend with the colonial legacies and trajectories of recognition. They establish how the state's politics of recognition and redress are mirrored in the prevalence of empathic modes of recognition which are situated as the desired ethical response to testimony's demands, demonstrating that both the political and affective modes of recognition thus de-facto serve to entrench the very colonial structures that testimony protests. I conclude this section with an argument to urgently reframe reading testimony beyond audiences' empathy, to refuse the politics and ethics of recognition and turn to feminist, Indigenous, and other culturally situated relational models. In the second half of the dissertation I explore how such models are enacted in literary and art-based testimony, proposing an approach to testimony through paratextual entry points. I argue that approaching audiences' engagement through testimony's material thresholds highlights its ethical demands beyond mere recognition, providing audiences with tangible strategies to account for implication in structures of oppression and foster response through an ethics and praxis of care, or, in other words, to move from reading to witnessing and foster right relations.

Dedication

To my parents and grandparents,
who have been teaching me through stories and silences,
through reading and witnessing.

להורים, הסבתות, והסבים שלי,
שלימדו אותי דרך סיפורים ושתיקות
מתוך קריאה ועדות.

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Introduction: Coming to Testimony

Always directed towards another, testimony places the one who receives it under the obligation of response to an embodied singular experience not recognizable as one's own. Amid testimony's tensile mix of gift and demand, there is an underlying entreaty to see, read, and/or hear that which is given over to those of us ready and able to accept the requirements of its encounter. On such terms, testimony (visual or otherwise) has the potential to transform the way in which we understand ourselves in and through our relation with others... This is a capacity that depends on one's address-ability and response-ability in the face of how it is that testimony gives over its witness. In this respect, witnessing testimony is not something accomplished by merely enduring the apprehension of demanding images and/or stories; rather, one must work through ways of transporting and translating these beyond their moment of appearance and enunciation. Thus, central to witnessing is the enactment of one's relationship with others in ways that make evident that one's thought and practice has been informed by the living memory of prior testimony. By invoking these obligations as central to witnessing, witnessing is constituted first and foremost as an ethical concept.

Roger I. Simon *A Pedagogy of Witnessing* 19-20

As "a mix of gift and demand," testimony, at its core, invokes ethics and relations. These are the stakes at the heart of this project. My work is invested in understanding the making and sustaining of relations; understanding them through the ways we listen to each other's stories — thinking about the roles of audiences as witnesses, and acts of reading or viewing testimony as

acts of witnessing. In other words, this research project is about the relational and ethical imperatives of testimonial life narratives. Creative forms of testimony are deeply rooted in colonial trajectories and grounded in confessional and juridical discourses of truth-telling, mobilizing truth through writing, performance, and visual art, in order to issue an ethical justice claim. From memoirs, to autobiographical poetry, performance, or art installation, literary and art-based testimony relies on objective (factual) truths to validate the veracity of subjective notions of the term, in order to communicate urgent accounts of injustice to a more privileged other and press them to act for social change. In particular, my project draws attention to the power and responsibilities of testimony's addressees, including the institutional and structural frameworks that are shaped by the politics of national literature, and which in turn direct the production, circulation, and consumption of testimony. More than anything, this work is about the audiences of testimony, exploring what it means to bear witness to creative testimony, and the ways that audiences are called to do so. The project thus investigates how creative testimony's demands are modeled and mediated, where audiences and cultural agents succeed or fail, and how we can come to honour our roles as witnesses, and our responsibilities to testimonial accounts and testifiers.

1.1 In Search of Right Relations

The relational thread of my project focuses on nation to nation relations vis-à-vis the nation-state, namely relations that emerge through colonial roots and shape contemporary neo-colonial as well as decolonizing routes. Weaving together the politics of national literature in Canada and the transactions of creative testimony in the public sphere, the nation-to-nation relationality explored in this dissertation contends with the ways that audiences are bestowed

with ethical responsibilities as witnesses, and how they are encouraged to act upon them. Nation-based relationality and the ethical resonances of witnessing thus guide my thinking through the questions of what does it mean to be in right relations, and how acts of reading creative testimony can be practiced in relation and for relation. I wonder too how can reading “relationally” allow audiences to bear witness to creative testimony and foster right relations between nations in Canada. More specifically, this project examines how the relationality of witnessing creative testimony is framed for and mediated to Canadian audiences. In turn, it also explores how this mediation shapes audiences’ ethical responses and delineates the scope of public political debate; what the limitations of current practices and ethical models are; and how audiences can push beyond them.

From public debate to cultural production and scholarly discourse, for the past decade Canada has been enthralled in a relational crisis — a moment in which the communities that live on this land are exploring what it means to be in relation and are (re-)considering their relations to one another and the state. The relational fault-lines of this crisis lie in Canada’s colonial legacies and realities, because, as Papaschase Cree descendent scholar Dwayne Donald argues, colonialism is “an extended process of denying relationship” (“On What Terms Can We Speak?” min. 12:10-12:15). The trouble of colonial relations can be traced as the gap between the nation’s myths of peacekeeping, multiculturalism, reconciliation, and redress, and the state’s continuous colonial apparatuses and structures. Over the last ten years, Canadians have been repeatedly confronted with this gap in both cultural and political fields.

In the span of a single decade, Canada has launched official campaigns to welcome Syrian refugees in 2015, and experienced a sharp—almost triple—rise in asylum claims, partly explained by a dramatic rise in irregular crossings at its southern border since early 2017

(“Asylum Claimants”). Concurrently, the province of Quebec passed Bill-62 banning religious face covering when providing or receiving public services, while the nation saw 47% rise in police reported hate-crimes in 2017 (Armstrong 3), and rising social media activity by extreme white supremacy groups across the country in 2020 (Davey et. al. 4-5). During this time, public debate shifted from the state’s official apology for residential schools and the formation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2008, to former Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s denial of Canada’s colonial history at the G-20 summit in 2009, and the 2015 publication of the TRC’s report that defines Canada’s Aboriginal policy—including but not limited to Indian Residential Schools—as cultural genocide (Introduction 1). The latter part of the decade saw further inquiries and critiques of the Federal government’s colonial practices — from a National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls conducted from 2016 to 2019, to campaigns in celebration and critique of Canada’s sesquicentennial anniversary in 2017, public statements that “Reconciliation is Dead” in light of the federal-government’s dispute with the Wet’suwet’en nation’s hereditary chiefs and land keepers over the Coastal GasLink pipeline in February 2020, and protests over systemic anti-Black racism and police violence later that year. From approximately 2008 to the time of concluding this project in 2020, then, relational crises have been unfolding on multiple sites and registers of Canadian politics and public debate.

The literary and cultural fields have not been immune to these trends and debates, as the last decade of scholarly, critical, and creative discussions have demonstrated a commitment to exploration of nation-to-nation relations alongside public disputes contending with the entrenched colonial dynamics of the politics of literature in Canada. In fact, as the following chapter will demonstrate, I consider relationality as a trope that aptly describes Canada’s political and cultural fields during the second decade of the 21st century.

Among other sites of debate, this relational crisis has been reflected in and unpacked through countless testimonial books, documentaries, exhibits, and performances that share the experiences of Indigenous, racialized, refugee, and other communities who protest their persecution or oppression in Canada and around the globe. In memoirs, autobiographical poetry-collections, and art-based projects, survivors of state-sanctioned abuse, dispossession, and rights violations — from residential schools, to eugenic practices, segregation, political persecution, or ethnic and religious genocide — testify to their experiences, sharing their true stories in order to issue urgent justice calls that demand public recognition, solidarity, or even socio-political change. Testimonies, then, function as a form of protest, defined by Gayatri Spivak as “the genre of the subaltern giving witness to oppression to a less oppressed other” (7). Indeed, as Simon suggests, creative testimonies are inherently both relational and ethical acts, as they necessitate readers’ recognition of their justice claim (*A Pedagogy of Witnessing* 20); but Spivak’s definition highlights that the gift and demand of response to testimony also has an embedded power dynamic, one that is distinctly rooted in colonial structures. In this sense, testimony protests colonialism’s denial of relations, and in its stead, demands rethinking relationality, or rather, decolonizing it.

The modes of address-ability and response-ability invoked in bearing witness to testimony, then, are not a singular act of recognition, but rather an ongoing obligation, commitment to a process of working through the “living memory of prior testimony,” a process of learning through bearing witness and transforming one’s ways of being with others as informed by the testimonial act (Simon *A Pedagogy of Witnessing* 19-20). In other words, testimony demands a mode of ethical relationality. Defining this concept in his work on rethinking Indigenous-Canadian relations, Donald configures “ethical relationality” as means of

decolonizing Canada, “require[ing] attentiveness to the responsibilities that come with a declaration of being in relation” (“Forts, Curriculum, and Indigenous Métissage” 5; “Indigenous Métissage” 535). Though Donald’s formulation of ethical relationality is specifically situated in the Canadian context, and though it certainly applies to the primary fault-line of Canada’s relational crisis, I argue that when it is situated vis-à-vis the discourse of testimony, ethical relationality encapsulates testimony’s gift-to and demand-from its addressees.

The focus of Donald’s ethical relationality on attentiveness and responsibility as ongoing processes echoes the relational registers of testimony as a site of protest (Spivak 7), a site that reflects a relational crisis and unveils the gap between the national imaginary and state reality, thus demanding processes of (un)learning and (re)storying that have the potential to dismantle both national myths and the systems they serve to uphold. In other words, while creative testimonies face audiences with truths that may be of other locations or different times, the ethical task of bearing witness demands that audiences consider the relevance of those truths right here and right now. These cultural productions confront readers with their beliefs of Canadian values and myths, thus disrupting the shared imaginary of the humanitarian or multicultural nation.

Bringing into conversation the ethics of testimony and the politics of national literature, my attention to testimony’s addressees thus directly asks what it means to read in relation and for right relations. I do so by examining how ethics and relations are shaped, reflected, and mobilized in the production, circulation, and consumption of creative testimony within the nation. Much research has been dedicated to the testifying subject, the psychoanalytical relations between testifiers and their addressees, and the pedagogical or campaign uses of testimony. But my work takes a different approach and, building on the works of Gillian Whitlock and Roger

Simon, tends to material and structural conditions that frame testimony to the audiences of these texts, thinking about the ways in which its ethical and relational demands are mediated to audiences even before they come to testimony. To explore these concerns, my approach to the ethics and relationalities embedded in testimony and national cultural production brings together work in autobiography studies with feminist, Indigenous, transnational, postcolonial, and settler perspective on literature in/about Canada, while also relying on research in reading, pedagogy, memory, and trauma studies, to demonstrate the risks in currently prevalent reading models and suggest potential alternative practices that can foster reading as a mode of witnessing. In so doing, the project addresses both general and critical or scholarly audiences, attending to their different registers of cultural influence, yet accounting for the political power they are given as testimony's addressees, both in terms of privilege and responsibility. Accordingly, in my attention to varied audiences and a wide array of objects—from memoir, to autobiographical poetry, art installations, performance art, and even a game show—my use of the term “reading” is rather broad, serving as a shorthand for a variety of practices of interpretation and engagement with literary and art-based testimony.

Thinking through the relational and ethical threads that interlace testimony and national literature in Canada, my dissertation — titled “Beyond Empathy” — is guided by the logic of mapping current problems of reading testimony and identifying or proposing potential ways to move past them. The first two chapters contend with the troubles of political and affect-driven recognition. They identify the colonial legacies and trajectories of recognition, demonstrate how political and affective recognitions both shape and reflect the fraught politics of Canadian literature and the models of ethical engagement primarily mediated and afforded to audiences. Together, the first two chapters outline a crisis of relations in the nation's cultural field and in the

mobilization of creative testimony in its public sphere. This crisis, I argue, is grounded in the state's politics of recognition and redress which are mirrored in the prevalence of empathic modes of recognition as the desired ethical response to testimony's demands. The first half of the project thus contours the dominant relational models in readings of testimony within or in relation to the national imaginary. It also identifies the limitations and unpacks the dangers of these models, to demonstrate how they serve to entrench the very colonial structures that testimony protests. I conclude this section with an argument to urgently reframe reading testimony beyond readers' empathy, to refuse the politics and ethics of recognition and turn to feminist, Indigenous, and other culturally situated relational models.

The second half, then, explores such relational models in literary and art-based testimony, with one chapter dedicated to each. Building on work about witnessing and relationality in autobiography, Indigenous, feminist, and transnational studies, "Beyond Empathy" proposes an approach to testimony through paratextual entry points, thus offering reading models that honour the "advocacy, responsibility, and accountability" which, as Whitlock suggest, are required to bear witness, to fulfill testimony's ethical demands, and mobilize its transformative capacities (*Postcolonial Life Narratives* 8). Approaching audiences' engagement with testimony through its material thresholds highlights the ethical demands of testimony beyond mere recognition, and provides them with tangible strategies to account for implication in structures of oppression and foster response through an ethics and praxis of care, or, in other words, to alter their "ways of being with others" (Dean 147).

1.2 Relational Crises and the Problem of Recognition

My project commences with defining the current moment in Canada's cultural field as one enthralled in a relational crisis, bringing together ideas of nation and relation with ideas of being a good witness in the context of nation-based relationalities. To begin this foray, the first two chapters, as stated above, outline how the state's politics of recognition and their role in Canada's relational crisis are mirrored in the mobilization of creative testimony in the nation's cultural field. The first chapter, titled "A Moment of Reckoning," unpacks the contemporary politics of literatures in Canada to show how they are enthralled in a crisis of relations, rooted in the colonial histories and realities that shape the production, circulation, and consumption of CanLit. Critically engaging with CanLit as "the informational shorthand for Canadian literature that names it as an established formation" which includes the creative, scholarly, and national imaginary as institutionally produced (Brydon 2,5), this chapter does not seek to privilege the CanLit category as the signifier of literature in or about Canada, or even as the body of work that contends with the relational crisis. Rather, it interrogates CanLit in order to question and account for the institutional aspects of the politics of national literature, the power structures that shape shared identity and determine "*cui bono*—who profits" (Robinson 887). By examining projects that story Canada's literary history for scholarly and general audiences, this opening chapter explores the ways in which the varied constituencies of CanLit—namely the producers, agents of circulation, and consumers of literatures in/about Canada—have been shaping, reflecting, and challenging the national imaginary, and its white-civility citizenry, i.e. the national construct of Canadianness as predominantly white-Anglophone and thus one of exclusionary civility and citizenry (Coleman 5).

Interlacing the works of Indigenous, settler, and transnational literary critics and scholars, the chapter further contours the fault-lines between the politics of CanLit as a seemingly depoliticized singular narrative constructed by and for white-civility Canadianness, and CanLit as consisting of multiple competing narratives that challenge the nation's colonial trajectories with a focus on settler-Indigenous relations, colonial resistance, and diasporic contexts (Sugars 8). The tensions between the singular colonial story and the opposing relational narratives unveil the pivotal role of recognition as causing the rifts. I point to recognition, since it is this discourse that determines whose stories and claims are acknowledged, under what terms, and for whose benefit. To develop this argument, I build on Pauline Wakeham's "The Cunning of Reconciliation," in which she suggests that reconciliation, grounded in the discourse of political recognition, formulates a state-sanctioned framework to settle differences between "the Anglo-Celtic establishment and its 'others'" while maintaining "entrenched power hierarchies" (211). The chapter then concludes with an exploration of the ways in which the politics of national literature deploy and profit from the very same cunning practices of the nation-state's politics of recognition and redress.

The first chapter thus identifies the state's politics of recognition as extended to the relational tensions which shape Canadian literature as a creative, critical, and scholarly field, demonstrating the ethical and political stakes of national literature. In so doing, the project joins a growing body of scholarly and creative work that seeks to explore relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities, and to foster better modes of ethical relationality. Joining the voices that identify the colonial trajectories of the relational crisis, the chapter contributes to these conversations by highlighting the role of recognition as the major fault line which is mobilized as a solution, and by demonstrating the ways recognition is extended to the

politics of national literature. My critical attention to the role of recognition discourse in CanLit's relational crisis then directly continues on to the second chapter, in which I explore how the politics of recognition are mapped onto the prevalent models for reading testimony in Canada's public sphere.

The second chapter, titled "The Limits of Recognition," focuses on testimony as a record of lived experience grounded in direct truth-telling speech acts. In this chapter, I build on existing research to define the relational nature of testimony as premised on trust and reciprocity between author and reader, with testimony's truth claims situated as the first thing that readers are asked to recognize, thus setting their entire reading experience in motion. I then turn to analyse the prevalent model of ethical engagement with literary testimony in a major site of public, shared-reading of CanLit — *Canada Reads*. This annual Mass Reading Event is the CBC's highly popular "Battle of the Books" game show which offers a *Survivor*-type contest, with books rather than people as the "survivors," and is promoted through variations of the slogan "one book all Canadians should read" (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, "A Reading Spectacle" 5-6). As the title suggests, this chapter brings together issues of recognition in the context of nation-state politics with readers' affective recognition as an expression of ethical engagement with testimonial claims. Closely reading the three seasons that predominantly feature testimonial accounts — the 2012, 2015, and 2019 editions of *Canada Reads* — the second chapter unpacks the relationality embedded in creative forms of testimony, the ethical and political efficacies of creative testimony in the nation's cultural discourse, and the recognition models afforded to general readers both as ethical subjects and political agents. Threading together work in reading studies and research on literary testimony, the chapter joins the conversation on *Canada Reads* as a produced site of reading that both shapes and reflects the national imaginary as it fosters an

intimate public. In so doing, the chapter demonstrates the potentialities and risks embedded in reading models that centralize readers' affective recognition as necessarily fulfilling the ethical demands of testimony.

Based on my analysis of the role of affective recognition in *Canada Reads*, and to develop the chapter's contribution to a critique of the ethics and politics of recognition, "The Limits of Recognition" builds on Gillian Whitlock's concept of "testimonial transactions." Whitlock posits this term to define testimony's movement across cultures and markets as "embedded in global networks of traumatic memory and witness, campaigns for social justice, reconciliation, and reparation," to "record changing, historical thresholds of subaltern agency and dispossession" (*Postcolonial Life Narratives* 8, 70). These movements, Whitlock argues, demonstrate how the "visibility, legibility, and audibility" of testimony's claims have been framed in "tactical, contingent, and constrained" ways, mediating its transformative capacities (*Postcolonial Life Narratives* 8, 68). In so doing, the idea of transactions stresses the gap between testimony's transnational political aims and the highly-mediated realities of its circulation and consumption, shaping not only the survivor's speech act but more-so the scope of readers' ethics of recognition. Employing Whitlock's concept of transactions, I attend to the reading models afforded to and enacted by the readers of *Canada Reads* as a produced nation-based site of shared reading, and delineate the avenues through which testimonial claims are recognized and mobilized alongside the ways in which readers fail to respond, reproduce colonial dynamics, mine for cultural knowledge, or perpetuate the fatigue of distant suffering.

Through the analysis of testimonial transactions on *Canada Reads*, I argue that Canada's colonial politics of recognition are mirrored in the show's affective ethics of recognition, as the empathic modes of recognition can serve to render moot testimony's ethical and political

demands. To examine this mirroring relation, “The Limits of Recognition” then moves to formulate a critique of empathy, too often problematically positioned by Western readers and scholars as the desired mode of ethical recognition that fulfills testimony’s relationality and its rights claim. To frame this critique I bring into conversation the works of Saidiya Hartman, Carolyn Pedwell, Stó:lō storyteller Lee Maracle, and Gillian Whitlock, who each trace empathy’s colonial roots and routes, unveiling its work in service of the colonial nation-state. Attuned to the colonial trajectories of empathy, the chapter establishes that empathic recognition merely serves to strengthen the reader’s perception of themselves as an ethical humanist subject, while concurrently allowing them to ignore their power and complicity in the conditions that cause the other’s pain. In this way, the chapter contours the scope of recognition that Canadians consider as acceptable in public debate, what readers are invited to recognize and what they are allowed (or even encouraged) to gloss over. As testimony’s claims for justice challenge the myths of multiculturalism and humanitarianism, this chapter demonstrates how empathic recognition obfuscates the power dynamics inscribed in discourses of recognition, seemingly recognizing testimony’s justice claim while denying any collective or structural political responsibility required for systemic transformation. In so doing, the chapter threads the colonial trajectories of national literature and testimonial transactions, uncovering the cunning of empathic recognition as working in service of the very colonial structures that testimony protests.

The first half of the project thus concludes that in order to fulfill the ethical and political demands of testimony, readers—both general and scholarly—need models of reading which demand more than empathy, models that offer complex modes of relationality which demand both implication and care to testifiers and testimony. Chapters three and four accordingly explore such modes of relationality as they are enacted in literary and art-based testimonies.

1.3 Reading as Witnessing: Material Thresholds, Implication, and Care

To push readings of testimony beyond an ethics of empathic recognition, the second part of the project explores models of reading in/for relations as posited by feminist, autobiographical, Indigenous, and transnational artists, writers, and scholars who explore ethics and relations, the politics of literature, its role in the public sphere, and reading as an act of bearing witness. Drawing on their methods and critiques of reading as means of fostering ethical relationalities, I propose an approach to reading that is accessible to both general and scholarly audiences—albeit on different registers—highlighting relationality, accountability, and an ethics of care rather than recognition, an approach grounded in and guided by testimony’s paratexts. As I pay attention to the inherently colonial power dynamics between testifiers and addressees, I suggest that paratext, namely the material thresholds of testimony, can offer both interconnected and specifically situated entry points to reading responsibly and relationally.

Paratext, as defined by Gérard Genette, provides “thresholds of interpretation” and comprises both the materiality of a work and the materials that surround a work (9). It functions to strategically guide the consumption of testimony on its own terms. From book covers to prefacing materials, glossaries, or author interviews, whether between or beyond the covers of a book or the space of an exhibit or performance, the paratextual fringes of testimony hold the power to set the terms of engagement—invoking testimony’s truth value, situating its truth within particular nation-based and historical contexts, articulating its justice claim, and asserting readers’ responsibility. In my engagement with paratext, I rely on the work of scholars in the fields of life writing and Indigenous literatures who have been promoting engagement with material strategies, book production, book history, and other publicly-available sources that envelop creative testimony, as tangible practices that can guide ethical engagement. While this

situated approach does not deny either affect or recognition, when applied to an analysis of literary and art-based testimony, it resists centring or privileging these modes of engagement as an ethical response to testimony. Instead, a paratext-driven approach highlights the need to shift focus away from individual responses and towards structural components, both in terms of reading practices as well as in testimony's ethical and political demands. Due to its material and formal nature, paratext, then, has the potential to draw audiences' attention to the structures that shape and manipulate the movement of testimony both as a material object and a justice claim. The second half of the project thus proposes a paratextual reading praxis that encompasses the potential to encourage and foster ethical relationality. The third and fourth chapters shift the focus from the existing transactions of testimony to potential ones, exploring how producers of testimony strategically guide audiences to perform reading as witnessing and to engage in active critical reading that encourages them to contend with their responsibilities through the prisms of communal implication and an ethics of care.

The third chapter, "From Reading to Witnessing," begins the exploration of reading through paratextual entry points, asking what it means to be in relation with testimony, whom and what are readers responsible for, and how readers are invited to testimony and directed to enact their responsibilities as witnesses. Discussing poetic and narrativized testimonies — Cree poet Louise Bernice Halfe's *Blue Marrow* and Carmen Aguirre's *Something Fierce: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Daughter* respectively — I enter my critical engagement with these texts through their paratexts, allowing their material thresholds to strategically guide my acts of reading. Accordingly, my approach serves to destabilize the power dynamics of testimonial transactions, returning agency to the producers of testimony and their knowledge systems

without relinquishing critical engagement with audiences' power and responsibility, while also accounting for the knowledge that audiences bring with them to reading acts.

Since the chapter focuses on individual reading practices (rather than the shared reading models enacted on Mass Reading Events like *Canada Reads*), it interlaces my theorization of an ethical relationality approach to reading testimony alongside a reflection on my experiences as a reader. In so doing, it considers the cultural knowledge I was encountering in testimony, as well as the one I carry with me as I come to read testimony. The knowledge I carry with me is the Jewish command and practice of זכור (zakhor), explained by Simon as “both an imperative and an obligation: ‘remember’,” simultaneously invoking an individual command as well as a communal mode of relationality, and demanding learning, teaching, preserving and acting on testimony's claims (“The Paradoxical Practice of Zakhor” 10-11). Personally, the commands of zakhor always guide my engagement with testimony, but entering the literary accounts through their paratext serves to de-centre my contexts and highlight my obligation to learn and act on their terms. Shifting the focus to the terms that frame a testimonial account can invite readers to enact more active and critical modes of reading. It leaves room for affect but does not privilege it, thus affording readers more tangible avenues to contend with existing systems and structures and account for their own power to enact recognition and mobilize testimony's justice claim. Encouraging readers to account for their own power is a key component in my approach to reading testimony, as it is a necessary condition for decolonizing relational dynamics and for mobilizing readers' ethical responsibility to honour testimony's demands. In particular, in this chapter I suggest that the situated entry points of paratext invite readers to confront the ways in which they are implicated in colonial pasts at the present, even though they “cannot be complicit in crimes that took place before [their] birth” (Rothberg 14). As such, the chapter establishes

how paratext-guided reading can lead to a decolonizing practice by offering a tangible avenue to devising ethical relationality and making right relations.

Complementing the third chapter's exploration of reading as bearing witness to literary testimony and its emphasis on implication as necessary for ethical relationality, chapter four, titled "The Lives and Afterlives of Testimony," focuses on art-based forms of testimony and attends to participatory modes of engagement as invoking feminist and Indigenous practices of care ethics. In this final chapter, I maintain the focus on paratext, and apply it to the material frameworks that construct and mediate art-based testimony for audiences. From performance to art installations and interactive projects, the final chapter examines how audiences are invited to bear witness to testimony in ways that demand more than the performance of affective spectatorship. In this chapter I analyze interactive public-art projects that bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists and audiences, testifying to settler-colonial histories and realities in Canada beyond the limits of state-sanctioned relational discourses and recognition frameworks. In so doing, I critically engage with the ways these projects call on audiences to bear witness through complex affective registers while refusing the consumption of trauma and pain, thus resisting the risks of over-identification with another's trauma, and encompassing a potential to mobilize such responses beyond an ethics of empathic recognition.

As the chapter expands the scope of testimonial mediums, acts, and practices explored in the project, I ask how the mediation of art-based testimony impacts audiences' engagement and their potential shift from spectatorship to witnessing. In so doing, I further examine how audiences' responsibilities to testimony are invoked in transactions of testimonial art. In other words, in this chapter, I claim that participatory art-based testimonies promote an ethics of care as counterpart to implication, as both are necessary for fostering ethical relationalities that can

honour the “advocacy, responsibility, and accountability” demanded in bearing witness (Whitlock *Postcolonial Life Narratives* 8). From the collaborative performance of *Hair*, to the collective-based commemorative art installation *Walking with Our Sisters*, alongside the participatory (*official denial*) *trade value in progress*, and the interactive game-based performance *Apology Dice*, this final chapter analyses the design and curation of these projects. It examines how these projects attest to colonial violence, trauma, and injustice by disrupting passive consumption and strategically guiding audiences’ ethical engagement with and through care. In so doing, the selected projects mobilize Indigenous and feminist approaches to care ethics which highlight care as an ongoing praxis of “recognizing and learning from one’s place in a web of diverse relationships and being drawn by the responsibilities that are embedded in such relationships” (Whyte and Cuomo 240). In particular, I build on the work of María Puig de la Bellacasa whose attention to care at the intersections of feminist, Marxist, and materialist perspectives, argues for care as the concrete work of maintaining relations shaped by the interconnectedness of “labor/work, affect/affections, ethics/politics” which “are held together” despite tensions and contradictions (3, 5). The chapter thus argues that these art projects demand an ethics of care as a condition for ethical relationality that fosters sustainable and decolonizing engagement with testimony.

This demand is articulated through the projects’ mediation, which challenges audiences with testimony that refuses representation, and guides them to bear witness in ways that unsettle their expectations of spectatorship. In so doing, the institutional and curatorial practices that mediate these projects, situate the projects as sites of confrontation, defined by Denise Ferreira da Silva as art events which mobilize the political efficacies of art by “making visible without making public” (n.p.). Indeed, as they unsettle audiences’ expectations, sites of confrontation

demand more complex, reflexive, and active modes of engagement, invoking an ethics of care. While the framework of care is not without its risks of strategic political manipulation, and though, as Puig de la Bellacasa warns, “it is not a notion to embrace innocently” (6-7), the anticolonial praxis of care invoked in these sites of confrontation serves to directly disrupt the mythology of the humanitarian and multicultural Canadian nation. By analyzing the ways in which the projects mobilize ceremonial or call-and-response models of engagement, the chapter establishes how their interactive aspects position audiences as stakeholders, as participants who are bestowed with particular responsibilities and invited to perform tangible actions during the event, encouraging audiences’ emotional and reflexive sense of experience as ethical engagement with testimony. In so doing, the chapter suggests how the design and curatorial practices of art-based testimony—i.e. the paratextual practices that frame and mediate audiences’ engagement—serve to mobilize testimonies’ demand for an ethics of care, centring relationality rather than recognition.

Finally, this last chapter ends with a discussion of the projects’ subsequent iterations: later-date exhibitions, exhibit catalogues, and book publications. My approach to these iterations is grounded in Marlene Kadar’s work on “autobiographical traces,” “as historical documents, personal or official archival materials, oral histories, or creative practices” that record an experience rather than tell the whole story of an event, and afford writers and artists both objects and a method that “allow a belated witnessing” (224, 227). Building on da Silva’s theorization of art as confrontation, this final section extends Kadar’s notion of traces by considering creative testimony as the event, and subsequent iterations as its trace, thus recording not only the traumatic history and its ongoing legacies, but also documenting communities’ knowledge and experience of processing, coping, rebuilding, remembering, and their advocacy for political

change. Concluding the chapter with a consideration of the projects' subsequent iterations as traces that can foster "belated witnessing" (Kadar 227) thus highlights how attention to testimony's framing and mediation encompasses the potential to honour its decolonizing aims, or, in Canada, to work through our current relational crisis.

Approaching the consumption of testimony through the strategic thresholds which artists and writers have laboured to create, allows their agency as cultural agents and testifying subjects (or facilitators of testimony) to set the terms of engagement. In so doing, the material and structural thresholds of literary and art-based testimony guide audiences to dwell on the modes of ethical relationality set forth by testifiers. These fringes offer entry points to testimony in ways that foster witnessing beyond empathy, demanding audiences' considerations of collective implication and an ethics and praxis of care. This research project thus makes way for materially grounded and critically situated modes of engagement that mobilize acts of reading as practices of witnessing, fostering ethical relationalities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities residing together on this land.

1.4 Beyond Empathy

As I conclude work on this project during a summer of local and global protest against systemic racism and colonial violence, the public work and transformative potentials of testimony reverberate across cultural and political fields. The limits of the currently prevalent modes of engagement with testimony echo just as loudly, with empty gestures of recognition or virtue signaling being called out for what they are. Calls for individuals to "educate themselves" through reading non-fiction in general and literary testimony in particular are widespread, as are critiques of how such acts of reading have been modeled and mobilized mainly for the benefit

and profit of the reading subject. This project, which I view as my own call to understand the relationship between testimony and witnessing beyond empathy, feels incredibly timely, and hopefully demonstrates the need for a renewed ethical engagement with testimony in ways that can foster and nurture right relations.

A Moment of Reckoning: CanLit's Relational Crisis

In an interview with Mike Doherty for Haisla Heiltsuk author Eden Robinson refers to the current moment in Canadian literature as “a giant crossroads” defined by “who’s speaking and who’s listening” (“CanLit at a crossroads”). The crossroad Robinson refers to emerges from, but is not limited to, several scandals that have enthralled the literary community in Canada in 2016-2017. In many ways this crossroad encapsulates the current politics of literature in Canada and the modes of relationality it fosters and demands from producers, agents of circulation, and consumers alike. As a crossroads, it is concurrently a site of encounter and a point of divergence, with the pathways leading to and emerging from it defined by deeply entrenched ruptures, which are shaped by the institutional power dynamics of colonial histories, legacies, and realities. The stakes, then, are high, very high — whose stories are told, how, and for whose profit, whether a shared community or imaginary even exists, and, if so, what are the responsibilities of its varied constituencies. It is these precise stakes that “A Moment of Reckoning” contends with. Building on Robinson’s revealing statement I define the current moment in CanLit as a relational crisis. To define the crisis, I explore the politics of literature in Canada with its colonial roots and routes, the modes of relationality it invokes within the confines of national literature, and the roles and responsibilities they shape for each party in the literary (and by extension national) community.

This chapter begins by drawing the contours and stakes of the current crisis through a discussion of Nick Mount’s *Arrival: The Story of CanLit*, critically engaging with its narrative, audience, and reception. In so doing, this chapter contends both with “who’s speaking and who’s listening” (Robinson), but more so, with how stories are told and listened to in relation to the national imaginary, and for whose benefit. To expand my engagement with the current politics of

Canadian literature, I then turn to discuss two recent guides to Canadian literature and its study, focusing on the ways their editors — Cynthia Sugars and Eva-Marie Kröller — frame the creative and scholarly field alongside the roles of its varied reading constituencies. As I develop this discussion, my attention turns towards scholarly readers, their roles as agents of the literary field alongside their responsibilities to real, live communities — or, in other words, their power to shape, challenge, or sustain national myths and mobilize their political efficacies. The following sections address the modes of relationality invoked and modeled by literary scholars in Canada, in an attempt to understand how they foster and reflect relationality between nation-based communities and vis-a-vis the Canadian nation-state. With relationality considered on multiple registers — between agents of the literary field and among nation-based communities — the chapter then concludes with a consideration of the current crisis of relations in CanLit as reflecting, or embodying, the cunning of political recognition discourse in Canada. In other words, this chapter explores the current relational crisis, its colonial resonances, its modes of relationality, and the roles of its reading communities, by addressing the core issues at stake, issues which Cree Métis author Aaron Paquette summarizes as “relationships, community, responsibility” (@aaronpaquette).¹

2.1 Storying CanLit

In September 2017 University of Toronto literature professor Nick Mount published *Arrival: The Story of CanLit*. Defining his book as a project that interlaces literary biography and criticism, Mount purports to tell the complete origin story of a nation’s literary identity (1). The House of Anansi Press book was “[p]ublished to coincide with the 150th anniversary of Canadian Confederation” and unfolds “[t]he full range of Canada’s literary boom” (“Arrival”

House of Anansi Press). But whose stories and lives are included in *Arrival*, and perhaps more importantly, whose aren't? What story is Mount constructing? Who is allowed to speak in Mount's story and who is invited to listen? Mount certainly narrates a story of several literary communities in Canada, threading together institutional conditions, the publishing industry, as well as creative and reading communities. However, despite its claim, it does not "tell the whole story" of "Canada's literary awakening" (Mount 1, "Arrival" *House of Anansi*).

Mount asserts that he wrote this book "because it didn't exist," because no one before brought together the stories about the writers of the CanLit boom, the publishing industry, and that particular time period in the nation's cultural climate (1). And while his story interlaces several narratives, it perpetuates the single origin myth of CanLit:

The long decade between the late 1950s and the mid-1970s saw the emergence of the best-known names in Canadian literature... the names most people still think of when they think of Canadian writing, names like Margaret Atwood, Marie-Claire Blais, George Bowering, Leonard Cohen, Mavis Gallant, Margaret Lawrence, Dennis Lee, Alistair MacLeod, Alice Munro, bpNichol, Michael Ondaatje, Al Purdy, Mordechai Richler, and Michel Tremblay. (Mount 5)

Though these are not the only authors whose work *Arrival* features in its storying of CanLit, its version of the story almost entirely excludes racialized writers and communities—from Black Canadians to Indigenous peoples — thus formulating a project of exclusionary relations. In this sense, *Arrival's* story of Canada's literary coming-of-age during the 1960s, is merely that of "white civility" — i.e. the story which Daniel Coleman describes in *White Civility: The Literary Project of English Canada* as the national construct of Canadianness and the literary tradition that represents it as predominantly white-British and thus an exclusionary imagination of civility

and citizenry (5). As “the whole story” (Mount 1), *Arrival* perpetuates the snow-whiteness of CanLit, its branded industry, the communities it represents, and its readerships, true to the spirit of Canadian cultural nationalism. *Arrival*’s aim, to tell a story that unpacks the interlaced nature of cultural production, national institutions, and public debate for general readers is important, but it also comes with the responsibility of acknowledging and critically reflecting on what and whose stories it shares and how. This responsibility includes rendering visible the politics of national literature and its role in making and breaking transnational relations vis-à-vis the prism of the nation-state. In this sense, *Arrival* narrates the story of a single community as “the whole story,” and hence the only community. Consequently, it erases the presence of other communities, the need for inter-communal relationships, or, for that matter, anyone else to be in relation with.

The most troubling aspect of *Arrival* however, is not the exclusionary story it narrates, rather, it is the public spirit reflected in the book’s modes of circulation and consumption. The book was ten years in production (Mount 9), and though Mount could not have predicted the political changes that the Canadian cultural sphere has undergone, *Arrival*’s own widely celebrated arrival as the missing piece of the nation’s literary coming-of-age in the last months of 2017, is the real testament of CanLit’s relational crisis. In his review of *Arrival*, Neil Besner positions it as “the most important book to be written in more than forty years about the rise of Canadian literature,” suggesting that it is bound to “become required reading” (“Canadian Stories”). John Metcalf, echoes a similar sentiment in his review, which regards *Arrival* as “a wonderful act of re-creating; it simply could not be bettered... It will give to readers and writers too young to have been there a vital understanding and appreciation of their inheritance,” as it “covers the entirety of the growth of CanLit” (“Origin of Species”). Charlotte Gray praises

Arrival as “ambitious,” for its “canvas is the whole country” and it reflects Canadian literature’s contemporary status as a “genre *sui generis* and as an important element of global literary culture” (“Rev. of *Arrival*”).

Though Mount does not offer a detailed etymological analysis of the term ‘CanLit’, some reviewers have celebrated *Arrival* for what they regard as its extended engagement with the term as more than mere shorthand. However, Mount is by no means original in his deployment of ‘CanLit’. In “Metamorphoses of a Discipline,” Diana Brydon defines CanLit as “the informational shorthand for Canadian literature that names it as an established formation” and includes the creative body of works, the scholarly field of study, and the nation-state designated in the category, which are all “institutionally produced entit[ies]” (2, 5). With Brydon’s work preceding Mount’s by an entire decade, why, then, is Mount celebrated by literary scholars for this approach, and is there a difference between his vision of CanLit and Brydon’s? There are clearly distinctive positions regarding the meaning, scope, and function of CanLit as a signifier. Some, like Metcalf, and Mount himself, see CanLit as what Alex Good terms as a “historical phenomenon,” a closed-chapter and bygone-product that is neatly archived between the covers of *Arrival* (“Money, Myth, and CanLit”). Others deem the signifier as a constantly evolving phenomenon that reflects Canadians’ changing “understanding of ourselves,” in the words of David Staines in his review for *The Globe and Mail*. From Charlotte Gray, to Fraser Sutherland’s “A Fit of CanLit,” the *National Post*’s reviewer Terra Arnone, or Dennis Duffy’s “Sociology of CanLit,” CanLit isn’t merely still evolving, tied to a national imaginary that’s relevant and alive, but serves to represent, imagine, and challenge it at the same time.

The discrepancy between the positions of *Arrival*’s reviewers’ points to the major fault lines of CanLit’s relational crisis which can be understood as a contestation of the role of

national literature in general, the politics of national literature in particular, and most profoundly, the communities it is responsible for. The gaps between the positions that emerge from these debates — CanLit as a nationalist and state manufacture product of the mid-twentieth century that is now over and done with, vs. CanLit as a multilayered category that is continuously evolving and questioning its own designation and the current state of a national imaginary — exceed the scope of general discussions, and are further reflected in current scholarly debates. From an academic perspective, Mount’s book certainly stands for the first group, as it perpetuates the cultural-nationalism project that ends with the arrival of multicultural critiques and post-national claims. But, as Cynthia Sugars notes in her Introduction to the *Oxford Handbook of Canadian Literature*, the latter position is reflected in a current academic trend that “draws the links between the literary and the public sphere” (8). In “Another Dumpster Fire” posted on the feminist blog *Hook and Eye*, and “The Wild Rise of CanLit” in *The Walrus*, Julie Rak, and Paul Barrett (respectively), openly challenge Mount’s definition of CanLit by modeling these very conversations — linking the literary and public spheres while unpacking the exclusionary, colonial nature of his work and the dangers encompassed in such an overview of the nation’s literary milieu.

As opposed to reviewers like Gray, who commend Mount for the breadth of his mapping, Barrett states that *Arrival* portrays an “exceptionally white” version “of the CanLit boom as driven by a small core of Toronto authors and publishers,” a version that “is not truly reflective of the CanLit community, even at the time” (“The Wild Rise of CanLit”). In particular, Barrett highlights the absence of Indigenous and Black authors in Mount’s CanLit corpus, singling out Maria Campbell and Austin Clarke, whose absence, according to Barrett, “blows a significant hole in [Mount’s] history” (“The Wild Rise of CanLit”). Sylvia Söderlind adds that Mount’s

selective and biased overview is reflected in his lack of attention to Franco-Canadian literature, limiting it to background information, “turning French Canada into a kind of supplement... to English Canada” (“Other Gates”). Rak’s review further notes the glaring omission of feminist writers, highlighting the absence of works by Nicole Brossard and Dorothy Livesay, as well as Margaret Lawrence, who Mount does address but neglects to mention her feminist work. In so doing, Rak indicates Mount’s relegation of feminism’s influence on the CanLit boom as merely formulating the conditions that created its audience (Mount 308), positioning feminists solely as consumers rather than producers, as the ones buying the image rather than shaping the imagination.

Their reviews indicate one of the many ways in which the CanLit marker is an evolving signifier, which has never been a settled one, but rather one that has always been political and politicized (and Mount’s book is no exception). In her essay “On the Politics of Literature,” Judith Fetterley discusses the role of power in the politics of literature in terms of inclusion and exclusion, or, in other words, as a matter of visibility and accessibility. “Power is the issue in the politics of literature, as it is in the politics of anything else. To be excluded from a literature that claims to define one’s identity is to experience a peculiar form of powerlessness” (Fetterley 94). In her attention to considerations of taking and making space within systems, Fetterley argues that acts of inclusion and exclusion serve to keep in power or undermine existing hegemonies (95), and that discussions of these matters should be determined by Lillian Robinson’s question of “*cui bono*—who profits?” (887).

Rak’s critique of *Arrival*’s scope pinpoints this specific question: ‘who profits?’ She notes that the problem is not merely that *Arrival* “reproduces assumptions about white, homophobic, sexist, settler Canada,” but that “*it celebrates them*” (“Another Dumpster Fire”;

italics in original). As Rak indicates, the danger of *Arrival* isn't merely the scope of works and literary figures included or omitted from the narrative, but rather how they are presented, and in whose service, they operate. In the guise of a descriptive project, Mount's history prescribes a seemingly a-political narrative of the nation's literary coming-of-age. This is, in and of itself, a political act that perpetuates the 'white civility' myth of Canadian identity and its literature. Rak, like Barrett, calls out Mount's work, the power-structures it serves, and those who hail it, particularly because of recent events which have unveiled, in no uncertain terms, that the project of national literature—including the parties and institutions that shape it—is never a-political. As Rak notes in her closing statement:

In the wake of these scandals that revealed much of the foundation of the CanLit star-system to be racist, neocolonialist, sexist and just plain arrogant, it might seem unthinkable that a book such as *Arrival* could be received without much hard-hitting discussion of its assumptions about history, regionalism, race, settler colonialism, and what constitutes sound research. But this is what has happened, so far. The dumpster fire that is Canadian literary nationalism continues to burn. *Arrival* fans the flames. (“Another Dumpster Fire”)

The “scandals” Rak refers to are three inter-related events—known as the Galloway or UBCAccountable affair, the controversy revolving Joseph Boyden's Indigenous identity claims, and *Write Magazine's* Appropriation Prize scandal—that have deeply disrupted and divided the Canadian literary community. The events, since dubbed by Tuscarora writer Alicia Elliott and author Jenn Sookfong Lee as a “raging dumpster fire” (McGregor et. al. 27), reflect the colonial, racist, and misogynistic attitudes inherent in CanLit, and make visible the gaping disparities of power embedded in the politics of Canadian literary communities and institutions.

In “Living in the Ruins,” the introduction to *Refuse: CanLit in Ruins*, co-editors Hannah McGregor, Julie Rak, and Erin Wunker summarize the sequence of events which erupted in November 2016, with the publication of the UBCAccountable open letter addressed to the University of British Columbia. The letter was published in support of “novelist and former UBC Creative Writing Program Chair Steven Galloway, who had been fired by UBC after an internal investigation into what it called ‘serious allegations’ about his conduct by a student and other complainants,” implying that “Galloway, and not the complainants should be believed and supported” (McGregor et. al. 23). The next controversy emerged in direct relation and proximity to the Galloway affair, as *APTN National News* published an investigative article questioning Joseph Boyden’s “claims to Indigenous ancestry and the ways in which he had profited from representing a culture that may or may not be his” (McGregor et. al. 24). With Boyden being a prominent proponent of the UBCAccountable letter, “the ties between the two events are evident” (McGregor et. al. 24). In the aftermath of the Boyden controversy, as “questions of identity and cultural appropriation in Canadian literature still very much under discussion,” Hal Niedzviecki published an editorial entitled “Winning the Appropriation Prize” in *Write Magazine*’s special issue on Indigenous literatures in Canada, “mock[ing] questions of cultural appropriation and Indigenous artistic practice” (McGregor et. al. 25).

These controversies far exceeded the realm of literary communities, circulating and unraveling on both mainstream and online media, and unveiling the deep political divides that run through CanLit. The production and circulation of responses-to and critiques-of these events is particularly telling, as “[h]igh-profile signatories were able to give interviews and write op-eds for major publications, but most [critical] commentators did not have the same access, and so blogs and social media platforms became the only way for other writers and activists to join the

debate” (McGregor et. al. 34). While prominent editors and writers have employed their cultural-cachet to publicly support Galloway, Boyden, and Niedzwiecki, Indigenous, feminist, queer, and racialized writers, academics, and activists — many of whom are precariously employed and lack any institutional support — have been jeopardizing their careers and incomes in voicing their deep concerns and adamant critiques. The controversies, the debates surrounding them, and their modes of circulation, all point to the same gaping power disparities in Canada’s literary communities, revealing who profits from the formations of CanLit’s multiple registers and how.

McGregor, Rak, and Wunker draw this claim about disparities even further, as they argue that the recent events are symptoms of long-standing entrenched divides, rooted in the very formations of CanLit as an industry, cultural field, and academic discipline (16). Tracing the roots of CanLit as deeply grounded in colonial violence, and historicizing moments of rupture and resistance to this oppressive and exclusionary formation, the co-editors note that “in this sense CanLit is the nation. It articulates the nation for itself and repeats the strategies of inclusion as a way to incorporate opposition into ideology” (McGregor et. al. 21). They even address how Mount’s narration of the story of CanLit as a multi-layered signifier embodies this spirit, as “[l]ike the image of Canada as a place without racism, where tolerance and diversity mark out our national character, [*Arrival*’s] image of CanLit ignores how literary celebrity depended on tokenization and exclusion, of writers and of the environment that made such a narrative of national success so easy to believe” (22).

The co-editors of *Refuse*, then, situate *Arrival* as an emblem of the colonial structures, legacies, and realities that have been shaping CanLit, and have created the institutional conditions and political positions of the recent controversies. And just like the opposing perspectives revolving the controversies, so are reviews of *Arrival* at odds, with Arnone and

Duffy considering *Arrival* to be timely and useful to readers on both sides of literary political debates, precisely because “[i]t’s an auspicious refresher or context-setter for modern Canadian readers; the kind who ... have watched these giants find new footing online, opining fervently in 120 characters or less” (Arnone). Duffy adds that it is due to the institutional and material infrastructure that Mount’s book narrates, that these controversies are even able to take place among wider audiences in the dailies. “Cultural politics, especially literary ones,” writes Duffy, “now make themselves felt in the news, and not always to the comfort of all the participants. Hats off to *Arrival* for its engaging coverage of a pivotal period in Canadian letters” (“A Sociology of CanLit”). Duffy and Arnone, then, obscure the power disparities at play in the current debates, ignoring who stands to profit from Mount’s storying of CanLit, and whose presence it erases, yet again, from the nation’s imagination.

In reviewing the reception of *Arrival*, whether celebratory or critical, I suggest that the high stakes of the debates about race and politics in national literature revolve around a recognition of CanLit’s relation to the nation-state’s colonial histories, legacies, and realities. It is these legacies that entrench the white civility myth that Mount’s story perpetuates, and it is these colonial realities that draw the fault lines at the heart of the recent CanLit controversies. In CanLit, then, colonialism serves “as an extended process of denying relationship” (Donald, “On What Terms Can We Speak?”, min. 12:10-12:15). A descendant of the Papaschase Cree, Donald’s definition of colonialism and its effects on the relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada is offered in the context of pedagogical imperatives, and suggests that in order to build a shared future, Indigenous peoples and Canadians must recognize and outright name the historical colonial divides that shape their present-day relationship (min. 12:15-12:40). In so doing, Donald’s definition pinpoints the core resonances of colonialism as the

major fault line shaping the current crisis in CanLit, a crisis revolving around “relationships, community, responsibility” (@aaronpaquette).

This is also where Donald’s ethical relationality applies to the current crisis of CanLit — “require[ing] attentiveness to the responsibilities that come with a declaration of being in relation... [and] carefully attend[ing] to the particular historical, cultural, and social contexts from which a person or community understands and interprets the world” (“Indigenous Métissage” 535). The need for ethical relationality as a response to CanLit’s moment of reckoning, is perhaps most strongly evident in Tuscarora writer Alicia Elliott’s call to action, urging scholars of national literature in Canada to focus on the socio-political efficacies of recent scandals:

A national literature’s job is to both define and uphold the nation. But what if that nation’s foundational beliefs about itself are, well, lies? ... Currently, we’re collectively mourning the loss of a CanLit – and a Canada – that was always an idea instead of a lived reality. It’s fine to mourn, of course. It’s natural. But we can’t just stand around and complain about the dumpster fire in front of us forever. Eventually we have to grab some fucking fire extinguishers and put that fire out. In other words, we have to sit down, assess the criticism and do the work to fix the problems. (97)

I offer the following sections of this chapter (and by extension the dissertation) as an initial response to Elliott’s call, and an attempt to contour the terms and conditions we must address to develop an ethical relationality.

2.2 Imagining Readers

Those who need to “*do the work and fix the problems,*” are the writers, producers, readers, and scholars of CanLit, and the case of Mount’s *Arrival* directly addresses their roles and responsibilities. Mount’s narration and curation of CanLit’s story is an exercise in what Fetterley calls the “posture of the apolitical, the pretense that literature speaks universal truths” (93). Mount’s story of the CanLit boom participates in the kind of formation Fetterley describes regarding the roles of national literature and its readership. A “literary canon, a shifting but recognizable body of writing *for critics to describe, students to read, the public to celebrate, and writers to steal from or define themselves against*” (Mount 294, my emphasis). These are the exact roles Mount ascribes to readers – general readers should celebrate, and critics should describe; neither party is allowed to critique. As a literary critic, Mount models his own position and claims to describe the CanLit boom. He is not the only one to ascribe the literary critic in general, and the literary historian in particular, the descriptive role. Like Besner, Metcalf, and Gray, Bethune congratulates Mount for telling the story of CanLit’s birth with “a graceful simplicity” (“How CanLit was Born”).

But for others, like Rak and Barrett, this is where Mount’s greatest fault lies. Citing Northrop Frye’s definition of literature as “conscious mythology,” Barrett notes that works of literary history – like *Arrival* – have “a significant role to play in the mythologizing of the nation, what stories it decides to tell of its own histories, and who its principal cultural actors are” (“The Wild Rise of CanLit”). For Barrett, this is where Mount’s own perception of his roles as a reader and literary critic misrepresents the political efficacies of his book: “[Mount] positions himself as a neutral observer of these clusters of Canadian literary activity... when, in fact, he is very much their cultivator ... he is not merely describing CanLit at a crucial time of its creation; he is

proscribing how that creation will be imagined for the foreseeable future” (“The Wild Rise of CanLit”). Barrett’s critique highlights a significant component in the roles of readers — general and scholarly alike — described by Shafquat Towheed, Rosalind Crone, and Katie Halsey in *The History of Reading* as “the transformative capacity of [a] book” (1). Mount’s position denies this transformation in service of maintaining political structures by posturing an apolitical role to the production of literature and its consumption. It is also this very transformation that Barrett and Rak’s positions model and demand. As they challenge the exclusionary, seemingly universalized version of CanLit narrated in *Arrival*, as well as the celebratory reception of its story, Rak and Barret model a critical reading practice that achieves Fetterley’s desire to “change literary criticism from a closed conversation to an active dialogue” (97). They do so not only by making visible the realities and political structures which the singular CanLit narrative serves, but also by showing that this never really was the only case or only story.

Rak and Barrett’s models of critical readers and readings do not merely challenge Mount’s view of readers, but also his position on national literature. In *Arrival* Mount does not merely limit the roles of readers, as he also renders the work of national literatures and the imaginaries they cultivate obsolete: “[I]ike the literatures of other large countries today, it’s not a national literature, not in the sense of a national project, or something that is definitely uniquely Canadian. ‘Canadian literature’ is now just the sum of its parts, a useful abstraction” (294). As the sum of its parts, Mount suggests, the current state of Canadian literature does not offer a shared imaginary to celebrate, and thus denies a contemporary sense of community, however exclusionary that community may be. Reviews of *Arrival* represent a similar state for CanLit. Besner, for example, notes that the present creative corpus, industry and readerships are no longer a part of the national imaginary, if anything, they—cultural forces such as “the indigenous

revival and the current post national reality”—seem to stand for varied literatures produced in Canada rather than markers of a shared imagined community (“Canadian stories”). Bethune takes his argument a step further, to describe Mount’s storying of the CanLit boom as “writing by people connected to this country, by birth or residence, and a dialogue between author and reader. Nothing else need intrude” (“How CanLit was born”). Bethune thus clarifies that Mount’s story of CanLit has never been one of a shared imaginary or community, but has rather been one defined by its absence. For Mount, as Bethune notes, while there may be a dialogue in which readers celebrate authors’ works, CanLit has always lacked a community to hold readers together through a shared imaginary.

Mount’s rendering of national literature’s role of nation-building is important precisely because it deems relations within the national imaginary as irrelevant, negating the entire validity of a communal project and the shared responsibilities that come with that. Limiting the roles of readers to celebration and description while declaring the shared imaginary of the Canadian nation obsolete, Mount deems Paquette’s stakes of “relationships, community, responsibility” as irrelevant, and denies literature any possibility of communal transformation. In other words, if there is no shared community then there are no relationships to foster or nurture, if the national imaginary is merely the sum of its parts then considerations or responsibility and criticism are irrelevant. *Arrival*, then, does not even pretend to hold an apolitical pretense, in its very core it narrates a deeply politicized story. In fact, if Mount’s claim is to be followed then the recent scandals in CanLit communities cannot occur, because there is no shared imaginary to celebrate or argue about. Nonetheless, the scandals and their revolving debates, in both mass media and scholarly circles, suggest that numerous communities of writers, producers, and readers have high political stakes related to literatures in Canada, ones that are deeply grounded in

community, responsibility and relationality. More so, these vocal debates make evident that however contested the scope, histories, and futures of CanLit may be, it is anything but an obsolete signifier.

The high political stakes and shared imaginaries are not limited to conversations in mass and social media, but are reflected in scholarly production as well, with two recently published guides in Canadian literary studies modeling both the gap between the imagined role of national literature and its readers, as well as the political efficacies of national literature and its critique. While narrating a radically different history for CanLit, its study, and the roles of its constituencies, Eva-Marie Kröller's *Cambridge Companion to Canadian Literature* and Cynthia Sugars's *Oxford Handbook to Canadian Literature*, both suggest the signifier's present formulations as a lively and engaging chapter in the shared imagination and transformation of the nation. The *Cambridge Companion* was originally published in 2004 and revised in 2017, while the *Oxford Handbook* was published in 2016. The revised *Companion* and the *Handbook* are thus published around the same time as *Arrival* and happen to coincide with the eruption of the recent scandals. Both guides map the current state of CanLit—as a creative corpus, an institutionally fostered label, and a community of readers—as a lively and potentially transformative site of social debate. What those transformations may be, and their respective position in the ongoing debates, are where the guides greatly differ. Whereas Kröller situates the roles of CanLit readerships in line with Mount's view, as ones that describe and celebrate the nation, Sugars positions readers and scholars as cultural agents who question, challenge, and imagine the nation and its state institutions.

The vast differences are evident in both the form and content of the guides, as the tables of content, choices of contributors and the editors' respective introductions narrate radically

different stories for CanLit. As a companion, the chapters in Kröller's edited collection are almost exclusively invested in an overview of the creative corpus, cultivating a seemingly apolitical guise. With an original edition in 2004, and a second one in 2017, the companion remains mostly the same, apart from two entirely rewritten chapters (the life-writing chapter rewritten by Julie Rak, and the one on national literature by Shelley Hulan), and two revised chapters which feature the addition of a new section by a new contributor (Daniel Heath Justice for the Aboriginal Writing chapter and Jessica Riley for the Drama one). Both editions also include varied peritextual materials such as maps and a chronology of historical and cultural events, with references to specific literary works that represent the period or mark significant moments in the country's literary corpus. Appearing prior to the introduction, the chronology fosters a sense of linear progression as the organizing principle of the guide, and grounds the image of a singular shared Canadian story, before reading even a single chapter. In terms of the guide's structure, both editions of the *Cambridge Companion* offer an eclectic collection of genres and a distinct focus on CanLit's spatial tropes — almost directly echoing Northrop Frye's oft-repeated “who am I is answered by some such riddle as where is here” paradigm — with chapters such as nature writing, travel and exploration, or regionalism and urbanism. Three of the book's chapters address identity categories, providing attention to Aboriginal, Francophone, and Women's writing. Marked as ‘writings’ the chapters' titles placate identity politics, truncate numerous and different communities under the guise of a seemingly benign unifying category and impose inclusion into the national creed. More so, these chapters not only mark distinct ‘others’ in Kröller's CanLit, but highlight the ‘others’ — such as diasporic, Black, or Asian communities — as excluded from her mosaic. The defining logic of Kröller's companion, then, is the same as that of Mount's *Arrival*, a narrative that perpetuates white civility, with just a dash

of diverse representation to reflect major trends in literary production without posing a threat to the national myth.

Despite the vastly different scope of the projects, with the *Cambridge Companion* offering a succinct overview compared to the *Oxford Handbook*, the editors' introductions narrate very different stories of CanLit. From the outset, Sugars' *Oxford Handbook* sets to unsettle the singular shared story and any national myths it serves. With multiple contributors and perspectives featured in each of the guide's five parts, Sugars presents stories of Canadian literatures and focuses on diverse aspects of their study. The first and last parts of the handbook address the origins and futurities of CanLit, as Sugars interlaces the literary production with its scholarly critique and edits a guide that is transparent in the ways that literature is mobilized and politicized within the nation and beyond. As one section is dedicated to varied periods and genres, two other parts consider nation-based categories— one addressing “Indigenous Literatures and Contexts” and the other sharing reflections on “intra-national” traditions from diasporic, to Asian, Black, Jewish, Quebecois, or Arab perspectives. Sugars' pluralities of literary traditions and scholarly perspectives resists privileging a singular story. She offers a guide that makes visible the tensions, blind-spots, and debates that have been characterizing the varied registers of the CanLit signifier from the get go and does not shy away from addressing the ways it celebrates, fosters, and challenges Canada's national myths alongside one another.

Each editor's introduction reflects these approaches. From the opening statements of her Introduction, Sugars situates multiple concepts of CanLit alongside one another, historicizing both the creative corpus produced in Canada and its critique from the mid-nineteenth century onward. The *Oxford Handbook* positions its histories of Canadian literature through the prism of colonialism and traces the shifting scholarly discourses. To introduce CanLit without privileging

a single story, Sugars narrates with constant attention to juxtaposing tensions. As she begins with considerations of 19th century Canadian literature as articulating “a Canadian identity or ‘character,’ a national self-definition based on exclusionary conceptions of racial (and cultural) fitness and desirability,” Sugars concurrently juxtaposes this position with the competing perception of Canada merely as a colony that “lacked the cultural traditions, history, or local inspiration to ground a properly resonant local literature” (1-2). But Sugars does not merely describe the oppositional perspectives; as she presents the competing narratives, she uses the former to challenge the latter, thus attending to multiplicities yet offering a critical contribution. While Sugars starts with Confederation, narrating the tensions between the local perspective and that of the colonizing empire, *Kröller* enters her story of CanLit from its contemporary international reputation, discussing the reception of Yann Martel and Madeleine Thien’s work vis-à-vis their Mann Booker Prize nominations in 2002 and 2016 respectively. Though their temporal and spatial entry points differ, and while Sugars tends to foreground critical and academic perspectives whereas *Kröller* focuses on creative production, both editors quickly turn to address CanLit’s colonial histories. Both *Kröller* and Sugars situate Canadian literature and its representation of the national shared imaginary as one that emerged from an understanding of Canada as colony of France and later, of Britain.

However, *Kröller* quickly turns to situate Canada as “a settler nation, in a position between colonizer and colonized” (4). This shift in language, from “colony” to “settler nation,” may suggest a turn away from understanding Canada as a passive of extension of the European crowns and towards an active force that formed its own national imaginary and state apparatus. *Kröller*’s terminology seems to suggest accountability and offer a consideration of Canadian cultural production as representing the nation-state’s responsibility for the colonization and

dispossession of Indigenous peoples. Yet, throughout her introduction Kröller focuses on the prism of the French-English divide, forming her engagement with diversity in Canada and its literary representation, through the prism of this euro-centric divide with its racialized others always set as a counterpart. In this way, Kröller's position embodies Coleman's claims about white civility as the defining characteristic of Canadian identity, while limiting the relevance of its diverse others only for teachers who want to allow their students to explore their cultural heritage (9). This is most evident in her discussion of multiculturalism, as she defines Canada's multicultural policy, and its resulting ethnically diverse literary production, as a celebrated period that facilitated the desired transition from a national coming-of-age to international arrival (10). She sums the policy as "a sequel to the Immigration act ensuring the rights of new Canadians to 'preserve, enhance and share their cultural heritage,'" and immediately moves to present its critiques (11). She situates the policy vis-à-vis the Anglophone-Francophone divide and cites "other observers [who] surmise that Trudeau's policies were a shrewd act of realpolitik to challenge Quebec separatism, by creating a multicultural population little interested in the traditional disagreements of the two 'founding nations' and by using foreign cultural policy as a showcase for federalism" (11). Kröller does note the opposite side of critiques, which situates the policy as a divisive, rather than unifying, practice. These critiques, often expressed by scholars who are members of 'othered' communities, are subsumed in her "Introduction" with a single generalized statement that notes they "dismissed this policy as an ill-considered ploy in domestic and international politics which would only serve to add further divisions to existing ones" (11). She names a single critique, Neil Bissoondath's *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, and frames it as "controversial" work that "provoked enough debate to require a revised and updated version" (11).

With these remarks, Kröller not only avoids presenting Bissoondath's arguments, but subsumes an entire decade of work by writers and scholars as controversial. In effect, critics of multiculturalism have hardly dismissed the policy, quite the contrary. Critiques of multiculturalism concurrently unveil the Euro-centric racist social structures perpetuated by the policy, unpack the obscuring language of culture and the segregating nature of its praxis, and note the irony of its seeming (yet forced) inclusion and de-facto exclusion from the national imaginary. In *The Dark Side of The Nation*, Himani Bannerji claims that Canada's boutique multiculturalism perpetuates "selective modes of ethnicization..." and serves as mere re-branding of the mosaic policy, as "the Anglo-Canadian core tolerat[es] other cultures/ethnicities" (78). In this way, Bannerji argues, Canada keeps its ethnicized communities (both Indigenous and settler) paralyzed in their traditional attire, "creating objects out of people" (117). Bannerji is among the Canadian scholars and writers who have challenged the policy's guile and dangers, highlighted its mere tolerance in the guise of diverse acceptance, as well as traced the social activism that pressured recognition for 'othered' communities and brought on both multiculturalism and the redress discourses that follow.²

But for Kröller, multicultural CanLit is to be celebrated primarily because it ushered the national imaginary from its coming-of-age during the 1950s cultural nationalism, to its internationalization. The international prism Kröller posits pertains to two concurrent moves — the first is CanLit's arrival on the global literary stage (with which she opens her introduction) and the second addresses the "remarkable array of established and emerging authors from a broad spectrum of very different backgrounds" (13). The "remarkable array" features works by both Indigenous and writers of colour published since 1989 (12), all subsumed under the umbrella of international, or rather post-national, CanLit. With this single statement, then,

Kröller makes the same exclusionary and dismissive move that Mount offers, situating contemporary literatures in Canada as a variety of voices with no shared present or future imaginary. For Kröller, the global accolades to these works merit celebration as a form of “arrival,” but the voices, and the Canada they represent, bear no relation to one another, their local readerships, or a shared national imaginary at stake. Contemporary CanLit, for Kröller, is thus an assortment of ‘other’ voices promoted in the aftermath of multicultural policies and lacking any shared imaginary, both among these texts and with the Canadian identity of the Anglophone-Francophone divide.

Sugars, on her part, continues to engage with the changing perspectives of colonialism in Canada by threading both Indigenous and transnational or diasporic literatures as inherently engaging with colonial discourse and the Canadian nation-state. By tracing the increasingly critical scholarly conversations, rather than a seemingly apolitical literary production, Sugars historicizes colonial legacies and realities and the ways they have shaped both literary production and its critique in relation to the national imaginary. The closing section of the *Oxford Handbook*'s introduction focuses on the present state of the scholarly field and traces five central conversations shaping the current and future trajectories of the field. Among those five conversations, Sugars identifies one that is invested in “the connections between Canadian literature and the nation’s colonial and pre-colonial directions” (8). Sugars traces the emergence and avenues of this discussion:

Foremost among these is a widespread focus on Indigenous literatures and settler-Indigenous relations. This field of interest has become especially prominent since the 1990s. This field was given impetus by the growing interest in postcolonial discourse and literatures of the 1970s and 1980s, although the term postcolonial has been widely

critiqued by Indigenous authors and critics in Canada, who insist that Canada is not a ‘post’-colonial state with regards to its treatment of Indigenous peoples, and who reject the assessment of people’s literature that takes as its point of origin and onset of European colonization. Connected to this is an interest in colonial resistance, diasporic literatures, and theories and contexts of globalization. (8)

Like Kröller, Sugars situates conversations about Indigenous literatures along ones on diasporic and transnational literatures in Canada. However, as opposed to Kröller, she threads them in relation to one another and in response to the national imaginary and its histories. With this move, Sugars not only maps a present trajectory but a future for national literature in Canada, and the socio-political implications it bears on a shared, though not necessarily unifying, imaginary.

Whereas the introduction to *Cambridge Companion* reflects the exclusionary position promoted in *Arrival*, the opening of the *Oxford Handbook* narrates multifaceted stories for Canadian literatures and their study, offering readers — general and scholarly alike — varied modes of engagement in their imagined community while maintaining shared responsibilities. In this sense, the *Oxford Handbook* joins a growing number of scholarly projects which unsettle singular white civility myths of CanLit. Since the turn of the century, a variety of scholarly and art-based projects have been dedicated to literary explorations of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities in Canada. From “Citizenship and Cultural Belonging” a special issue of *West Coast Line* (edited by Sophie McCall and David Chariandy), *Cultural Grammars of Nation, Diaspora and Indigeneity in Canada* (edited by Christine Kim and McCall), or *Critical Collaborations: Indigeneity, Diaspora and Ecology in Canadian Literary Studies* (edited by Smaro Kamboureli and Christl Verduyn), to *Narratives of Citizenship:*

Indigenous and Diasporic Peoples Unsettle the Nation State (edited by Aloys N.M. Fleischmann, Nancy Van Styvendale and Cody McCarroll), Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham's edited a special issue of *English Studies in Canada* on "Aboriginal Redress" and their *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives of the Culture of Redress*, *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity* (Ashok Mathur, Jonathan Dewar, and Mike DeGagné), *The Land We Are* (edited by Gabrielle L'Hirondlle Hill and McCall), and *Arts of Engagement: Taking Aesthetic Action In and Beyond the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (edited by Dylan Robinson and Keavy Martin) — collections of essays on nation-based relations have been exploring the politics of literary production, circulation, and consumption in Canada vis-à-vis the colonial legacies and trajectories of a shared imaginary, decentralizing the white civility version of the shared story.

What the projects of the past decade have been unravelling, is that scholarly readers hold the power and responsibility of storytelling, that their interpretation and narration serves to entrench and naturalize the colonial narrative or make evident and thus unsettle the ways it has been governing the fraught transnational relations in Canada. From ideas of treaty or diasporic citizenship and considerations of sui-generis citizenship, these collections suggest relations between nation-based communities in Canada are possible but not inherent, that we are already in relations, but these relations are broken. The events of 2016-2017 further suggest that rather than experiencing an emerging event rich with transformative relation-making potentialities, the current state of CanLit sheds light on the deeply fraught ways in which transnational relations continue to be broken. So, now is the time to inquire what being in relation means. It is time to ask how the fractures can offer pathways not to neat healing processes but rather to disruptive

practices that unsettle power dynamics and colonial institutions, or, in other words, how to develop ethical relationality.

As this section demonstrated, the work of scholarly readers is never a-political, let alone within the framework of national literature. Even if literary critics and scholars merely describe and celebrate, the former is never neutral, and the latter is always in service of the structure it hails. I argue, then, that the practices of reading and interpreting literary works vis-à-vis national structures isn't merely political but is active participation in processes of making and breaking relations. Naming and deconstructing the colonial infrastructures that have been shaping Canadian literature — “as a creative body of works, the scholarly field of study, and the nation-state designated in the category, which are all “institutionally produced entit[ies]” (Brydon 5) — literary scholars in Canada have been doing the hard work of decolonizing the cultural field by showing the ways colonialism has been operating “as an extended process of denying relationship” (Donald min. 12:10-12:15). In so doing, they have been contending with their roles not only as consumers but also as producers, not merely as readers but also as storytellers — asking whose stories we tell, what stories, on what terms and who profits.

2.3 Unsettling Narratives

As Donald notes, to begin the work of renewing relations, to decolonize Canada, “we [must] face each other across these historic divides” and consider the terms on which we speak (min. 14:20-14:30, 11:50-11:52) — namely, we must start by reconsidering the terminology we use, the infrastructures that frame our conversation, and the kinds of relationalities they envision and afford. In the following sections, I join an ongoing conversation among scholars of literature in Canada, examining the terms we use to describe communities' relationship to this place and

others' co-inhabiting it, alongside an interrogation of the categories of nation and culture. By unpacking critical conversations surrounding the terms of settler, nation, culture, and relation, I suggest they can allow us to understand how CanLit's relational crisis is deeply grounded in colonial roots and routes that deny relationality and demarcate the cunning politics of recognition in the cultural sphere.

For many non-Indigenous peoples living in Canada — regardless of the ways they are racialized — the category of settler was laid to rest with books like Susana Moodie's *Roughing it in the Bush* (published in 1852). But the category of settler is by no means a bygone or settled one. Indigenous scholars and thinkers have been holding Canadians accountable to their settler-privileges for decades, invoking the responsibilities that come with this positioning. What is new is that the current trend of engagement with relationality is also propelled by and revolves around the perspectives of general and scholarly readers who are exploring their own settler positionalities and responsibilities. Two questions arise from this trend. The first pertains to the category itself and who is included under its umbrella — does the category describe solely Canadians of white European descent, or does it extend to racialized and diasporic non-Indigenous communities inhabiting this place? The second question engages with who takes up the responsibilities of settler privilege or complicity, and how.

While the term settler is not new, Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice notes a recent turn in uses of the phrase, denoting “associations with shameful atrocities that many would prefer to remain unspoken and buried with the bygone past—and which, in fact, they assume is entirely a matter of past actions rather than ongoing behavior of recent and current generations” (*Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* 9). Justice further indicates that whether the category of settler is applied to Canadians of European descent or racialized and immigrant communities

(both voluntary or forced migrations), “there is a clear desire to distance oneself and one’s community from the violent histories and continuing practices of settler colonialism” (*Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* 10). Sustained conversations of settler perspectives are offered in Paulette Regan’s *Unsettling the Settler Within* and *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the Lens of Cultural Diversity*, edited by Ashok Mathur, Jonathan Dewar, and Mike DeGagné. Both projects are specifically situated vis-à-vis Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, but their engagement with who settlers are and what their responsibilities to Indigenous peoples, reconciliation and Canada may be, are situated in distinctly different ways. Regan offers a definition of settlers as “we who carry the identity of the colonizer and have reaped the benefits and privileges of colonialism” (2) and with this move seems to collapse colonial and historical specificities. Mathur, on his part, narrates his own coming to the settler term as a racialized immigrant and indicates the anthology’s purpose in adding such voices to conversations about reconciliation. For Mathur, the crux of the settler category lies in land, or more specifically in the myth of *tabula rasa* (rather than *terra nullius*) presented to immigrants, a clean slate on which to build their new homes (3). The perpetuation of the clean slate myth, Mathur argues, serves to discourage racialized immigrants and communities from considering themselves as party to the settler-Indigenous binary (3). Mathur’s note regarding the *tabula rasa* myth not only speaks back to early European explorers and settlers who grounded the *terra nullius* myth, but its attention to land as the pivotal category of settler identity (and the violence it enacts) echoes the positions of Indigenous scholars like Justice himself (10).

While Mathur suggests changing the metaphoric language from blank slate to geographic palimpsest (3), Regan indicates that to work for reconciliatory relations, Canadian settler identity must be unsettled by interrogating yet another foundation national myth, that of “the benevolent

peacemaker” — the idea that Canadians and the crown established and sustained relations with Indigenous peoples in peaceful ways. It is the persistence of this particular myth, that, according to Regan, prevents Canadians from understanding themselves as settlers and their nation as an ongoing colonial project, keeping them still on a misguided, obsessive, and mythical quest to assuage colonizer guilt by solving the Indian problem” (11). Regan then suggests that to undo the peacekeeping myth Canadians must shift the focus upon themselves and interrogate what Roger Epp calls “the settler problem” (11). With this shift, Regan asks Canadians to take responsibility for the broken relations with Indigenous peoples and understand themselves as part of an ongoing continuum of colonization. Yet, at the same time, she seems to leave the work of self-recognition as settler and the responsibility for settler colonialism on individuals — “[h]ow can we, as non-Indigenous people, unsettle ourselves to name and then transform the settler – the colonizer who lurks within?” (11). In her call to unsettle the settler within, Regan thus risks perpetuating a different but equally prevalent Eurocentric, enlightenment-era myth, that of individual citizenry responsibility, invoking responsibility not as grounded in community relations but rather as encapsulated in the moral-value of the individual subject.

The narrative of moralizing individual citizenry is challenged by conversations regarding the inclusion of racialized Canadians in the settler category. In “Decolonizing Antiracism,” Bonita Lawrence (Mi’kmaw) and Enakshi Dua open the conversations through the prism of critical-race studies, presenting the argument that “people of color are settlers” (134). Published six years prior to Mathur’s exploration of racialized settler identity, Lawrence and Dua note that while “[b]road differences exist between those brought as slaves, currently working as migrant laborers, are refugees without legal documentation, or émigrés who have obtained citizenship... people of color live on land that is appropriated and contested, where Aboriginal peoples are

denied nationhood and access to their own lands” (134). They contend, in a sense, that not only are racialized subjects also settlers, but that all settlers bear equal responsibility. In “Are People of Colour Settlers Too?” Malissa Phung challenges the latter part of their claim, as she argues for stratified settler identities, caused due to the discriminatory histories and realities of race-relations in Canada. Nonetheless, Phung still suggests that racialized settlers (herself included) can resist “settler-colonial narratives” by refusing the ‘model immigrant’ narrative imposed on them by the white colonial nation state (294). Resisting the European-based upward-mobility narrative, Phung notes, allows settlers of colour to refuse Indigenizing white settlers as the original inhabitants of this land (294). In this sense, Phung maintains Regan’s position that decolonizing settler identity can be achieved via interrogation of national myths and the moral acts of the individual subject.

In the same anthology as Mathur and Phung’s work, Robinder Kaur Sehdev’s “People of Colour in Treaty” shifts the settler discussion from national myths or identity narratives to treaty citizenship: “[o]ur belonging on this land is made possible by treaty, and it is therefore incumbent upon us to reconsider our strategies for social justice with treaty in mind” (265). Taking up James (Sa’ke’j) Youngblood Henderson’s concept, Sehdev calls racialized Canadians to “recognize [their] conflicted position as marginalized settlers and treaty citizens,” and offers a way for individual unsettlement by “shift[ing]... attention from the quest for innocence to the dynamics of power in which we are located and act upon.... direct[ing]... attention to the power contexts that produce us as simultaneously marginal and dominant” (Sehdev 265, 266). In a sense, by unpacking the nuances of settler identity through treaty citizenship, Sehdev offers a way to concurrently expose both the fraudulent ‘benevolent peacemakers’ myth that Regan identifies and the tolerant self-congratulating multicultural myth. In so doing, Sehdev argues for

treaty citizenship that “recognize[s] the significance of treaty to Aboriginal political philosophies and practices,” because failure to do so “amounts to another act of colonization” in which people of colour are used by the Canadian state to maintain the ongoing domination of Indigenous peoples (270).

In “Privilege vs. Complicity: People of Colour and Settler Colonialism” Beenash Jafri makes a crucial contribution to these discussions of the settler category when she makes the distinction between “settler complicity” and “settler privilege.” Privilege, Jafri notes, refers to “the unearned benefits to live and work on Indigenous lands, and to the unequal benefits accrued through citizenship rights within the settler state,” benefits which racialized subjects do not really enjoy due to their “nationality, class, gender and migration status” (“Privilege vs. Complicity”). Jafri indicates that recognizing oneself as a member of the settler category, as benevolent and politically allied as it may be, runs the risk of “easily re-inscrib[ing] dominant subject positions, by centring the focus on the unlearning process of the dominant subject” (“Privilege vs. Complicity”). In a lecture at the 2017 “Indigenous Resurgence at the Age of Reconciliation” conference, Yellowknives Dene theorist Glen Coulthard further argues that in so doing, settler privilege “once again displace[s] Indigenous presence” as the centre of attention is the speaker’s recognition and engagement with their own status (qtd. in Justice *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* 12). Both Jafri and Coulthard, then, refuse attention to the settler self, shifting attention from settler privilege to Indigenous presence, posing a challenge to Regan’s path to decolonization.

Instead, Justice notes that Coulthard calls for a shift in terminology from settler to colonizer, which “returns us to a discussion of colonialism that attends specifically to structures of power, and doesn’t sweep all newcomers into the same status, an understanding that there are

many ways of being in relation to this land, and that not all newcomers are colonial agents” (in Justice *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* 12). Jafri, on her part, asks non-Indigenous Canadians, racialized subjects included, to think in terms of complicity, because it “requires a much deeper investment” as it demands understanding the condition of settlerhood “not as an object that we possess, but as a field of operations into which we become socially positioned and implicated” (“Privilege vs. Complicity”). Complicity does not allow settlers to “‘check’ our privilege at the door” and prevents focus on the privileged individual. It thus shifts decolonizing practices to a re-examination of the “strategies through which we give ourselves [individual] responsibility and become accountable in the first place,” in the hopes that, especially for racialized settlers, “this might open up spaces for thinking about tangible ways that colonial relationships are supported, reproduced and reinforced, rather than how we carry the burden of colonialism on our backs” (“Privilege vs. Complicity”).

When the current crisis of relations in CanLit is considered, I don’t think the question is whether all settlers are made equal, or if settler identities are stratified. Yes, properly naming relations and remaining attentive to semantics and the histories they mark is an important scholarly and political exercise. But, if scholars of literatures in Canada seek to work through the fractured relations within the creative and scholarly communities, and by extension promote the project of decolonizing Canada via public engagement with the nation’s literatures, then the real issue at hand is recognition; recognizing Canada as a settler-colonial nation-state, and, as Jafri further notes, recognizing that *all* non-Indigenous Canadians are complicit in settler colonialism, whether they reap its privileges or not. Being dispossessed or marginalized does not prevent one from *also* being a dispossessor. More so, while recognition alone is not enough, shifting public debate to address the recognition of complicity (rather than focusing on the thematic of

dispossession), *and* demand responsible action – individually and institutionally – are urgently required shifts of both scholarly and public discourses.

2.4 On Nations and Relations

To develop ethical modes of relationality in the Canadian context, the pivotal and complex roles of the settler category, and the discussions of responsibility, privilege, and complicity that it invokes, are perhaps best exemplified in discussions around nation-to-nation relations and responsibilities, as invoked through the concepts of treaty and kinship. In “A Treaty is a Gift” Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair (Anishinaabe) considers relations between nations in Canada to be based in treaty. Sinclair explains that for Indigenous peoples, treaties produce family-relations and are hence both an opportunity and a responsibility; they are “the eternal commitments made between two – and often more – self-determining and independent beings in the interest of producing life” and so are not limited to human-centric relations (“A Treaty is a Gift”). However, he notes, for settler-Canadians — as wide or narrow as the category may be conceived — treaties are a one-time transaction. This epistemological difference is where Sinclair situates the fault line which weakens and breaks treaty relations. For Sinclair,

[w]hile Canada has become one of the richest countries in the world, Indigenous people have received inadequate housing, tainted water, and inappropriate funding caps to education. The relationship isn't working. The problem is, it was never supposed to be this way. The Canada of today is a weak shell made up of fragile, broken, and unfulfilled relationships where virtually all are losing. Today is not the opportunity of yesterday. (“A Treaty is a Gift”)

But Sinclair does not merely lament the lost opportunity. While his essay identifies a relational crisis — one that in many ways encompasses the same crisis I described above regarding Canadian literary production and consumption — Sinclair calls to make an epistemological shift and actively re-engage in treaty relations, together.

In recent years, treaty relations and their application in literary studies in Canada have been invoked predominantly in the context of reconciliation. With the formation, operation and conclusion of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars, activists and public intellectuals have urged Canadians to re-consider treaty relations as a tangible and responsible alternative to what Pauline Wakeham defines as the "cunning" language of reconciliation. In "We Are All Treaty People" Epp notes that "[i]n a very real way, most Canadians exercise a treaty right simply by living where they do. On the prairies we are all treaty people" (133). For Epp, reconciliation demands non-Indigenous Canadians to contend with their "settler problem" because, thanks to national myths, they are too comfortable living with "the dirty little secret that the treaties were a one-time land swindle than with the possibility that [treaties] might mean something in perpetuity" (126, 133). While Epp focuses on settler perspectives (which Coulthard and Jafri argue against), his position aligns with Sinclair's as they both situate the rupture of relations in the breaking of treaty responsibilities as understood by Indigenous communities (137-138). For Sinclair and Epp, reconciliation is first and foremost about lands and treaties, acknowledging that Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians are already in a binding relationship, and that they can and should still work together to repair.

Notokwew Muskwa Manitokan scholar Sharon H. Venne returns the focus of Indigenous perspectives on settler-Indigenous relations, and in "Understanding Treaty 6: An Indigenous Perspective" further highlights that the root of the fracture in relations revolves around the

language used to describe land agreements in the written version of the treaties (192-193). The difference lies in a gap between what is indicated in the written version — i.e. a final sale — and the land-sharing mandate given to Indigenous negotiators “according to the Cree, Saulteau, Assiniboine, and Dene laws” (193). Land, Venne notes, is the root of both Indigenous understandings of being in treaty and the fracture in Indigenous-settler relations. In “Treaties Made in Good Faith,” Venne further highlights the centrality of land for treaty relations:

When Indigenous Peoples talk about the land and the making of treaty, we are talking about our life and the life of future generations. Land is central to that process. We have a relationship with our Creation based on a legal system designed to protect and honour the land. These are the laws that guided Cree Peoples when the Chiefs negotiated and concluded Treaty Six in 1876. (9)

This notion is echoed in Glen Coulthard’s *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* and Chickasaw scholar James (Sa’ke’j) Youngblood Henderson’s “Sui Generis and Treaty Citizenship,” as they both agree that, in treaty, it is the land that defines communal obligations which are non-negotiable and bind *all* of the land’s inhabitants to one another. By focusing on “the oral basis for interpreting the treaties, and the authority vested in Indigenous negotiators,” Venne unpacks treaty obligations and provides both Indigenous and settler readers tangible ways to explore treaty histories and their significance for treaty responsibilities, grounded in legal discourse and nation-to-nation land negotiations (173).

With regards to Canada’s relational crisis and its reconciliatory debate, the most important aspect of treaties isn’t merely the identification of land as the root of the problem. The primary significance of treaty relations, as it arises from Sinclair, Epp, and Venne, is that treaties situate Indigenous nations as autonomous sovereigns and while they are in an existing and

binding relation with the Canadian state, treaties deny Indigenous nations' incorporation as subjects of the settler state. This notion, defined by Henderson as 'Treaty Citizenship', shifts power relations and situates Indigenous peoples as the benevolent power that permits settlement under treaty conditions (115). In so doing, Henderson, like Sinclair, indicates treaty relations as an ongoing process that requires the continuous and sustainable consent of Indigenous peoples, rather than the Canadian state. As I contend with CanLit's relational crisis, and think through the ways literary scholars have and can continue to "sit down, assess the criticism and do the work to fix the problems" (Elliott 97), critical attention to the category of treaty highlights relationality as an ongoing and ethical commitment, implicating both individuals and communities.

The insistence of an epistemological shift, and the ethical stakes encompassed in relations within and between nations, are further clarified in the works of NunatuKavut scholar Kristina Fagan [Bidwell] and Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice. Fagan and Justice indicate that in settler-colonial nation-states like Canada, insistence on the language of nations and relations, in public debates, scholarly discourse, and cultural production alike, is working to make visible and dismantle the mechanisms and institutional realities of colonialism embedded not only in state apparatuses and national identities but also in the intellectual and academic structures that critique them (Fagan qtd. in Justice 247). As he draws from Fagan's work, Justice further notes in "The Necessity of Nationhood" that:

the cultural study of Indigenous literatures, though common in academia, is divorced from being relevant to Indigenous lives, and is being weakened by its avoidance of political concerns... Cultural readings, by themselves, distract us [literary critics], and they fix our attention on shallow surfaces. Culture alone cannot change the world. The power—and danger—of nationhood is that it *can*. (247-248, italics in original)

This single shift in terminology — from culture to nation — demands scholars of literatures in Canada to acknowledge Indigenous communities as sovereign nations, as well as situate all non-Indigenous communities, regardless of how they have been rooted in Canada and routed to this land, as complicit in colonial realities of the Canadian nation-state.

This demand for recognition of terminology as an acknowledgement of responsibility is also evident in the works of Métis artist David Garneau and Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson, who engage with treaties in art-based projects of making and breaking relations. In “Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation” Métis artist and scholar David Garneau suggests that reconciliation discourse is informed by Catholic protocols of relations, which posits an individual vs. state logic, and is premised on the assumption that “a previously existing harmonious relationship” (between Indigenous peoples and the state of Canada) has been damaged or disrupted and requires repair (35). However, Garneau notes, while the relationality of treaties is binding and ongoing, it was never honoured by the Crown or the Canadian nation-state, and so the terminology should shift to making conciliation rather than practicing reconciliation (35). Robinson pushes Garneau’s work a step further. When exploring both Indigenous and settler-led art-projects that claim reconciliatory practices and gestures, Robinson argues that changes to terminology will not only affect the nation-to-nation relations that Garneau and Henderson envision, but would promote conciliatory acts on an individual level (64). Robinson’s practice of conciliation,

“requires a much larger reconsideration [that] settler Canadians might use to acknowledge their intergenerational responsibility... Most importantly, [Robinson] suggest[s], settler Canadians might consider using a phrase that names the continued ignorance of Indigenous histories and lack of civic responsibility for what it is:

intergenerational perpetration... *To reconceive settler Canadians as perpetrators of intergenerational irresponsibility is to shift the framework of perpetration from action to inaction*" (62-63; my emphasis).

In his attention to personal rather than institutional responsibility, and inaction as perpetration, Robinson expands Indigenous-settler relations beyond treaties, legalities, and nation-states, and situates creative cultural projects as a site for building and sustaining relations. His conceptualization of 'perpetration' pushes forward what Jafri defines as 'complicity,' but more so, by returning the focus to individual responsibility, Robinson's approach echoes Regan's, yet models individual accountability that will not fall to the self-indulging trap that Coulthard and Sehdev warn against.

The modes of relationality invoked in the language of treaties are indeed productive in asserting and centralizing Indigenous nations' sovereignty and consent, as well as make evident the reciprocal and continuous nature of responsibilities for sharing land, but treaty relations are also an inherently exclusionary model as not all the peoples of this land have signed treaties — peoples whose traditional territories are unceded and the Métis nation, for example, are not treaty people. Further, by focusing the relations of Indigenous nations with the Canadian nation state, primarily within legal discourse of land negotiations, treaty relations see settlers only as subjects of the state, rather than members of other imagined and physical communities. James Sákéj Youngblood Henderson's model of treaty citizenship attempts to address this issue as he highlights the notion of community:

Each person has a right to a personal identity as a member of a community, but also has responsibilities to other life forms and to the ecology of the whole. Such kinship was a necessary foundation of Aboriginal sovereignty and order. Instead of promoting abstract

rights, the Aboriginal order of kinship implies a distinct form of responsibilities...

Instead of defining a nationality separate from relatives, Aboriginal teachings recognize a web of reciprocal relationships among individuals. (425)

Through the language of community and kinship, Henderson makes evident that the treaties signed between the Crown and Indigenous nations are just one form of relations which is always interlaced with other, concurrent, relational modes which are equally long-lasting and binding.

In “Go Away Water! Kinship Criticism and the Decolonizing Imperative” Justice extends kinship — a principle in which both Indigenous land and identity are rooted — as a model for ethical criticism of Indigenous literatures (353). Defining kinship as “[a] delicate web of rights and responsibilities,” Justice reminds fellow Indigenous scholars that kinship is a verb rather than a noun, something “that is done more than something that simply is,” an approach that insists on active engagement in relationships (“Go Away Water” 352, 369). His model of ethical literary practice deliberately ignores the state and its national imaginary. Rather, by addressing his work to fellow Indigenous literary scholars, he extends the idea of making kinship as a critical practice that formulates what Garneau defines as an irreconcilable space, a sacred space. For Garneau, “irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality” are “Indigenous intellectual spaces that exist apart from the non-Indigenous gaze and interlocution” and depend upon their difference from settlers (33-34). By situating the nation-state and its citizenship model outside the scope of his conversation, Justice returns Indigenous-settler relations to the hands of individuals, as Robinson does, and both of them do so via creative — literary and art-based — production and consumption. In so doing, their relational models shift the power dynamics of nation-based relations and demand individual responsibility within a community setting while refusing to

partake in or be satisfied by the discourse of state recognition and redress, nor privileging the settler perspectives and concerns which Regan centralizes.

While Justice's work, originally published in *Reasoning Together: The Native Critics Collective*, is directed to fellow Indigenous literary scholars, his essay does not preclude extending kinship relations beyond those lines. In *Our Fire Survives the Storm*, Justice offers a wider consideration of the ethical imperative of literary scholarship:

If Thomas King is right, and 'the truth about stories is that's all we are'... then the work of the literary scholars has profound ethical implications. Our vocation is the telling, preservation, interpretation, and creation of stories. Stories are what we *do*, as much as what we are. (206)

By extending storytelling to scholars (as well as authors), Justice bestows all literary scholars — Indigenous and non — with the responsibilities of making kinship relations and actively engaging with them through acts of reading and writing. Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair builds on Justice's statement in "Responsible and Ethical Criticisms of Indigenous Literatures," as he outlines "possible trajectories scholars might want to keep in mind in their works while studying Native stories" (301). He reminds scholars who and what they are responsible for in their work by asserting that scholars are responsible for situating their work in the specific histories and realities of Indigenous communities, offering literary critique vis-à-vis nation-specific literary approaches and intellectual traditions, as well as "recogniz[ing] the full humanity of Indigenous peoples"; they are responsible to modern Indigenous readers, to "promot[ing] dialogic exchanges that include all interested parties, Indigenous or otherwise," and for creating spaces to dream new possibilities and invoke change (302, 307, 306). These trajectories, for Sinclair, are necessary for sustainable and responsible relations past, present and future, as literary scholars "hold the

potential to invoke positive change, inspire and perhaps even contribute” to the making of worlds (308).

In my attempt to contribute to this endeavour, my work joins that of other non-Indigenous scholars who take up the responsibilities of nation-to-nation relations. For example, in “Decolonization: Reading Asian and First Nations Relation in Literature” and “Epistemologies of Respect: A Poetics of Asian/Indigenous Relation,” poets Rita Wong and Larissa Lai respectively model literary scholarship that fulfills Sinclair’s ethical and responsible trajectories. They explore critical and creative strategies for making poetic relations, more specifically alliances, with Indigenous communities, and in the process be accountable to their position as settlers (Wong 158-9, Lai 100). Both poets contend with their concurrent position as racialized and marginalized subjects who are *also* complicit in Canada’s colonial state. As they suggest relational strategies for writing and reading, Lai and Wong explore what it means to make literary relations and contemplate the expansion of individual action to collective relation. Lai’s poetic praxis is informed by Justice’s notion of kinship as she notes Justice’s recognition of ‘kinship in difference’: “Sameness and likeness are not necessary in order to recognize relation. In fact, the challenges of relation arise precisely through difference and disagreement” (102). Addressing the categories of Indigenous and Asian as “Western constructs that are nevertheless materialized through repeated iterations in language, law, and lived experience,” Lai seeks to explore a “poetics and politics of relation” (100). She relies on Édouard Glissant’s ‘poetics of relation’ as a “poetics that is never innocent and never pure, but rather is always stepping forward to claim responsibility and produce connection” (125). A poetics where “kinship and responsibility are not premised on direct cause, [or] individual agency ... but rather through a poetics, a metaphysics, or an epistemology that emphasized the imperative to make balance and

respect wherever one sees the possibility to do so,” a poetics that promotes an “epistemology of respect” where “we have a deep responsibility to find the new balance of the world and move towards it” (Lai 125-126).

Whether as part of literary or political discourse, debates that explore treaty and kinship relations attend to sovereignty, responsibility, sustainability, and reciprocity. However, when considering these concepts vis-à-vis models of nation-to-nation relations, the category of recognition emerges as a pivotal axis — recognition of terminology (e.g. culture vs. nation), recognition as acknowledgement of sovereignty and obligations, recognition of intellectual traditions and legal frameworks as basis for conciliatory relations, and recognition of the binding and ongoing nature of nation-to-nation relations. From self-positioning (i.e. recognition of one’s self as a member of a community), to the categories used to describe different communities, and the state’s recognition of these communities’ rights claims — I believe that recognition, as a political and scholarly problem, is the core of CanLit’s relational crisis, and this is where the ethical trouble lies.

2.5 Mis-Recognitions: Political Recognition in Canada³

Critical discourse addressing political recognition in Canada interlaces the state’s colonial legacies and realities with its multicultural policies and its politics of redress, unveiling Canada’s continuous manipulation of political recognition in service of maintaining its colonial status-quo. Much like discussions revolving settlers and treaties, most of recent discussions regarding political recognition in Canada situate it vis-à-vis redress and reconciliation, as pertaining both to Indigenous and non-Indigenous marginalized communities. In “The Cunning of Reconciliation” settler-scholar Pauline Wakeham, threads the narratives of colonialism, multiculturalism, and

reconciliation, as she examines critiques of recognition and redress in the contexts of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous rights' claims. In this essay, Wakeham traces a direct line between Canada's multicultural epoch and its current age of reconciliation (216). She indicates that the language of recognition and reconciliation, merely a revised version of the multicultural jargon, forms a state-sanctioned way to settle differences between "the Anglo-Celtic establishment and its 'others'" without unsettling the state structures and maintaining "entrenched power hierarchies" (211). Wakeham's claim reflects decades-long critique of multiculturalism in Canada, in which scholars indicate not only the Euro-centric racist social structures perpetuated by the policy, or the obscuring language of culture and the segregating nature of its praxis, but the irony of its seemingly welcomed (yet forced) inclusion and de-facto segregating exclusion from the national imaginary. The 'cunning of' multiculturalism denies communities agency on political claims (to lands or rights), making all claims to recognition as matters related to the Canadian national imaginary but separate from the policies of the state.

Wakeham's argument for "the cunning of reconciliation," i.e. "how the project of redressing injustices has been co-opted by the power bloc as a performance of white civility, an index of the supposed enlightenment of the Euro-Canadian establishment" (231), is also evident in Matt James' "Neoliberal Heritage Redress." James indicates how the neoliberal logic of multiculturalism, "describ[ing] a set of dominant normative distinctions between globalizing cosmopolitanism and parochial traditionalism which polices the borders between legitimate and illegitimate diversity," has now been "transported and applied to the newly important terrain of historical redress" (32, 31). Historical redress, James notes, perpetuates a barter economy in which what Rinaldo Walcott defines as "a tactical acknowledgement" (344) serves governments

to appease marginalized communities while making them “forsake more ambitiously reparative discourses and claims” (41).

Beyond the Canadian borders, the logic of Wakeham and James’s critiques is also evident in the work of Chickasaw literary scholar Jodi Byrd who posits the sonic metaphor of cacophony to describe how “liberal multicultural settler colonialism,” situate multitude of moral claims as “competing struggles for hegemony within and outside institutions of power” (xvii). In so doing, countries like the USA—and I would argue Canada—create the effect of sonic cacophony in the public sphere which “often coerces struggles for social justice for queers, racial minorities, and immigrants into complicity with settler colonialism,” by “serv[ing] to misdirect and cloud attention from the underlying structures of settler colonialism that made the United States possible as oppressor in the first place” (Byrd xvii). Byrd’s critique thus turns the lens to a different dynamic at play in cultures of recognition and redress. Rather than indicate how governments use such discourses to appease communities’ justice claims, Byrd’s cacophony metaphor directs attention to the strategic use of acknowledgements and recognition as means of continuously making the liberal multicultural nation-state “a desired state formation within which to be included” (xv, xvii).

Byrd, Wakeham, and James’s critiques of the discourses of reconciliation and redress pinpoint the problems lying in leading perspectives of political recognition, such as Charles Taylor’s seminal “Multiculturalism and ‘The Politics of Recognition’.” In this work he traces the rise of recognition discourses as pertaining to personal identity, social-group rights, and their intersections in Western cultures since Enlightenment. Tracing the ways in which recognition plays-out in the public sphere, Taylor is concerned with recognition of group rights and the de-facto clashes of these rights based on two concurrent and connected yet distinct meanings that

recognition has come to signify in the West — a politics of equal dignity, “an identical basket of rights and immunities,” and a politics of difference which relies on the recognition of “the unique identity of [an] individual or group, their distinctness from everyone else” (43). Taylor further notes that, while both emerge from the same concept, of equal respect, the politics of equal dignity and that of difference “come into conflict” because the former relies on difference-blind treatment of others, whereas the latter demands the recognition of particularity (43). He undertakes an analysis of this clash in political values focused on Canadian politics and the limits of its multicultural tolerance. In his analysis, Taylor indicates different potential routes for this clash and how it serves to mask the creed of Western liberalism as culturally neutral (61).

Despite accounting for varying levels of tolerance for cultural difference offered by models of political recognition, and while acknowledging that those models would at best foster hospitality to marginalized communities (61), Taylor’s notion of political recognition still limits relationships between cultural communities to what Bissoondath defines as tolerance in “Multiculturalism: No Place Like Home.” But the true limitations of Taylor’s theory lie in his assumption that all communities seek inclusion in the nation state, that their desire for recognition is limited to cultural survival, and that it is inherently addressed to a Western, liberal nation-state. With his focus on culture, Taylor placates the possibilities of groups’ demands for national sovereignty and grants the right to recognize to Western countries alone. Further, his insistence on culture as the site of recognition debates embodies Fagan and Justice’s argument on the key role of language in perpetuating colonial realities and legacies, preventing any real challenge of shared-narratives and the institutions they uphold (247). In his analysis, Taylor narrates a seemingly leveled playing field of equal power dynamics between varied groups (69), thus obfuscating colonial histories, legacies, and realities. Taylor’s model of recognition, then, is

colonial in the sense that it denies potential of actual political change and maintains the power of recognition in the hands of benevolent Western states. But it is also colonial because, despite the wide scope that Taylor aims to cast, he falls in the traps of multiculturalism discourse as the only viable, albeit problematic, model of relationships between cultural groups. In other words, Taylor's model of recognition envisions, at best, the possibility of hospitality or tolerance of others within Western liberal nation states, what Stanley Fish describes as 'boutique multiculturalism' — namely, an "appreciation/ recognition of legitimacy of the traditions of other cultures as long as these do not offend the canons of civilized decency as they have been declared/ assumed" (69).

Taylor's analysis of recognition and the clash he describes between the politics of equal respect and the politics of difference model the failures of the current politics of recognition as they play out in nation-to-nation relations in Canada. This is evident in contemporary practices of land recognition in public events in Canada, which all too often, while well intentioned, function as the kinds of 'tactical acknowledgements' described by Walcott. Commonly offered at the openings of cultural, political and academic gatherings, and acknowledging that the land audiences are gathered on is the traditional territory of [insert name of location-specific Indigenous nations], these statements are offered as markers of politically allied gestures, with their former parts recognizing the uniqueness of Indigenous nations' presence and histories on this land, and the latter parts subsuming those differences under a shared universalizing present. With a single move, then, contemporary practices of political recognition in Canada employ Taylor's idea of equal recognition to situate Indigenous peoples once again under the multicultural umbrella, as part of the Canadian nation-state's shared imagination. In the guise of a politics of difference, Canada has been, in fact, immersed in a universalizing politics of equal

dignity. That is true for both multicultural and redress-age Canada, in public and scholarly discourse; it is also evident in literary production and its study. Canadian politics of recognition tolerate difference as long as it does not disturb the status quo.

Though neither Wakeham's nor my work is limited to the scope of recognition-critique as situated vis-à-vis multiculturalism or redress movements, perhaps the most central contemporary critiques of recognition in Canada have directly emerged in relation to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the nation's colonial realities and legacies. Garneau critiques the politics of recognition as embodied in TRC protocols and practices, by illustrating the limits of shared knowledge and the terms upon which knowledge and experience should be shared. In Garneau's understanding of reconciliation discourse, the TRC's recognition of claims by residential school survivors forms a misrecognition that frames "the residential school era as an unfortunate deviation rather than just one aspect of the perpetual colonial struggle to contain and control Aboriginal people, territories, and resources" (35).

In response to the colonial, and by extension academic, desire for knowledge as a form of ownership and exploitation, "based on the belief that everything should be accessible, is ultimately comprehensible, and a potential commodity or resource," Garneau suggests that primary sites of resistance to colonial powers and practices are "the perpetual active refusal[s] of complete engagement: to speak with one's own in one's own way; to refuse translation and full explanations... to not be a native informant" (29). For Garneau, these "irreconcilable spaces of Aboriginality" form a refusal to engage with a politics of recognition (whether that be on an individual or institutional level) (29). Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson echoes Garneau's notion of irreconcilable spaces as she claims that "political recognition is a technique of settler governance" and posits contemporary Iroquois or Haudenosaunee confederate sovereignty, a

“politics of refusal,” as a response (20, 1). In *Mohawk Interruptus*, Simpson models her confederacy’s resistance to colonial structures in general and the iteration of state-recognition in particular as she notes that in writing the book she contended with creating “an archive of knowledge... that refuses to disclose... that does not make contents available for the control of classic ethnographic subjects, unless perhaps that subject is governance itself” (177). Further, she notes that the Mohawk politics of refusal is premised on pre-contact knowledge systems enacted “through marriage practices, political engagements, and the way they live their lives” (1). Invoking kinship models of governance, Simpson joins a growing number of Indigenous scholars who contend with kinship practices vis-à-vis the discourse of recognition. While Simpson posits Indigenous governance based on kinship practices, as a refusal of settler logic, settler-scholar Mark Rifkin’s *When Did Indians Become Straight?* develops what he defines as a queer methodology that lays bare how the language of kinship has been utilized by the USA to recognize the sovereignty of Native nations within a framework that maintains settler hetero-normative forms of socializing and governance (12).

A similar concern is evident in discussions of treaties as means of critiquing notions of recognition. In his discussion of Indigenous–state relations in Canada, Coulthard sums this up in his argument that “the contemporary politics of recognition promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonial power that Indigenous demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend” (437). Henderson further delineates the logical fallacy of the “culture of redress” and the discourse of reconciliation (116), laying out the manifold ways in which they embody the failure of the British legal system and its understanding of treaty citizenship. For Henderson, treaty citizenship demands that any continued relation with the Canadian state must distinguish redress to colonial abuses inflicted upon diasporic and other racialized communities

by the Canadian state, from its violations and abuses of Indigenous peoples (116). Henderson argues that to honour treaty citizenship, reconciliation must be constitutional, and would hence create “a decolonizing conflict with the various past and present laws and policies of the settler state, and the individuals and communities, including diasporic ones, that constitute Canada and form the electorate of its governments (those who are considered innocent third parties by the court)” (116).

In “A Memo to Canada: Indigenous People are not your Incompetent Children” published as an opinion column in *The Globe and Mail* in January 2018, Tuscarora writer Alicia Elliott presents a similar view. In the wake of changes in government terminology, with the Trudeau government invoking “nation-to-nation relations,” Elliott asks “What kind of ‘nation-to-nation’ relationship can be built when Canada refuses to acknowledge the traditional governments of our nations – the governing bodies that we chose?” In response, she calls to “shift our focus from truth and reconciliation to denial and consent” (“A Memo to Canada”). With this shift Elliott refers to the denial of treaties as the foundation of the nation and the state, that is premised on Indigenous nations’ consent. Elliott, then, draws attention to the Canadian state’s continuous assumption of Indigenous consent, thus denying Indigenous nations both the right to deny consent, and the opportunity to situate consent as “a prerequisite for any of Canada's actions in regards to the lands we have historically cared for, lands we consider part of us” (“A Memo to Canada”). The treaties invoke the need for consent, but as Elliott notes, there is no Federal law requiring consent, only a custom of consultation. Elliott positions acknowledgment and consent as pre-requisites before the government can “earn its right to discuss reconciliation” (“A Memo to Canada”). But the acknowledgement, or recognition, she requires are not those of neoliberal redress. Rather, they resemble Henderson’s constitutional reconciliation more than anything else:

They [the Canadian government] will need to say that they support Indigenous communities' right to determine our own governance, and will respect our decisions.

And, most importantly, they will need to acknowledge the Indigenous nations of this land are sovereign nations, respect us as sovereign nations and consult and negotiate with us as sovereign nations. Anything less is politically correct posturing. (“A Memo to Canada”)

These views are perhaps best summed up by a Twitter post made on October 29, 2017 by Rachel Ann Snow (Nakoda), who pointedly critiques a *Globe and Mail* article on a Canada 150 cruise “tasked with celebrating the people and places of Canada’s three coasts” (“Confronting Race, Shame and Reconciliation at Sea in the Far North”). On her personal account Snow tweets a response to the article: “Excellent – the myth of reconciliation. It is a CON – it wrecks the sovereignty of first peoples. #Wreckconciliation is not working” (@RachelAnnSnow). Snow’s pointed hashtag pinpoints yet another national myth — adding to the list of peacemaker, empty land, and multiculturalism — and exposes its nature as a con.

But before there were claims to truth or reconciliation, Roger Simon was hopeful that the TRC would provide an opportunity for all those “living together above the forty ninth parallel... to consider anew the on-going responsibilities that accrue to us when we realize that remembering Canada’s history means remembering we are all treaty people and that treaty relationships are fundamentally abiding, living covenants” (139). And while Simon’s hope may have been squandered by the con of reconciliation, his worries about the recognition of survivor’s claims, still stands and should resound in literary scholars’ ears:

Rendering the people who come forward to speak to the commission as victims living a damaged life beyond repair risks what Dipesh Chakrabarty argues are the wounds of mis-

recognition... [which] risks reducing the political to the therapeutic so that restorative justice is defined solely within support to personal healing from the wounds of colonialism. (132)

In so doing, Simon notes, mis-recognition runs the danger which both Justice and Sinclair warn against, as it fails to “recognize the full humanity of Indigenous peoples” (301). Moreover, it perpetuates what Justice calls as “the story of *Indigenous deficiency*” (*Why Indigenous Literatures Matter 2*, italics in original), in place of responsible and accountable engagement with the structural mechanisms that marginalize Indigenous communities (Simon 132). Simon warns against this particular aspect, as stories of residential schools that centralize pathos for the formation of public memory constitute “a form of historical amnesia” and deflect critical engagement with the oppressive systems still in place (133).

Simon’s concerns were proven right, as this is precisely where the trouble with recognition lies — both in the context of political recognition of rights claims and the ethical recognition of creative testimony’s truth claims — making a gesture of ethical response without acknowledging or changing the nature or terms of the relationship. Though Simon is focused on residential school narratives, this same form of misrecognition is the one that divides positions revolving the recent CanLit scandals, and it is the misrecognition perpetuated in the storying of CanLit like the one narrated by Kröller. Despite acknowledging settler and colonial histories in Canada, or while noting critiques of multiculturalism, and including texts by Indigenous writers and writers of colour, Kröller’s introduction to the second edition of the *Cambridge Companion* formulates a public memory narrative that propagates transformation from colonial to postnational formations of Canada and its literary sphere. In so doing, she narrates a mode of

historical amnesia, erasing the historical and ongoing prevalence of racist colonial institutions, policies, and practices, and deflecting both individual and communal responsibility.

Simon is far from the only literary scholar to contend with the ethics of storytelling or the problem of recognition. For example, Simon's attention to the stories told in the context of reconciliation and the structures they perpetuate and imagine, reflects Justice's statement in *Our Fire Survives the Storm* regarding the ethical imperative that underlies the work of literary scholars (206). Further, within the context of literary studies, the problem of recognition is most clearly exemplified in the relation between texts by Indigenous authors and their interpretations by non-Indigenous literary scholars who read them through the prism of Canadian literature's colonial narratives of assimilation or the European enlightenment traditions of autobiographical or ethnographical genres. This is an extension of the misrecognition that Kröller's introduction demonstrates, where in the same move, literary scholars introduced Indigenous authors' voices and works into the literary field while misrecognizing their claims to sovereignty, resistance to colonial assimilation, and entirely glossing over the authors' own intellectual traditions as framing the work.

Cree-Métis scholar Deanna Reder's "Indigenous Autobiography in Canada" touches upon this very issue as she examines works "that preserve Indigenous knowledge and specific tribal understandings for their descendants and subsequent generations" (170). Her investment is in Indigenous intellectual production, rather than interested in the discourse of life writing, which has been the focus of previous engagements with Indigenous autobiography in Canadian literary studies (170). She further notes that readings of Indigenous autobiographies through the prism of assimilation "fail to see what cultural work it continues to accomplish" (174). Rather, Reder purports readers to "consider autobiography as an Indigenous mode of cultural and national

expressions that demonstrates there is more to the politics of self-determination than resistance to oppression” (173).

In her argument, Reder expands the works of settler scholars Sam McKegney and Keavy Martin on Indigenous autobiographies in Canada. In *Stories in a New Skin: Approaches to Inuit Literature* Martin promotes “reading Indigenous autobiographies as literary texts,” as a strategy that “aims to liberate Indigenous authors from ethnocentric assumptions regarding their choice of genre and from ethnographic readings that diminish readerly appreciation of their skill” (104). Since her work explores critical approaches to Inuit literature, Martin posits the idea of Inuit Qaujimagatuqangit (IQ) i.e. “the Inuit way of doing things: the past, present and future knowledge, experience and values of Inuit Society,” as well as “the Inuit tradition of inuusirmingnik unikkaat (or speaking from experience),” as “useful tools for literary analysis of Inuit life stories, only when keeping in mind the directive ... that literary criticism be integrated into IQ, rather than vice versa” (104, 114). In her work, Martin draws on *Magic Weapons*, in which Sam McKegney cautions settler-scholars against reading Indigenous life writings as testimonial accounts, precisely because they have been too often reduced to mining sites for historical and ethnographic evidence by both Western scholars and political rights campaigns (59).

Though aware of the mining dangers related to readings of Indigenous life narratives by non-Indigenous scholars, Reder’s claim does not easily dismiss autobiographical forms of writing in Indigenous literary traditions. Rather, Reder demands that we thread together the lives in the stories and the lives of the stories, calling for the reading of Indigenous autobiography through the prism of Indigenous intellectual traditions including forms of autobiographical knowledge, and considerations of a work’s publication history (indicating what works were

deemed worth publishing, how, and for whom) (172). Reder offers her method in opposition to Arnold Krupat's argument that Indigenous storytellers have developed uses of autobiographical genres only thanks to the benevolent teachings of Europeans (172). In rejecting Krupat's argument on account of misreading — as he does not identify the ways in which Indigenous autobiographies develop from and contribute to specific nation-based knowledge — Reder's method reclaims and resituates generic traditions not merely as “resistance to oppression,” but rather as an assertion of “intellectual sovereignty” (172).

Projects like those by Martin, McKegney, and Reder, as well as ones like *Creating Community* (edited by Renate Eigenbrod and Jo-Ann Episkenew) and *Learn.Teach.Challenge* (edited by Deanna Reder and Linda Morra), showcase how scholarly reading models can create spaces for practicing politics of resistance and refusal in the cultural sphere, making visible the colonial legacies and realities present not only in the content of a text and the literary communities it circulates within and is consumed by, but also through varied modes of interpretation. Such projects offer strategies to engage with acts of misrecognition and understand how the discourse of political recognition is mapped onto other discourses in Canadian cultural debates. The case of Mount's *Arrival* and the recent CanLit scandals mirror the problems with the discourse of political recognition in Canada and embody its dangers of perpetuating a colonial imaginary through practices of erasure and segregation in the cultural sphere, in both the production and consumption of literary critique. CanLit's crisis of relations — in its varied registers and efficacies — lies in the cunning of both political and cultural discourses of recognition. But it is by making visible the very dangers of misrecognition, that literary critics can foster resistant reading practices, and account for our role in modeling reading as a social practice that seeks to mobilize political change, and signal our responsibilities as

cultural agents who shape public dialogues that can then foster change. With this project, I join their endeavors to develop reading practices that demand attention to the colonial realities that shape both the production and consumption of literature in Canada, as means of fostering models of ethical relationality and pushing forward through this moment of reckoning in CanLit's relational crisis.

The Limits of Recognition: *Canada Reads* and the Problem of Empathy-Driven Reading

“In this [memoir] you are right in there, like you are in a VR empathy machine, and you are able to see it with your own eyes”

Ziya Tong, “*Canada Reads* 2019 Day Two” min. 36:38-36:43

The “there” that Tong is transported to as a reader of Max Eisen’s *By Chance Alone* is the Auschwitz I concentration camp in 1944. Tong’s discussion of Eisen’s holocaust-survival memoir is part of the 2019 season of *Canada Reads*, a season branded as the “one book to move you” edition. The affective resonances of the theme were strongly invoked in the four days of the live-streamed event — from references to books as transporting or transforming readers to the idea of a book as “a VR empathy machine” (Tong “*Canada Reads* 2019 Day Two” min. 36:38-36:43) — as each of the five panelists passionately debated the transformative capacities of their chosen text. But the panelists also took their arguments a step further, suggesting that as readers feel immersed in, and moved by, the book’s world, the text subsequently effects pressing social justice change by transforming readers’ positions on the issues it invoked. The panelists’ arguments, then, are guided by the theme, and they perform their affective responses to the text as if these responses alone are capable of fulfilling their ethical responsibilities and formulating a vehicle for political change.

In this chapter, I approach *Canada Reads* as a site of shared reading that is mobilized for ethical and political public debate. My attention to *Canada Reads* as a site of shared reading and/as public debate is grounded in the show’s undeniable effect on the Canadian literary market and its nationalist framework. In other words, as Julie Rak notes, the show has had growing “economic, social, and cultural impact” to the extent that Canadian publishers and bookstores

use it as “a successful promotional vehicle” (“A Transnational Autobiographical Pact” 60). As such, critical engagement with *Canada Reads* provides me with an opportunity to explore the resonances of CanLit’s relational crisis among general (or rather, CBC-oriented) audiences, to consider how the politics of national literature are enacted on a massive shared-reading platform, both reflecting and shaping political debates in the public sphere.

In particular, I focus on the seasons that exclusively or predominantly feature non-fiction (2012, 2015, and 2019), and more specifically, examine the discussions that revolve around testimonial accounts which present urgent rights claims directed at readers as humanitarian subjects in both national and global contexts. My attention to the non-fiction iterations of *Canada Reads* is grounded in the ways that the discourse of autobiography formulates records of lived experience and is grounded in direct truth-telling speech acts that invoke readers’ roles both as ethical subjects and political agents. In “The Autobiographical Pact” Philippe Lejeune defines autobiographical accounts as texts grounded in three registers of truth: the text’s claim to telling a truth, the active role of readers in believing or rejecting this truth, and the ethical responsibilities bestowed upon both writers and readers in sharing a truthful account (10-11). In other words, it isn’t that works of fiction are not sharing a truth, but rather that in order to read life-writing audiences are required to recognize the text first-and-foremost as a truth-telling act. As such, the truth claims presented in autobiographical accounts cannot be relegated to themes or metaphors, instead, they confront readers with reality and demand a response. Truth, then, is central in life narrative precisely because of the discourse’s dialogical mode; precisely because “autobiography is a mode of reading as much as it is a type of writing” (Lejeune 30). The truth claim of a text requires a reader who, at the very least, is willing to recognize it. In this sense, autobiographical discourse is premised on a relationship of trust and reciprocity between author

and reader, with truth situated as the first thing that readers are asked to recognize, setting their entire reading experience in motion.

The pivotal role of relationality and ethics in autobiographical discourse is the reason that I turn to the non-fiction seasons of *Canada Reads*. The 2012, 2015, and 2019 seasons of *Canada Reads* invite critical engagement with shared readings of life writing within the framework of national literature's mass circulation and consumption, to consider how the politics of CanLit are framed and enacted on such a multi-media platform, how the roles of readers as ethical subjects are guided and modeled, and how, in turn, these elements determine readers' responses to life-writing's truth claims. To develop my engagement with these questions, I begin the chapter with a discussion of reading as a social practice, then move to an extended overview of truth in autobiography and testimony, suggesting a shift from testimony as genre to consider testimony as discourse, followed by an exploration of the ethics of recognition in the context of the politics of testimonial transactions. Finally, I thread together critiques of the ethics of affective recognition in testimony, with critiques of the politics of recognition in Canada, to demonstrate how the former mirrors the latter, and effectively serves to render mute testimony's ethical and political demands of readers.

I interlace the theoretical discussion with a critical analysis of the debates that take place on *Canada Reads* in 2012, 2015, and 2019, primarily focusing on debates concerning testimonial accounts. I examine the ethics of affective recognition modeled by the panelists as readers, as contouring the potentialities and limitations of their responses to testimony's truth claims. As I do so, I argue that while it may seem transformative, the reliance on affect in general and empathy in particular as being capable of formulating the required ethical response and mobilizing the desired

political change is a logical fallacy. Such acts mirror the cunning of political recognition and serves to perpetuate the very colonial structures it claims to oppose or disrupt.

3.1 Reading as a Social Practice: *Canada Reads*

Canada Reads is an “annual Battle of the Books” game show produced and hosted by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) since 2002. Since 2006, it has been promoted with variations of the slogan “one book all Canadian should read,” and designed with a formula that interlaces several common features of reality television in a radio show, including interactive audience components first integrated in 2011, which allow listeners across the country to nominate books for the long list, engage with panelists and authors through other CBC shows, and host blogs and social media groups to discuss the texts and debates (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Beyond the Book* 91, 93, 94). The show offers a *Survivor*-type contest, with books rather than people as the “survivors,” and celebrity panelists championing the books which the whole panel either saves or votes off at the end of each episode (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, “A Reading Spectacle” 5-6). In *Reading Beyond the Book*, Danielle Fuller and DeNel Rehberg Sedo define shows like *Canada Reads* as shared reading events that fit the One Book, One Community (OBOC) model. This model describes public events that invite a city, region, or even nation-wide communities to participate in a shared reading experience of a book (or books), mobilizing “the belief in reading as an individually transformational, educational, therapeutic, creative, and even ‘civilizing’ experience” alongside “the ideal of shared reading as a way of building community and improving cross-cultural understanding in urban centers” (3-4).⁴ More specifically, *Canada Reads* is a “mass reading event” (MRE)—both in terms of format (operating on multiple mass media platforms) and because of its “emergence within nation-states

where the neoliberal political climate underscores the civic, social, and economic function of public culture and the arts” (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 5, 8).

As an MRE, *Canada Reads* is thus a cultural product that mobilizes market powers to shape public imagination and debate. As a product of the CBC, the show is tasked with performing certain cultural work and modeling particular reading practices. Its formula “showcases Canadian writing, promotes Canadian writers, encourages literacy, and supports the publishing industry in Canada” (Moss 7). In accordance with the CBC’s mandate “to contribute to the development of a shared national consciousness and identity” (“Canadian Broadcasting Corporation Mandate”), the show promotes nationalist ideals, and a nation-based sense of belonging through publicly shared reading experiences.⁵ Fuller and Rehberg Sedo further “contend that the model of nation imagined by the content of ‘Canada Reads,’ particularly in terms of text selection and the books’ explicit framing on-air, is problematically, if predictably, conservative (bilingual and uncritically multicultural)” (“A Reading Spectacle for the Nation” 7).

As a Mass Reading Event, then, *Canada Reads* mobilizes shared reading experiences in order to foster or sustain what Benedict Anderson defines as a nation-based imagined community (6-7). MREs achieve this aim because they are grounded in the idea that books are commodities of unique cultural value, and because the act of reading is understood as encompassing a transformative potential for personal and communal betterment through moral and intellectual development (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Beyond the Book* 25-26). In this sense, *Canada Reads*, as an MRE, embodies Lauren Berlant’s concept of an “intimate public” (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 34). In the introduction to *The Female Complaint* Berlant defines “intimate publics” as a sense of belonging created “when a market opens up to a bloc of consumers, claiming to circulate texts and things that express those people’s particular core interests and

desires” (5). Intimate publics, then, are fostered through the circulation of literary works and allow participants to “*feel* as though it expresses what is common among them, a subjective likeness that seems to emanate from their history and their ongoing attachments and actions” (Berlant 5, emphasis in original). But, this sense of belonging is concurrently conditioned with criteria of inclusion and exclusion designed to maintain social order; namely, it is available “mainly for those who can pass as conventional within its limited terms ... an evolving sense of experience that confirms some homogeneity and elaborates social distinctions” (Berlant 13).

To foster an intimate public, MREs employ multiple platforms for participation and carefully curate the kinds of texts available for discussion, but mostly, they model certain practices of reading. Fuller and Rehberg Sedo indicate that the type of books featured in MREs are “discussible” (*Reading Beyond the Book*, 48). Selected texts also “must never be too ‘difficult’ to decode in terms of their formal elements” and most often include “contemporary fiction in a realist genre” (*Reading Beyond the Book* 27). Furthermore, as Fuller and Rehberg Sedo note, One Book One Community events are modeled after Oprah’s Book Club and assume the same inherent value in reading, namely, one that is “empathic and affective,” “or one that the reader can connect to her own life experience” (4, 37, 48). This, they suggest, is also an inherent component in the formation of intimate publics, as the “emphasis on affect is marked by the consumer’s fantasy that feeling something important about everyday life could contribute to social change” (35). That is how *Canada Reads* forms an intimate public, when panelists, and other participants, “articulate the affective dimension of their reading experiences... [as] expressions of belonging to communities both locally realized and more broadly imagined, that are saturated with the desire for social connection” (Fuller and Rehberg Sedo, *Reading Beyond the Book* 35).

All five panelists continuously invoke themes they deem necessary in 2019 Canada. From love, to hope, forgiveness, and compassion — the themes are distinctly affective and positioned as responses to the socio-political challenges and problems facing Canadians as a community, from a mental-health crisis to systemic racism and a rise in xenophobia and antisemitism. As former model and TV host, Lisa Ray, suggests when championing David Chariandy’s novel *Brother*:

we’ve all seen the headlines but *Brother* goes beyond, into the struggles of single mothers, into systemic racism that occurs right here in Canada, into loss, grief, kinship. [Chariandy’s] words grip you, they suck you into the story in such a way that all of the differences are erased and empathy grows...what if the power of this book to move you can actually change your perceptions and change your prejudices? (“2019 Day One” min. 09:08-09:43)

Ray’s statement invokes affective responses to reading literature as the driving force that contours the scope of belonging to the intimate public of CanLit, a community invested in belonging to a nation of CanLit that is multicultural and humanitarian. But in this very statement Ray does more — situating empathy-focused reading as mobilizing an ethical mode of engagement and, hence effecting social change. In so doing, Ray models the kind of civic ethics enacted on *Canada Reads*, and by extension encompassed in the CanLit brand; namely, recognizing a text’s political claims, acknowledging their existence, yet with the same move glossing over the need for action by positing affective response as a political solution.

From the onset of the show, scholars like Laura Moss have raised concerns about “the disjuncture between the program’s nation-building rhetoric and its depoliticization of the literary works” (7). Moss expresses her concern in the third year of the show (2004). In those earlier

seasons many of the discussions turned to literary merit at the expense of political debate, and in her critique, Moss articulates the guile of depoliticized debates as she addresses the inherently political work that they do in service of the nation. For Moss, this depoliticization is not merely a matter of rhetoric used on the air as a means of “drawing Canadians together by creating a shared cultural background,” it is also embedded in the show’s format, “with the immense cultural responsibility placed on the celebrity panelists” (Moss 7). This concern is not solely held by Moss. Rak further explains that this mode of vernacular reading is in part due to the predominance of the novel as the leading genre in the show, “because it is the type of reading most closely associated with the private reading of fiction, when readers read for pleasure and a sense of identification with the characters” (60). Such acts of reading, then, mobilize affect-based interpretations to foster a shared sense of belonging, an intimate public that seemingly works to re-imagine the nation, while in fact maintaining the status-quo.

In latter seasons, the depoliticization of discussion has quickly shifted to the model Ray enacts — glossing over critical engagement with the structural and institutional implication of texts’ rights claims, offering individual affective recognition as an ethical response that evokes political change, thus seemingly engaging with the political efficacies of CanLit without ever critiquing the conditions that sustain it or the structures it serves. In this sense, when, in 2015, Ray suggests that feeling empathy for the characters in *Brother* can make readers face their racial prejudices, she makes the leap to communal (and accountable) engagement with systemic racism in Canada. The Canadian, or more specifically the CanLit intimate public that Ray invokes in her argument is one grounded in human rights and social justice, but also one that is shaped by the image of Canadians as civil and peacekeeping, one that corresponds with Canadian myths of multiculturalism and humanitarianism.

The tensions between the contours of national belonging embodied in *Canada Reads* as an intimate public, the political claims presented in the featured texts, and the models of affect-driven reading enacted on the show, emerge most predominantly in seasons that feature — exclusively or partially — non-fiction texts, as they serve to shift the discourse of the show and mobilize the affective dimensions of MREs in service of civic ethics. In other words, despite questions directing debate towards considerations of literary merit (e.g. in terms of setting on the second day of debates), and try as Ray might to keep the focus on writerly mastery (repeatedly invoking Chariandy’s remarkable command of language to create a fictional world that feels so intimately real), because three of the five texts featured in the 2019 season are works of non-fiction the debate repeatedly reverts to the urgency of the texts’ truth claims and what they demand of members of CanLit’s intimate public as ethical and political subjects.

Of the five featured books in the 2019 season of the show, *Brother* is the only featured novel. Three — *By Chance Alone* by Max Eisen, *Homes* by Abu Bakr al Rabeeah, and *The Woo Woo* by Lindsay Wong — are memoirs, and *Suzanne* by Anaïs Barbeau-Lavalette (translated by Rhonda Mullins) is a work of autofiction.⁶ Yet, all panelists mobilize their affective reading experiences to address political issues. *Simple Plan* punk band member Chuck Comeau, and Ziya Tong, co-host of the Discovery Channel's *Daily Planet*, both defend testimonial accounts and contextualize events from other locations and times with present-day national and global politics. As Comeau presents al Rabeeah’s memoir of his life in Syria, he suggests that:

in this scary moment in our collective history where fear and hatred have become normalized, *Homes* is essential reading. This incredible memoir *will make you more compassionate and profoundly grateful* that you and your children don’t have to fall asleep to the sounds of machine guns tonight. And it *will make you very proud* to be from

here, this incredible country that brought here Bakr and his family with open arms (*q* min. 2:56-3:19 my emphasis).

Tong, on her part, presents Eisen's Holocaust memoir in very similar terms, defining it as "*a powerful reminder* of what happens when we see the signs around us but we choose to look away. *This book not only moved me, I believe it has the power to move the nation*" (*q* min. 5:40-6:07, my emphasis). For Tong, both the affective register and the political urgency are grounded in the text's truth-value. When asked about meeting Eisen the day prior to *q*'s recording, where the panelists first introduced their chosen texts, Tong mentions that "his book and what he has lived through is so unbelievable, and then to actually look in his eyes and realize that this was real and wasn't just a story, and wasn't even just history, this was like a real living moment – *the book was alive*" (*q* min. 11:16-11:53 my emphasis). While all panelists address the political importance of the issues raised in their chosen texts, Comeau and Tong both stress the ethical responsibility and pressing urgency to address the rights claims invoked in al Rabeeah and Eisen's testimonies. They indicate that the truths in these texts, perhaps more than the truths of the other featured works, cannot and should not be ignored — because they bestow on readers an ethical responsibility.

This shift from literary merit to political recognition and ethical responsibilities isn't unique to the 2019 season of the show, having first occurred in 2012, when non-fiction texts were first introduced to *Canada Reads*. As Fuller and Rak argue in "'True Stories,' Real Lives: Canada Reads 2012 and the Effects of Reading Memoir in Public," the shift to non-fiction changed "the explicit aims of the contest... because of the way that ideas about 'Canada,' citizenship and truth telling could be engaged through non-fiction genres and ethically motivated reading practices" (41-42). Due to the texts' truth claims, Fuller and Rak suggest that the shift to

non-fiction narratives drew “reading away from considerations of literary merit and reader affect and toward ethical considerations about content and the author,” thus directing the focus to public discourse and sociopolitical issues (29). They further note that subsequent iterations of *Canada Reads* “have taken up different aspects of the ethical agenda raised in the 2012 contest, both thematically and in on-air discussions” (Fuller and Rak 42). This is evident in both the 2015 and 2019 seasons which featured a combination of fiction, autofiction, and non-fiction, with the themes of “one book to break barriers” and “one book to move you” (respectively) centralizing affective modes of reading as a means of social transformation.⁷

The truth value of non-fiction in general, and the tenor of testimonies’ ethical responsibility and urgency in particular, shift the shared reading experience in *Canada Reads* seasons that stretch beyond literary fiction. As a Mass Reading Event produced by a national broadcasting corporation, *Canada Reads* aims to foster a sense of belonging to the national community, based on the assumption that the betterment of the national community can be attained through public discussions about acts of reading. In so doing, the multi-platform setting of the show in its entirety models the roles of readers as citizens, while seasons that introduce non-fiction position panelists and general readers as ethical and political agents within the scope of the nation state, signified by CanLit as representing an imagined Canada’s multicultural and humanitarian creed.

As I build on the robust scholarship on *Canada Reads* offered by Fuller, Rehberg Sedo, and Rak, the following sections of this chapter add to their critique of the show’s infrastructure and its models of shared reading within a national setting, to contend with the politics of testimonial transactions, practices of reading as acts of witnessing, and how the politics of

empathy are mobilized in service of the politics of recognition under the guise of ethical response.

3.2 Recognizing Truth Acts

In “The Autobiographical Pact,” Philippe Lejeune distinguishes autobiography from fiction through the concept of the “autobiographical pact” as an informal agreement between the reader and the text about the identity of the author, narrator, and protagonist. If all three parties match — and it is possible to know that the author is a real person in the real world — a reader knows that the text before them is an autobiography, and not a work of fiction. While Lejeune devised the pact as a way to distinguish the autobiography (as a genre) from novels, in contemporary autobiographical scholarship, the pact is regarded as an opportunity to discern any form of autobiographical work from works of fiction. The scholarly shift from autobiography as a genre to autobiography as discourse is important because it embodies the political and ethical stakes of life-writing. As Marlene Kadar suggests in her introduction to *Essays on Life Writing: From Genre to Critical Practice*, the shift to discursive notions of autobiography emerges from a feminist ethics of research and highlights the role of the reader in determining the dynamic nature of life stories (3). Informed by Ruth Behar’s ethnographic work, Kadar defines herself as a reading subject — a white woman, whose position marks both the inquisitive Western gaze of others, and a self, othered by that same sight (3). But Kadar’s reader embodies not only the Enlightened subject and its unsettling; more so, it indicates how a practice of reading life-writing can challenge notions of objective truths, and avoid privileging single positions, indicating the applications of such practice for terminology, method, and ethical consideration of the field (5).

As Kadar brings together feminism, postmodernism, and deconstruction to move life writing from a genre to a practice of reading and writing, her call-for and model-of a feminist revision of the field, resonates with Adrienne Rich's feminist praxis in "As We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision." Rich proposes what she defines as a radical reading practice, envisioned as "retaining [the text's] coherence and comprehensibility" while performing a repetitive and interpretive process of reading that offers a feminist re-vision, as it sees the text "with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction" (18). Rich's revision is an approach she offers to feminist literary scholars both as readers and writers, attuned to the ways they can shape predominant narrative by accounting for positionality and the politics of literature through their critique. Kadar's practice of feminist revisioning is further advanced by the work of scholars like Julie Rak in *Negotiated Memory: Doukhobor Autobiographical Discourse*, and Leigh Gilmore's *Autobiographics: A Feminist Theory of Women's Self Representation*, who shift the use of the term autobiography to refer to "discursive formations of truth telling" in ways that attend to power relations inherent to the tradition of autobiography and address the negotiations of marginalized subjects who revise those traditions (Smith and Watson 3). The shift to discourse, then, is an inclusionary and feminist revisioning move, a shift that is accountable to the ethical responsibilities of scholars as both consumers and producers of the politics of literature. As discourse, autobiography thus invokes readers' engagement with their positionality vis-à-vis the identities and experiences narrated in a text, highlighting the ethical and political implications of their relation to the text, its authors, and the truths it shared.

As a discourse grounded in records of lived experience, one of the keys to reading life writing involves a recognition of autobiographical truth as a transaction. As he proposes the autobiographical pact, Lejeune defines truth in autobiography as interlacing objective (factual)

truth with subjective notions of the term. For Lejeune, the objective facts are designed to validate the veracity of subjective truths, or rather “the truth as much as it is known and appears to the author” (22). Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson further this notion of truth, indicating that whether the truths are subjective or objective, the purpose of autobiographical writing is not “a story to be proved or falsified,” nor is it about “assessing and verifying knowledge” (17). Rather, they suggest that the value of autobiographical truth is to produce a “shared understanding” of a life as shaped by “the inter-subjective exchange between narrator and reader” (16). Truth, then, is the driving force of autobiographical discourse, premised on a relationship of trust and reciprocity between author and reader.

The recognition of truth as setting in motion the practice and politics of reading life writing is reflected as early as the introductions on the first day of debates in the 2012 iteration of *Canada Reads*, which centralized the truth value of memoir already in its thematic title, “True Stories Edition.” All five texts featured in the “True Stories Edition” of *Canada Reads* are works of non-fiction. Two of the books invoke distinctly Canadian tropes — musician’s Dave Bidini *On A Cold Road* chronicles his band’s road trip across Canada, while *The Game* by Ken Dryden portrays his experiences as a professional Hockey player. The third book, John Valliant’s *The Tiger*, though set in remote eastern Russia and narrates the hunt of a man-eating tiger, evokes traditional survival themes of man vs. nature and wilderness so often regarded as emblematic of classic CanLit. But the other two memoirs — Carmen Aguirre’s *Something Fierce: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Daughter*, and Marina Nemat’s *Prisoner of Tehran* — are set elsewhere and testify to Aguirre’s experiences growing up undercover as a member of the Chilean resistance to the Pinochet regime, and Nemat’s years as a teenage-girl imprisoned for her religious and political beliefs. To engage with the truths presented by Aguirre and Nemat, the readers of

Canada Reads 2012 are thus asked to recognize traumatic experiences of others, not here, not now, to recognize human-rights violations and abuse in Latin-America and Iran. Whereas the first three texts address the *Canada Reads* intimate public through shared experiences, cultural memory, and familiar themes, recognizing the truth of Nemat and Aguirre's memoirs demands readers' engagement as ethical subjects who uphold the humanitarian values of Canada's national myths.

When asked which character she "found least engaging," Anne-France Goldwater, a Francophone lawyer known as "Quebec's Judge Judy," directly attacks the authors of the competing four books, focusing on their life experiences, their right to write their stories, and the truths they share. When commenting on *Prisoner of Tehran*, Goldwater notes that its author, "Marina Nemat. . . tells a story that's not true, and you can tell it's not true when you read it" ("2012 Day One" min. 09:20-09:25, min. 33:03-33:18). Whether stated for the sake of argument, or not, Goldwater strategically uses her response to shift the debate by creating a shocking affect among fellow panelists and audiences in the studio and at home. As Fuller and Rak note, in so doing, Goldwater's statements activate Lejeune's "autobiographical pact" (30), initiating a discussion that showcases the high stakes of reading life-writing.

As a reader, who is also a contender on a survivor-style gameshow, Goldwater approaches Nemat's memoir like the lawyer she is, as if she was cross-examining a witness within the confines of the courtroom, using rhetoric to invoke a shocking affect, which she in turn mobilizes to question Nemat's reliability as witness. Goldwater's critique, whether honest or merely strategic, exemplifies a situation when autobiography's truth claim falls flat, when it is muted. By challenging the veracity of Nemat's narrative — in invoking an evidentiary or verification concept of truth rather than a memory-based, reflexive, and relational one —

Goldwater dismisses any need to listen to Nemat's claim about the violation of civil and human rights in Iran. Goldwater refuses to trust Nemat's account and believe her truth. Part of the reason that Goldwater holds Nemat's truth to such scrutiny is precisely because Nemat invokes human-rights claims, testifying to her experience as a sixteen-year-old under state-sanctioned unlawful imprisonment, inflicted to extreme physical torture and sexual abuse as means of controlling her religious and political expression in Iran. After all, Goldwater did not demand the same verification of the book she herself was defending, which, though based on true events, narrates a survivalist hunting story through the voice and perspective of a hunted man-eating tiger. In the argument that ensues following her statements, Ghomeshi attempts to hedge Goldwater's remarks as a personal opinion ("2012 Day One" min. 34:20-34:44). Goldwater continues to resist, stating that "no, there is objective reality... you know, I know you have to willfully suspend your disbelief to read fiction" ("2012 Day One" min. 34:44-34:53). In response, Arlene Dickinson, a businesswoman and investor on CBC's *Dragon's Den* who was championing Nemat's *Prisoner of Tehran*, interjects and directly addresses the issue of truth in readings of autobiographical accounts:

A memoir comes from a person's perspective of what they understood ... and she [Nemat] is quite upfront saying at the beginning of the book 'this is the best I can recall' and you have to allow that... We have to understand all of these authors were trying to portray a story, to the best of their ability, about real, true facts. ("2012 Day One" min. 34:53-35:22)

Dickinson doesn't merely challenge Goldwater's engagement with truth as objective knowledge to be verified; rather, she performs the kind of transaction that Smith and Watson define as autobiographical truth, namely a shared understanding of lived experience shaped by "the inter-

subjective exchange between narrator and reader” (16). But as the *Canada Reads* 2012 panel discussion indicates, contrary to the readerly homogeneity that *Canada Reads* claims in national terms, readers’ engagement with autobiographical truth, and the author’s rights claims, are neither singular, nor universal. In other words, when true stories enter a site of nation-focused shared-reading they disrupt the terms of the intimate public as readers are asked to first and foremost recognize truth, rather than primarily focus on the image of their shared community.

Leigh Gilmore’s discussion of autobiographical truth nuances the notion of truth, noting that an autobiographical text draws its authority from the cultural power of truth telling (*Autobiographics* 3). Like Smith and Watson, Gilmore notes that autobiography as genre and discourse is grounded in its truth claims, and that it necessitates a teller, a listener, and a tale (*Autobiographics* 107, 121). However, for Gilmore, autobiographical truth is not about a shared understanding; rather, she draws attention to the policing practices that both require and shape notions of truth in autobiography (*Autobiographics* 109). In particular, Gilmore suggests that autobiographical truth emerges-from and is defined-by the confession in both Christian and legal discourses (*Autobiographics* 107). Gilmore argues that it is conventions of the confession that prescribe writers’ and readers’ engagement with truth in autobiography, as well as determine their relationship to one another. Readers, according to Gilmore, are situated “as witnesses to confession,” and are thus “authorized to return a verdict, to determine veracity or perjury, to judge innocence or guilt, to decide on absolution or damnation;” in a sense, a reader “stands in for abstract authority because neither God nor the Law can speak in its own voice” (*Autobiographics* 120-121). For Gilmore, then, autobiographical truth is determined both by the discourse of confession in legal and Christian contexts, and by the sociocultural and political positioning of the writer, noting that “[w]hen a writer is seen in relation to the dominant

discourses of power s/he was simultaneously inscribing and resisting, the ‘innocence’ of autobiography as a naïve attempt to tell a universal truth is radically particularized by a specific culture’s notion of what truth is, who may tell it and who is authorized to judge it” (*Autobiographics* 107).

Gilmore’s discussion of autobiographical truth highlights the dynamics and politics embedded in the transactions of truth in autobiography. In this sense, Gilmore denies any universal understandings of shared truth, and accounts for both the ethical responsibilities and policing powers that readers are endowed with. This is what Goldwater’s comments regarding *Prisoner of Tehran* make evident — namely, what is considered as truth, who gets to determine and judge it, what writers are accountable to, and how readers are expected to engage with it. However, while Gilmore’s conception of truth’s transaction in autobiography may seem mutually exclusive to Smith and Watson’s, the panel discussions indicate that while they are, indeed, competing registers of truth, they are also concurrent ones.

Goldwater’s accusation of Nemat mobilizes Gilmore’s responsibility as a reader to both verify and stand in judgement of Nemat’s claims. Furthermore, it invokes the idea that certain autobiographical truths have higher stakes than others, since, interestingly enough, she does not hold *The Tiger* — the very book she is championing — to the same requirement for veracity. In fact, the other four panelists find the character of the tiger in Vaillant’s book to be the least compelling precisely because of a person’s inability to verify what an animal is thinking or feeling. It seems then, that Goldwater holds different non-fiction texts to different registers of truth, and she isn’t the only one. At the end of the first day of debates, Nemat’s book is voted off, in part, due to a stalemate in the votes (between *Prisoner of Tehran* and *The Tiger*) and a strategic tiebreaker made by Stacey McKenzie. In her closing remarks in response to the vote,

Dickinson repeatedly states that McKenzie should have cast “the right vote,” should have “done the right thing,” and voted for the right reasons (“2012 Day One” min. 54:38-54:40, 01:00:27-01:00:51). With these remarks, Dickinson invokes the kinds of truths which the texts speak to, the risks marginalized authors take to tell these truths, and the ethical responsibilities to listen to their claims. For Dickinson, the ‘right choice’ between *Prisoner of Tehran* and *The Tiger* is defined by the human-rights claim which Nemat brings forth; in other words, Dickinson, as a reader, perhaps even as a Canadian reader, is called to bear witness to Nemat’s testimony and expects others to do the same. This is most evident in her response to a question from an audience member in the studio, regarding the book’s work to forward women’s rights:

you gain a new appreciation for a woman who can stand up, frankly, about something that happened thirty years ago and is still happening today... Her voice for women’s rights is so powerful. And whether she remembered everything a hundred percent true, I don’t frankly a red-rat’s ass, because at the end of the day the gist of this book is exactly what’s wrong with women’s rights in this world. And how we could ignore that, and how we can dismiss it, is wrong. (“2012 Day One” min. 01:08:00-01:10:03)

Dickinson opens her response by using her travels to Afghanistan to situate herself as a witness to the truth in Nemat’s account. In this way, Dickinson highlights the valuable currency of truth at play, using her own experience to verify the rights-claim which Nemat speaks to. More so, she flags the panel’s failure to care and listen, tying the truth-value to an ethical responsibility that lies in the hands of readers rather than the author. She calls her fellow panelists to bear witness to Nemat’s testimony, but they refuse to listen.

While Gilmore denies the idea of a shared understanding of truth, Dickinson models a reading that mobilizes the legal conventions of confessional discourse and the verification aspect

of reading memoir towards a shared understanding of a rights claim. Put differently, Dickinson indicates that the kind of truth Nemat speaks to requires readers to mobilize verification to ethical action. The panel debates revolving around the *Prisoner of Tehran* suggest that, while autobiographical discourse in its entirety is grounded in the confessional, certain truth-acts are held to higher criteria of veracity, verification, and relation, demanding more from both confessors and readers. In this sense the season's debates in general, and Dickinson's statement in particular, challenge Gilmore's definition of autobiographical discourse as inherently testimonial, as characterized "by a rhetorical setting in which a person places herself or himself within testimonial context" (*The Limits of Autobiography* 3). In effect, they demonstrate that the tenors and efficacies of autobiographical truths are not created equal, as certain texts invoke more urgent and ethically or politically pressing truths than others.

Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, George Yúdice, and Gillian Whitlock all discuss testimonial accounts in ways that distinguish them from other autobiographical forms and clarify the dynamics at play in the debates surrounding the *Prisoner of Tehran*. In "Testimonio and Postmodernism" Yúdice defines testimonial writing as:

an authentic narrative, told by a witness who is moved to narrate by the urgency of a situation (e.g., war, oppression, revolution, etc.). Emphasizing popular, oral discourse, the witness portrays his or her own experience as an agent (rather than a representative) of a collective memory and identity. Truth is summoned in the cause of denouncing a present situation of exploitation and oppression or in exorcising and setting aright official history.

(17)

In his definition, Yúdice distinguishes testimonial writing from other literary modes, and invokes not only the truth value of testimonial accounts, but their sense of urgency and agency. In this

way, Yúdice suggests that testimonial accounts do more than merely record a life, referring to them as “a form of oral history, ‘new’ journalism, or political activism” (19). The sense of urgency and agency of testimonial accounts is anything but accidental. In her work on testimonial life narratives, Gillian Whitlock is attuned to the truth-value of testimony, but draws attention to the ways it is communicated, primarily addressing the temporary nature of testimonial narratives. Explored via Franco Moretti’s notion of the life cycles of literary forms, Whitlock characterizes “testimonial ‘cycles’ [as]... temporary structures associated with specific campaigns and era, finite flourishes ‘that *last* in time, but only for *some* time,’ that exhaust their potential” (*Postcolonial Life Narratives* 5). She further draws from Homi Bhabha to characterize testimony in present ‘tense’, and while this ‘tense’ has “transformative force, the agency of testimonial cultures is finite” (Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives* 5).

As both Whitlock and Yúdice are attuned to the urgency of testimonial accounts, Spivak draws attention to yet another register of testimony, namely the power dynamics at play. In “Three Women’s Text and Circumfession” she defines testimony as “the genre of the subaltern giving witness to oppression to a less oppressed other” (7). Spivak’s framing of testimony not only tends to the positioning of the testimonial subject as the subaltern, but also situates them as the focus of testimonial accounts, with the othered party being their addressee. But with the same stroke Spivak reminds scholars that regardless of who is the subject and who is othered, the power of mobilizing testimony to social change, and the responsibility to do so, lies with the addressee who agrees to recognize the subject’s truth and its urgency.

The definitions of testimonial accounts, as presented by Spivak, Whitlock, and Yúdice, frame testimony — whether oral, written, or art-based — as a discourse rather than genre; one grounded in autobiography, but making a much more specific demand of readers, a demand to

bear witness and a responsibility to carry testimony's truth. In this sense, creative forms of testimony do not merely necessitate a recognition of truth, but rather demand a mode of ethical relationality — defined by education scholar Dwayne Donald, a descendant of the Papaschase Cree, as a situated mode of engagement with experiences and stories, requiring “attentiveness to the responsibilities that come with a declaration of being in relation” (535). While many scholars — including Spivak and Gilmore — address testimony as a genre, I thus argue that the conventions they identify would serve to define creative forms of testimonial accounts, as a discourse. When, in *Negotiated Memory*, Rak suggests the shift from considerations of autobiography as genre to discourse she notes that the change would be an inclusionary one, considering subjects and records that would traditionally be excluded from the Western conceptions of autobiographical accounts, and thus a move that can potentially “be appropriated for use by those who are not powerful or whose version of events cannot be allowed to have validity” (ix). My argument for a shift to testimony as discourse builds on Rak's inclusionary move, while also flagging the high stakes at hand. The speaking subject's positionality, the urgency of the subject matter, and the distinct aim of socio-political change, all define testimonial acts, and can be regarded as formations of genre. However, like Rak notes, a shift to discourse can be inclusionary both in terms of subject-positions and forms. Testimony as genre privileges verbal narrativized accounts, but, as further chapters in this project will indicate, non-narrative visual accounts, and performance-based acts, can also fulfill the conventions of testimony. The shift to discourse also highlights that the importance of positioning isn't just a matter of the speaking subject but rather the relational positioning between them and their addressees, thus accounting for power dynamics as well as the pivotal role of recognition in the process of communicating testimony, and centralizing the urgent ethical and political stakes.

In the case of *Canada Reads* 2012, as Fuller and Rak argue, the shift to truth-telling accounts shifted explicit aims of *Canada Reads* “because of the way that ideas about ‘Canada,’ citizenship, and truth telling could be engaged through non-fiction genres and ethically motivated reading practices” (Fuller and Rak 42). However, by making a shift from testimony as genre to testimony as discourse and distinguishing autobiographical truths from testimonial claims, the real stakes of Dickinson’s ethical call for accountability and responsibility in reading *Prisoner of Tehran* emerge. Based on the above discussion, Nemat’s book fulfills the conventions of testimony, as it makes an urgent rights-claim and urges an ethical and political response from non-subaltern addressees. In other words, thinking about testimony as discourse would account for the pivotal role of readers’ recognition not only of the object’s truth claims, but the urgency of this truth, and the responsibility of being in relation with the text and its truth, the responsibility to act upon it and mobilize political change. The tension between mere recognition of autobiographical truth claims and the ethical demands of testimony’s rights-claims carries through the three seasons of *Canada Reads* that include non-fictional accounts. In part, this tension arises from a gap between readers’ role as members of CanLit’s intimate public and the sudden responsibility to engage with texts primarily as ethical subjects. Rather than being asked to recognize themselves and the images of their imagined community in the texts, testimonial accounts demand readers’ recognition of the ethical values encompassed in national myths (i.e. Canada’s global humanitarianism in the case of Nemat and Aguirre’s memoir).

But questions then arise — how do readers know that they have come to testimony? What modes of engagement do testimonies invite, demand, or refuse? And how can readers pick up on those? I turn to discuss the politics of the circulation and consumption of literary testimony, highlighting the over-reliance on affect-driven responses as the prevalent model of

ethical reading presented to Western readers. In so doing, I unpack the limits of affect as an ethics of recognition and demonstrate how, when situated within nation-focused frameworks, it is coopted into sustaining the very colonial structures that testimony speaks against.

3.3 The Politics of Testimonial Transactions

Testimonial acts then, are urgent, truthful, accounts of injustice communicated to a more privileged other and pressing them to act for socio-political change. And while I challenge Gilmore's generalization of all autobiographical acts as testimony (because not every personal story speaks to dispossession or seeks to articulate social justice demands), I do concur with her that the truth-value of autobiographical discourse situates all testimonial acts within confessional protocols and framed within juridical settings (*Autobiographics* 107, *The Limits of Autobiography* 5). These legal settings, whether within or outside the courtroom, require a person who shares their story about a specific event, the ability to verify the story as true, and an audience sitting in judgment of the story. However, even though this structure may seem straightforward, as Cynthia Franklin and Laura Lyons state in "Bodies of Evidence and the Intricate Machines of Untruth," such legal protocols are in fact set within and reflect ideological institutions, making testimony "first and foremost a profoundly political act" (ix). Testimony, then, is inherently political because it is situated within ideological structures, but also because, in the public sphere, it often makes political claims for justice and rights. Franklin and Lyons address the political resonances of testimony when they define testimonial texts as the "narrative remainders" of victims and survivors (iix), as a "body of evidence" that undoes official historical records and so often "dismantle[s] the state's intricate machines of untruth" (xxi).

Their attention to political discourses of justice and rights is not accidental.

Contemporary engagement with testimony — from autobiographical studies, to legal and policy work, as well as the work of trauma studies in the contexts of education and health — emerges from work on testimonies of the Shoah, the Jewish Holocaust, and the subsequent emergence of human and civil rights discourses. Granted, personal testimonial accounts have been mobilized for political change on national and global levels centuries prior to the Holocaust, with perhaps the most prominent example being the use of slave narratives for abolition campaigns (Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives* 9-10). But in “The Politics of Suffering” Carolyn Dean traces contemporary engagement with ‘bearing witness’ — in legal, policy, and cultural contexts — to the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Israel, during which prosecutor Gideon Hausner mobilized survivor testimony by “compelling observers to grapple anew with their feelings that Jews should have put up more of a fight” (630). Given the unprecedented Western mass-media coverage of the trial, Dean argues, the event formulated the cultural model of the survivor-witness, “turning ‘survivor’ into an icon and an identity” as well as transformed “victims’ claims, usually viewed skeptically... into grievances to be taken seriously” (628, 630).

The image of the survivor-witness has since been mobilized in numerous campaigns for social justice and human rights, often situated in direct critique of nation-states’ policies and institutions. Such rights’ campaign though, no longer limited only to the scope of Holocaust-survivor testimonies, but also moving beyond the confines of the courtroom or the legal claim, to do the work of memorializing and grieving, of educating and healing, of seeking justice in a wider scope. This work is mostly negotiated in the public sphere through cultural production that aims to bear witness. This is where autobiographical discourse becomes a crucial component in testimonial work, as it allows survivor-witnesses to speak for themselves and share their truths

with wider audiences, or, in Spivak's words, "the genre of the subaltern giving witness to oppression to a less oppressed other" (7). The way in which testimonial cultural production moves in the global public sphere, is defined by Gillian Whitlock as "testimonial transaction."

The notion of transit is one that Whitlock first begins to develop in *Soft Weapons*:

Autobiography in Transit where she defines it as "the work of contemporary autobiography as it moves across cultures in conflict" (3). But, in *Postcolonial Life Narratives: Testimonial*

Transactions, Whitlock narrows her focus from the general scope of life writing to the specific

discourse of testimony and pushes her theoretical gesture forward, addressing 'testimonial

transactions' as the global movement of testimonies "beyond nation and narration to track

transnational and transcultural passages of life narrative, its volatile currency and value and its

changing technologies of the self" (1). For Whitlock, this movement is "embedded in global

networks of traumatic memory and witness, campaigns for social justice, reconciliation, and

reparation" (*Postcolonial Life Narratives* 70). But for a transaction to occur, i.e. for social

change to take shape, testimonies need readers who are willing to bear witness.

As Goldwater accuses Nemat of being untruthful in her account, thus refusing to recognize the *Prisoner of Tehran* as testimony, she accepts the truth claim of another testimonial account. Carmen Aguirre's *Something Fierce: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Daughter* narrates her coming of age as the daughter of an active member of the Chilean resistance movement, who, in turn, becomes a resistance fighter in her own right. As she refuses Nemat's truth, Goldwater accepts Aguirre's, yet, she attacks the author precisely because she recognizes the truth-value of *Something Fierce*, claiming that "Carmen Aguirre is a bloody terrorist, how we let her into Canada I don't understand" ("2012 Day One" min. 33:05-33:09). While she hedges her statements by saying "It's not true y'all. We lawyers, we learn to say anything. Don't believe a

word of what I just said,” Goldwater continues to stand by her argument against Aguirre’s memoir. Ghomeshi immediately warns that terrorism “is a very strong word. Some people would consider resisting the Pinochet dictatorship civil disobedience,” but Goldwater cuts in, noting “there’s nothing civil about it. Bomb carrying, murdering terrorist” (“2012 Day One” min. 33:54-34:37). At that point rapper Shad, who champions *Something Fierce* on the show, jumps in and argues that “if you consider her a terrorist you have to consider Nelson Mandela a terrorist,” to which Goldwater responds “Damn straight blood on his hands” (“2012 Day One” min. 33:55-35:43). The heated exchange occurs precisely because Goldwater believes Aguirre but strongly disagrees with her politics, because they clash with Goldwater’s peace-keeping image of Canadian citizenry in general, and Quebecois values in particular, as they clash with a myth of civility perpetuated in the intimate public she belongs to as a reader of CanLit.

Though she ends up voting against *The Game* on the final day, effectively supporting *Something Fierce* as the winner, throughout the four days of debates Goldwater openly and assertively critiques the politics of Aguirre’s book. On the last day of debates, Ghomeshi asks panelists about the family portraits presented in the two finalist memoirs. As they discuss family dynamics, struggles for bettering families’ lives, and images or values of Canadian families, Goldwater notes that “Carmen Aguirre’s book starts with the most hateful crime imaginable — and if you think I’m going to go back to the political you are wrong — the crime of a parent (and it is unfortunately most often mothers) who kidnap their children away from fathers. And that’s what this woman did” (“2012 Day Four” min. 19:10-19:48). With these remarks Goldwater does acknowledge that Aguirre makes a political rights claim, yet consciously chooses to redirect attention to a different claim, one that may stand in stark opposition with the writer’s own position.

Goldwater's arguments present a reader who, while acknowledging testimony's truth claim, refuses its rights' claim — namely, the right and need to fight for freedom from oppression and political persecution. When she explains her vote in favor of *Something Fierce* Goldwater notes that people have to read the book in order to be educated and make the decision between right and wrong for themselves:

Because [Canadian readers] will know what is right and wrong. I have that trust in the Canadian public. That's why we have *Canada Reads*... I think this [book] is a big insight into history, an important part of our history, and a part that we as Quebecers also rejected – we rejected resorting to violence, we keep on doing the dialogue with the rest of Canada... we made a choice as a people to reject bloodshed. That's something I am proud of. It is part of my Quebecois identity. And it is something you can't understand unless you read about it and decide for yourself if bloodshed is the answer. ("2012 Day Four Q&A" min. 02:10-04:22)

Goldwater, then, actively rejects Aguirre's rights claim. She recognizes the truth, acknowledges the rights claim and determines that, for Canadians, the only ethical response is to reject armed resistance even in the face of living under oppressive regimes. The debates that emerge from Goldwater's claims, her engagement with the ethical responsibilities invoked in reading testimony, and the recognition of testimony's claims demonstrate the pivotal role of testimony's addressee, particularly when circulated and consumed in mass reading events (MREs) and hence interpreted within the framework of national literatures. But the roles of readers in testimony are more profound than mere recognition.

Contemporary engagement with the survivor-figure, the language of 'bearing witness,' and Whitlock's work on the transactions of testimonial literature emerge, in great part, from Dori

Laub's work on recording testimonies of Holocaust survivors. For Laub, witnessing is grounded in the survival of trauma, specifically, the Shoah. His category of witness includes both the testifier (the survivor) and the listener (a recipient companion), because first and foremost, Laub says that people are witnesses to themselves as they experience an event (61). In "Truth and Testimony: The Process and The Struggle," Laub stresses the temporal nature of testimonial events as he shifts focus from testimony to witnessing, from attention to the story to focus on the relationship between witnesses as established during "the experience itself of *living through* testimony, of giving testimony" (70).

As Whitlock draws on Laub's pivotal work with Shoshana Felman in *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History*, she defines testimonial life narratives as performative direct speech-acts (8). Like Felman and Laub, Whitlock discusses literary forms of testimony, namely, creative texts that have been consciously and deliberately produced to be circulated and consumed as testimony. Literary testimony, according to Felman and Laub, aims "to open up in the belated witness, which the reader now historically becomes, the imaginative capacity of perceiving history — what is happening to others — in one's own body" (Felman and Laub 108). But, whereas Felman and Laub's work emerges from and contends with traumatic events while focusing on individual survivor-witnesses and readers (69), Whitlock expands this scope, accounting for the cultural and political work of testimony, by discussing "the weight of responsibility" encompassed in reading testimony as an act of bearing witness (*Postcolonial Life Narratives* 8). She does so by building on Leshu Torchin's *Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide on Film, Video, and the Internet* and further characterize testimony as an act that

can create a piercing and transformative ‘bearing’ witness that triggers advocacy, responsibility, and accountability, which move the reader and produce collective ‘witnessing publics’, but these are temporary and contingent collectives hailed through rhetorical address, and active engagement and responsibility that is subject to change (qtd. in Whitlock *Postcolonial Life Narratives* 8)

Whitlock’s extended definition of testimonial life narratives thus tends to particular forms of relationality — “advocacy, responsibility, and accountability” — that are required in order to bear witness, to fulfill testimony’s ethical demands and mobilize its transformative capacities. To bear witness, however, Whitlock’s relationality to testimony requires multiple shifts of perspective, from the advocacy of speaking subject to the listening one, from the responsibility of the individual to the collective, and from considerations of the testifier’s positionality as a condition for accountability to that of the listener. In this sense, Whitlock’s framing of bearing witness to testimonial life narratives, echoes Dwayne Donald’s conceptualization and call for ethical relationality, which is further strengthened by her attention to the colonial trajectories of testimony and reading as acts of witnessing.

Whitlock’s layered notion of bearing witness to testimony is important not only because it tends to multiple yet concurrent registers of its relationality, but perhaps mostly because it leaves room for the complexity of testimonial transactions as they come into conflict with the national imaginary. From her opening to her closing remarks, Goldwater’s critique of *Something Fierce* demonstrates a complex form of ethical engagement with testimony, of bearing witness. She recognizes Aguirre’s truthfulness and acknowledges Aguirre’s human rights claim of freedom from oppression and political persecution. More so, Goldwater advocates for the importance of reading *Something Fierce* as confronting readers with the ethical choice of

condoning or rejecting resorting to violence as resistance of oppression (“2012 Day Four Q&A” min. 02:10-04:22). Promoting the importance of a wide readership for this book, Goldwater invokes the shared responsibility and individual accountability that it demands. She appeals to readers’ accountability as members of the intimate public of CanLit, and by extension the Canadian national imaginary. It is this very accountability, she argues, which demands a communal responsibility to Canada’s shared values. These shared values are also the exact reason of Goldwater’s rejection of Aguirre’s resistance claim. Goldwater engages with *Something Fierce* as a Canadian, and her definition of Canadianness relies on both the peace-making and white civility myths of the nation, though the former denies the colonial violence that has been shaping the relations of settlers and Indigenous peoples of this land (Regan 11), and the latter entrenches an exclusionary white-British imagination of civility and citizenry (Coleman 5). In other words, For Goldwater, the only ethical response available to a Canadian reader is the rejection of armed resistance. Any other response would mean the rejection of Canadianness.

The tension between ethics and politics in the transactions of testimony is one that Whitlock tends to in her engagement with testimony as a discourse that moves across global cultures and markets, to “record changing, historical thresholds of subaltern agency and dispossession” (8). In so doing, like Spivak, Whitlock grounds ‘othering’ not only in psychic trauma, but in historically situated political and cultural legacies and realities of colonialism (8). She makes this shift while maintaining Laub’s view of testimony as an event of bearing witness. In so doing, Whitlock is able to unpack how subaltern subjects have been mis-represented as voiceless or victims, when, in fact, it has been their “visibility, legibility, and audibility” that’s been “tactical, contingent, and constrained” (*Postcolonial Life Narratives* 8). Expanding the

scope of Felman and Laub's work, Whitlock unveils the culturally and politically conditioned nature of literary testimony as it moves across global markets, highlighting the gap between testimony's trans-cultural aims and the highly-mediated realities of its circulation and consumption.

Whitlock, then, draws attention to the fact that readers of literary testimony are not merely tasked with ethical concerns, namely the tasks of "advocacy, responsibility, and accountability," but that readers and their responses are cultivated by literary markets. In a sense, Whitlock situates testimonial events as ones that require the formation of intimate publics to achieve their aim. The resonances of the tension between the ethics of reading testimony and the framework of the intimate public is what Goldwater's layered response demonstrates. Fostering an intimate public, the *Canada Reads*' on-air debates have been shaping cultural public-debate within the confines of belonging to a nation of CanLit — i.e. to a community of readers who imagine themselves as part of a multicultural, humanitarian, and reconciliatory nation — in the guise of merely reflecting it. Discussing the show's format and the reading practices it models, Fuller argues that the use of celebrity figures as champions of texts, as well as the moderator's guiding questions foster a 'vernacular' reading practice, focused on affective responses ("Listening to the Readers of Canada Reads" 19-20). This mode of vernacular reading centralizes affect-based interpretations and mobilizes them to foster a shared sense of belonging, an intimate public that seemingly works to re-imagine the nation, while in fact maintaining the status-quo.

On the final day of debates the 2019 season, panelists are asked about the place of hope in the two finalist testimonies — *Homes* and *By Chance Alone*. This question directs the discussion not merely towards affective interpretations (which repeatedly result with teary eyed panelists), but towards a consideration of Canadian present-day realities, issues, and needs. Or,

as Zee notes, “We are at such desperate times, we are at such a cross roads in this country, we need a little bit of hope... Not every book needs to have hope. We have to tell different stories and uncomfortable stories to understand the society we live in. That being said, *Canada Reads* is the book that everybody in this country should read, and I feel like we do need to inspire some hope” (“2019 Day Four” min. 24:00-26:10). Comeau takes the discussion of hope a step further and notes that “*Homes* is the ultimate journey of hope,” not solely for the family’s story of resilience and survival, but how the story of the book has unfolded “with [Abu Bakhr] coming to Canada and it’s tough and he doesn’t want to be there but he still holds on to hoping that he can figure this out and then he meets this teacher that takes him under her wing and helps him to tell the story” (“2019 Day Four” min. 27:00-28:00).

The evocative resonances of affect modeled in the texts and underscoring the reading experience are highly predominant during the “one book to move you” edition of *Canada Reads*, but they are not unique to this season or the show. With hosts encouraging panelists to champion their books by attending to the texts’ “powerful, moving, or ethically important” messages (Rak “A Transnational Autobiographical Pact” 60), affective responses often serve to initiate the show’s on-air debates, while being framed under the guise of ethical engagement. Berlant notes that this is crucial, yet often unacknowledged, component of the creation of intimate publics:

intimate spheres feel like ethical places based on the sense of capacious emotional continuity they circulate, which seems to derive from an ongoing potential for relief from the hard, cold world. Indeed, the offer of the simplicity of the feeling of rich continuity with a vaguely defined set of like others is often the central affective magnet of an intimate public. (6-7)

The sense of “rich continuity” afforded by a shared affective response — in this case, hope — is one mobilized on *Canada Reads* distinctly for the formation of the intimate public as an ethical entity, one that conceives of CanLit readership through ethical citizenship and by extension characterizing the national imaginary with these very terms. In this single move, the discourse revolving affective responses on *Canada Reads 2019* and beyond, positions the individual reader as part of the CanLit intimate public, and by extension a member of the imagined Canadian collective.

The closing round of debates in the 2019 season of *Canada Reads*, focuses on this move from the individual reader to a collective imaginary, discussing how readers can be moved to political action. It brings Comeau and Truesdale to argue that an ethical response to the two testimonies demands taking responsibility and enacting forms of advocacy. They suggest that readers should take action by reaching out to neighbours and colleagues, by writing or calling their elected representatives to ask what they are doing about the war in Syria, and even by voting, to “make sure we don’t bring in people that want to take [Canada’s welcoming refugees policies] away from this country and bring us in a different direction” (“2019 Day Four” min. 47:20-49:12). They demonstrate that the “one book to move Canada” means being moved from the personal to the national, and to take action. At a time of deep socio-political animosity, rise in xenophobia, and hate-full public discourse, they argue that the way to move the nation may be through an affective sense of hope. Thus, like Goldwater, Comeau and Truesdale model the complexity of Whitlock’s notion of bearing witness to literary testimony. Nonetheless, while Goldwater models bearing witness despite a clash between the intimate public and the ethical demands of testimony, Comeau and Truesdale demonstrate the role of affect in shaping and

mobilizing reading as an act of witnessing, and both models display the utilization of vernacular readings for the sake of sustaining national myths.

As Mass Reading Events like *Canada Reads* formulate intimate publics, affect serves to both foster a sense of belonging, and, by demonstrating recognition, seemingly perform a relational ethics. But reliance on affect as the fulfillment of testimony's ethical demand risks testimony's transactions in the public sphere being easily co-opted into propaganda (*Soft Weapons* 3). In other words, focusing on affect as an ethical response is grounded in feeling which rights claims are justified and which are not, rather than contending with the histories and realities of how political structures shape and govern lives. The ethical imperative encompassed in testimonial accounts positions readers as witnesses and demands their engagement with its truth and justice claim. To bear witness, to fulfill testimony's ethical demand, as Whitlock suggests, testimony certainly relies on mobilizing affect, but affect-based recognition alone is not enough, because to bear witness to testimony readers must engage with "advocacy, responsibility, and accountability" both as individuals and as members of a collective (*Postcolonial Life Narratives*, 8). Within the framework of national literature as set up on an MRE like *Canada Reads*, the arguments presented by Comeau, Truesdale, Dickinson, and even Goldwater, demonstrate how readers mobilize affect to engage with the ethics of bearing witness, while this very reliance on affect still risks co-optation into the very power structures that testimony seeks to dismantle.

3.4 Recognizing a Witness

In addition to Whitlock's attention to the "advocacy, responsibility, and accountability" required for ethical engagement with testimonial life narratives, Margaretta Jolly draws attention

to the juridical resonances of acts of reading as witnessing. While Leigh Gilmore was the first to identify that testimonial projects (oral or written, creative or not) are always situated within legal protocols of truth telling, always framed within juridical settings (*The Limits of Autobiography* 5), Jolly adds that in so doing, testimonial texts also allow calling and responding to claims that cannot be fully addressed in a court of law (5). Nonetheless, Jolly notes that creative forms of testimony are still produced in relation to legal discourse as they formulate direct speech acts that issue social and political demands. Testimonies, according to Jolly, should thus be understood not only as “a process *told in stages*” with psychological, social, juridical, and literary facets, but much like Whitlock suggests, should also be framed as a conversation “defined through who listens, how and for what interest” (Jolly 10). Given their relational nature, creative testimonies bestow responsibility (in lieu of judge and jury) upon their audience. In their introduction to *Human Rights and Narrated Lives*, Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith address this responsibility as the ethical imperative embedded in human-rights’ life narratives:

[Testimonies] issue an ethical call to listeners both within and beyond national borders to recognize the distinction between the values espoused by the community and the actual practices that occur... Stories unsettle private beliefs and public discourses about the national past, generating public debate, sympathy, and outrage... Storytelling in action accumulates political import... Whether or not storytelling in the field of human rights results in the extension of human justice, dignity, and freedom depends on the willingness of those addressed to hear the stories and take responsibility for the recognition of others and their claims. (3, 5)

Jolly concurs with Schaffer and Smith’s argument, situating the socio-political efficacies of creative testimonies in “the context of a claim” that necessitates readers’ recognition (10).

Grounded in juridical and political recognition discourses, then, testimony identifies itself to a reader by invoking a claim for recognition or justice.

These are the claims made by Aguirre and Nemat, by Eisen and al Rabeeah, as well as the responses demonstrated by Goldwater and Dickinson, by Comeau and Truesdale, modeling varied forms of recognition and response to testimony's claims. But the testimonies aren't merely identified as such by the readers. They are framed as such by the platform of show as a Mass Reading Event. As part of the promotion of each season, the show produces book trailers (40-60 second videos presenting the books) which open each day of debates, offering a descriptive pitch of each text, invoking distinct affective reading experiences, and in the case of testimonies use these affective resonances to present the texts' justice claims. Both Nemat's *Prisoner of Tehran* and Aguirre's *Something Fierce* are presented to audiences not merely as truthful accounts, but more so, as ethically and politically pressing acts, situated as testimonies of political upheaval and resistance to oppressive regimes. Nemat's story is presented through the price she pays: "Marina Nemat is speaking out against [the new regime], she is 16 years old. In Iran in 1979 that's old enough to be arrested, imprisoned, tortured, sentenced to death" ("2012 Day One" min. 18:28-19:08). *Something Fierce*, on its part, is set as a story of dedication to revolution at a great personal price: "[r]evolution chose her, and she chose it... torn between her dedication to bringing down the Pinochet regime and a teenager's preoccupation with boys and pop music... Life is going to be fierce. Carmen made her choice, and now, she is going to try and live with it" ("2012 Day One" min. 20:56- 21:30).

The 2015 season of *Canada Reads* is framed as the "one book to break barriers" edition, and positions all five finalist books, both fiction and non, as making a claim for social change; declaring they are ones that identify a barrier and serve to break it. All five texts directly contend

with social barriers — from homophobia, to islamophobia, discrimination against Indigenous people, and end-of-life. Yet, despite identifying clear justice claims and collective calls to break them, the trailers shift to thematic discussions. Both Kim Thúy’s auto-fictional account of her refugee story in *Ru* and Kamal Al-Solaylee’s coming-of-age memoir as a gay man in the Middle-East in *Intolerable: A Memoir of Extremes*, are introduced by identifying the barriers, but the trailers then shift to highlight themes of internal-conflict and healing. While Al-Solaylee’s Yemen is presented as “no country for gay men,” Thúy’s Vietnam is set as drenched in violence. However, the trailers (and the subsequent discussions of the books) highlight Thúy finding refuge and healing in Quebec, and Al-Solaylee drifting apart from his family who turn to fundamentalist Islam as he moves toward Western liberalism (“2015 Day One” min. 15:42-16:30, min. 10:33-11:14).

The focus on theme and affect guide panelists’ strategies of interpretation in ways that become apparent immediately following each trailer, with a 60-second introduction speech made by each book’s respective celebrity-champion. Both Kristin Kreuk (championing *Intolerable*) and Cameron Bailey (promoting *Ru*) immediately situate their chosen books in terms of Canadian demographics and multiculturalism, as well as identify the barriers tackled in *Ru* and *Intolerable*. Cameron Bailey, the artistic director of TIFF, introduces *Ru* by modeling a reading practice and appealing directly to the show’s intimate public, naming the immigrant experience as the defining phenomenon currently “changing the face of Canada” (“2015 Day One” min 17:17-17:19). Situating himself and many among the studio audience as members of migrant communities, Bailey makes an appeal to these very readers, noting that *Ru* is the one book that helps readers understand the shared experience of migration and the ever-evolving “heart, and the mind and the soul of Canada” (“2015 Day One” min 16:50-17:54).

Kreuk, an actress, positions readers of Al-Solaylee's text as "witnessing the Middle East moving from secularism and moderation to fundamentalism and oppression, from bikinis to burkas, within a lifetime, through the voice of a brave young gay Arab boy determined to survive, to thrive" ("2015 Day One" min 11:40-11:53). In this same breath, Kreuk also defines what readers are expected to do as witnesses to Al-Solaylee's account, namely, to "develop a deeper understanding of the experiences of our friends and neighbours... [to] contextualize our place in the world today ("2015 Day One" min 12:28-12:29). Within the span of a single minute, during which Kreuk simultaneously includes Muslim immigrants as members of Canada's imagined community and excludes them from the show's reading community, she directly identifies the text as a testimonial account and models the interpretative practice expected of readers as witnesses.

But perhaps the text most distinctively situated as a testimonial is the one defended by activist Craig Kielburger, Thomas King's *The Inconvenient Indian*. The trailer introduced King's text as a book that tells "a tale of sticks and stones and broken bones, broken treaties, hollow promises" and shows "it's time to rewrite the script" ("2015 Day One" min. 13:04-13:45). *The Inconvenient Indian's* trailer is the only one that moves from a thematic interpretation, to introduce a text's direct claim for justice, thus situating it as testimony. Kielburger's introduction continues the direct claim for justice and situates it as a pressing crisis by extending the argument beyond King's book. He argues, "last month *Maclean's* reported on the dismal mistreatment of Aboriginals and said that Canada's Aboriginal non-Aboriginal conflict is worse than race relations in the United States. This is the five-hundred-year-old barrier that has to be broken" ("2015 Day One" min. 14:02-14:18). Like Kreuk, Kielburger notes both how accessible the book is, and its educational potential as it is "destined to be a cornerstone in how we understand our

country, to be taught in every school and to be read by every citizen” (“2015 Day One” min. 14:48-14:56). Similar to Kreuk, Kielburger imagines the intimate public of *Canada Reads* as a white-civility citizenry that desires to be educated about the plights of others who reside among them. He positions *The Inconvenient Indian* as a book that serves to change perspectives on “the history of North America we thought we knew” (“2015 Day One” min. 14:12-15:09), but never invokes personal or collective accountability, never suggests that Canadian readers contend with their potential responsibility for sustaining the false colonial peace-making narrative or their complicity in the dispossessions the book attests to.

Interestingly, entertainment journalist Lainey Lui’s introduction of Raziel Reid’s young adult novel *When Everything Feels Like the Movies* makes a similar move that employs paratextual elements to position the novel as one with a truth value that invokes a rights-claim and mobilizes affective responses to create socio-political change. Lui is able to invoke the discourse of testimony, in part because, Reid himself positions the novel as one that is based on the true story of Larry Fobes King’s murder, a “young gay teen who was shot dead by the classmate who he had asked to be his Valentine,” an event Reid learned of by watching *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* as a teen, thinking “that could have been me” (Reid, “How I Wrote *When Everything Feels Like the Movies*”). The book’s trailer narrates a suspenseful plot summary, but Lui immediately takes up its reception to shift the work of fiction to a rights-claim in real life:

Like Jude [the novel’s protagonist], this book is under attack. It was condemned by a columnist in *The National Post*, [and] there is a petition across this country calling for it to be stripped of its Governor General’s Award. Why? Because it shakes up the status quo, it upsets the guardians of the status quo, the pearl-clutchers who guard the barrier of homophobia and intolerance. Because it is not only confronting the barrier, it has doused

gasoline all over that barrier and has lit the flame. And if this book can win this competition, we together can throw that match down, watch it burn to the ground, then walk across the ashes of that barrier, hold our hands out and say ‘be my valentine’. Come on Canada, let’s dance. (“2015 Day One,” min. 22:00-23:00)

Like Kielburger, Lui uses a paratextual object to indicate the urgency to recognize the book’s claim. But, as opposed to Kreuk and Kielburger, Lui approaches a different intimate public, one that is ready to challenge the white civility citizenry. The paratextual sources Lui refers to are a column by Barbara Kay and an online petition which critique the novel’s graphic content and warn against “the influence this will have on children’s minds” (Koning qtd. in Lorenzi), positioning the novel as a danger to the heterogeneous and patriarchal aspects of white civility. In her opening pitch, Lui responds to these critiques, and based on the novel’s inspiration from true events, she uses paratext to call for recognizing Reid’s novel as bearing an urgent justice claim. In this sense, Lui engages with testimony as a discourse, and takes up her role as a reader to be a witness to testimony, a witness called to recognize the truth claim of a text and mobilize affective responses to social change through “advocacy, responsibility, and accountability” (Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives* 8).

Pleas to engaged citizenry and attention to socio-political issues are similarly prominent in the 2019 season. But, perhaps due to the “one book to move you” theme, introductions highlight the affects invoked within the texts and by them. While all five finalist books are introduced in affective terms with trailers narrated by the authors’, the two texts identified as testimonies —*Homes* and *By Chance Alone* — align an ethical response with an affective one and situate it as combating racism and xenophobia. Comeau describes *Homes* as a book that “will fill your heart with empathy and compassion,” that “will make you believe in the power of

love, hope, and family,” suggesting that this kind of book is “the best antidote to senseless hatred.” Comparing the book to “a modern-day version of Anne Frank’s diary,” a teary-eyed Comeau notes the book will make readers “feel grateful that your kids don’t have to fall asleep to the sound of machine guns tonight” (“2019 Day One” min. 13:27-14:05). Tong, on her part, situates Eisen’s Holocaust memoir as “a vaccine for your brain” designed to stop hate spreading like disease (“2019 Day One” min. 15:58-16:02). Opening her statement by including global and national insurgence in racist hate crimes, Tong warns that “[a] recent survey found that one in five Canadian young people doesn’t even know what the Holocaust is. At the very same time, in our very own country, hate-crimes have sky rocketed by up to 47%” (“2019 Day One” min. 15:43-15:57). Tong’s suggested solution is an affective one: “[t]he only thing that destroys hatred is kindness. Does it take courage to read this book? Yes, it does. But not nearly the same amount of courage it takes Max to experience what he did, to relive it, and then write this book” (“2019 Day One” min. 16:03-16:13). With texts introduced as passionate, moving, brave, compelling, and challenging, both the produced book trailers and champions’ rehearsed introductions on *Canada Reads* serve to frame the texts vis-a-vis the annual theme, as well as directly suggest and model affective responses. In so doing, these openings guide readers’ expectations of the texts. When introducing testimonial accounts, the trailers and remarks do indeed invoke the book’s claims for recognition or justice, but never suggest what these claims might demand of readers beyond mere acknowledgement of the claim as true. This is neither accidental, nor unique to *Canada Reads*.

Discussions of testimony’s ethical and political responsibilities are mostly framed vis-a-vis the testifier, who is required to translate traumatic memory into a truthful narrative (Jolly 11). Even when focus does shift to the roles of readers, the global transactions of testimony too often

merely tax readers with the recognition of the text's veracity, frequently expressed as an empathetic affective response. Schaffer and Smith, for example, posit that in order to honour their responsibilities to a testimonial account, readers' ethical engagement is an "attempt to listen, to follow the strands of personal storytelling, and to respond through an ethics of recognition" (12). In other words, Schaffer and Smith suggest that affective responses formulate acts of recognition that can properly respond to testimony's ethical demand. Jolly, on her part, acknowledges that creative testimonies call "for emotional recognition and mourning, the compensation of public remembrance and education" (5). Affective response is positioned by life writing scholars not only as an ethical fulfillment of a reader's witnessing responsibilities, but also as an action that activates social change and can honour testimony's justice claim. But an ethics of recognition that relies on affect as mobilizing testimony's justice claim does not fully contend with the modes of relationality invoked in reading as acts of witnessing, primarily because the transactions of affect in the public sphere, much like those of testimony, are easily co-opted into the colonial structures that justice claims seeks to dismantle.

3.5 Affective Risks

The dangers embedded in the global transactions of testimony and its reliance on readers' affective responses are far from ignored by life writing scholars. Jolly notes that the challenge surrounding testimonial transactions is not merely the enactment of affective recognition but the fact that those testifying lose control over their testimony (and its claim) once it is shared (6). Caren Kaplan echoes a similar concern, warning that texts' truths can be mobilized to reproduce neo-colonial attitudes (122). Whitlock concurs with the danger of reproducing "the dynamics of colonization and dispossession," and adds that they may serve to "naturalize the doxa of

globalization: the neoliberal discourse of the free circulation of ideas, goods and peoples in global networks of exchange,” and are hence easily co-opted into propaganda (*Postcolonial Life Narratives* 9, 7, 3). But even if the dangers aren’t as prevalent, Whitlock highlights the power dynamics embedded in testimonial transactions, as

“[t]he ‘rights’ that are attached to those who testify in human rights discourse, the emotional attachments created by benevolence and humanitarianism, and the humane recognition bestowed through empathic identification are privileges of the witness... and historically contingent. These can be withheld, or they can disconnect — through aversion, disgust, shame, and compassion ‘fatigue’” (*Postcolonial Life Narratives* 9).

Their concerns are not unfounded. In “Girls in Crisis: Rescue and Transnational Feminist Autobiographical Resistance” Leigh Gilmore and Elizabeth Marshall note that discourses of circulation and consumption of transnational testimony in the West appeal to readers’ sympathy for others’ suffering in distant locations and position readers to “imagine themselves as empowered to rescue” the testifying subjects (684, 683). While their discussion is limited to the scope of girlhood abuse and trauma, Gilmore and Marshall’s argument extends to Western discourses of testimony, which operate “within a model of affective engagement that displaces [testifying subjects] into an imaginary realm of undifferentiated violability and victimization” and perpetuate power dynamics (684).

Carolyn Dean’s “The Politics of Suffering” and Wendy S. Hesford’s “Documenting Violations: Rhetorical Witnessing and the Spectacle of Distant Suffering” showcase one way in which modes of testimonies’ circulation and consumption among Western audiences serve to mobilize affective responses in ways that position reading witnesses as rescuers of the testifying subjects. Dean and Hesford indicate that the use of testimonial narratives in political work and

social activism —emerging from the discourse of human rights — do embody these risks, with humanitarian aids, journalists, documentarists, and social activists often usurping the role of the testifier. Building on the work of Didier Fassin, Carolyn Dean notes a shift in the social value of testimony, moving from the prevalence of survivor-witness images, to mandating humanitarians “to heal suffering the world over in the name of alleviating trauma” (629). This shift in power dynamics — from the survivor-witness to the humanitarian — is in effect “part of a bureaucratic, administrative and judicial apparatus whose mandate to care for traumatized victims provides cover for the extension of western interests through humanitarian interventions and rhetoric, generating the trauma such an infrastructure was supposed to remedy” (C. Dean 632). In so doing, the state both “defines the victim’s truth and turns the humanitarian into its representative” (C. Dean 634). This paradoxical manipulation of testimony’s ethical efficacies in service of the state’s power is precisely the risk that alarms both settler and Indigenous critics of Canada’s TRC and its politics of recognition — from Coulthard and Simpson, to Gaertner and Wakeham, among others. Carolyn Dean furthers this argument as one of erasure, with documentarists serving as an example or model of humanitarian-witnesses, who, despite their political alliance with survivor-witnesses, end up usurping testimony’s social capital by mobilizing empathetic affects, and becoming complicit in the state’s violence as they erase the agency of survivor-witnesses (634-635).

Hesford furthers this argument in her discussion of human rights documentaries in which “victims’ testimonies bear witness to incommensurable events, and also function rhetorically as empathetic markers in an effort to create the viewer as witness” (106). Noting the documentaries’ significant cultural influence on political “movements for reparation and restitution,” Hesford flags that while they are used as “forms of evidence,” documentaries

“conjoin legal and dramatic forms of persuasion” and thus risk empathy turning to identification “merging between witness and testifier, listener and speaker” (107). Like Hesford, in “Unbearable Witness: Towards a Politics of Listening,” Wendy Hui Kyong Chun contends with the danger of empathic affect being translated to identification. Chun discusses feminist and postfeminist perspectives on the Montreal Massacre at the Polytechnique in 1989, addressing how respondents failed to bear witness to the massacre and the traumas it inflicted and triggered. Chun indicates that in the aftermath of the event, “the line between identifying with and identifying as was often (involuntarily) breached... identifying as the victim rather than with her” (158). Attending to the political and historical efficacies of witnessing, Amber Dean’s “Inheriting What Lives On” attends to yet another register that reflects the limits of empathy-based approaches to witnessing. Dean discusses art-based testimony through the prism of memory studies, and notes how such approaches, despite being well-intentioned, oft position witnesses to mobilize empathy as identification and appropriation, thus “erasing complex histories in ways that make it difficult to see how wider social contexts are related to the injustice or violence being witnessed” (3-4).

Dean, Hesford, and Chun, caution of the danger of identification given the local and global contexts of testimony’s movement — namely what Whitlock, Jolly and Kaplan warn against — as well as what Hesford defines as “the rhetorical dynamics of circulation and the incorporative power of reception” (122). Through the analytical lenses of trauma and memory studies, Hesford then asks “what kinds of witnesses do human rights testimonials construe? To what degree are testimonial subjects romanticized as transnational artifacts (Kaplan), and/or turned into opportunistic spectacles for self-positioning or for certain political agendas?” (107, reference in original). With these questions, Hesford, like Chun and Amber Dean, engages with

the role of readers as witnesses to testimony, and the ethical efficacies of this role. However, rather than tend to the rhetorical aspect, or focus on readers' positioning of the testifying subject, I explore what readers and listeners are supposed to do when they receive testimony.

Once testimony is shared, the responsibility for it moves from the testifying subject to the ones receiving it. What matters then, is how audiences listen and respond to testimony, and what they do with it. Being attuned to the circulation and consumption of testimony means taking into consideration that testimonies do not construe their witnesses in a vacuum. Rather, as demonstrated in this chapter, readers may understand their roles as witnesses and the responsibilities that entails not solely through the testimony and its claim, but also, and perhaps more so, through the models—however limited—which agents of the reading industry present to them. This is what happens with the *Canada Reads* 2012, 2015, and 2019 debates. The format of the show — through the use of an annual theme, book trailers, discussion questions, and celebrity-champion's introductions of the books — serves to delineate the scope of engagement with testimonial texts, who is regarded as a member of the show's intimate public, what their roles and responsibilities are, and what they should take from every book.

The three seasons model social acts of reading testimony within the confines of the CanLit brand and Canada's prevalent myths. These very confines demarcate the potentialities and pitfalls of reading as witnessing in a mass literary event. Stemming in part from the CBC's mandate "to 'enlighten Canadians' about each other," and the show's premise that reading is "inherently capable of uniting Canadians and creating better citizens" (Fuller and Rak 33, 36), the seasons' debates maintain the use of affective interpretations as means of upholding national values rather than mobilize empathetic affects to responsibly engage with testimonies' rights claims. While affect is mobilized on different registers during the debates — from discussions of

affective relations as modeled in the texts, to panelists' affective responses to the texts, and panelists' use of rhetoric to create certain affects during discussions — the “breaking barriers” season (2015) demonstrates the scope of recognition afforded to readers by the framework of the show, by the contours of the CanLit intimate public as a citizenry not only invested-in but upholding the values of reconciliation, humanitarianism, and multiculturalism as characteristics that are uniquely and proudly Canadian.

The 2015 debates demonstrate the risks of affect-driven engagement with testimony beyond the scope of over-identification, as the “breaking barriers” season demonstrates the kinds of affects readers are willing to engage with. The debates open with a question by host Wab Kinew, who, like his predecessor Jian Ghomeshi, invites literary analysis expressed through an affective lens. As he asks “which of these books is least effective in breaking down barriers?” the immediate responses of panelists revolve around affects of detachment or irritation, despite Kinew's attempts to direct the conversation towards how these affects are produced in terms of theme, style or tone (“2015 Day One” min. 25:10-28:44). As the debate unfolds, panelists use affect to argue about the urgency of the claims made in each of the texts, with the truth-value of testimonial accounts invoked through repeated references to paratextual materials and used to support the importance of their claim.

Kreuk and Kielburger repeatedly address demographics and public debate as they urge fellow panelists and the wider *Canada Reads* community to care about these stories and the painful experiences they share. Kreuk defends *Intolerable* not only for its relevance to Canadian society given changing demographics but notes how the genre of memoir allows Al-Solaylee to reflect the difficulty of his story and his position, noting the bravery and courage that sharing his story requires. In her analysis, she takes the reading affects used to critique the book — namely

Wainwright's claim that the repetition and the narrator's tone regarding his family are annoying and off-putting — and explains why for her the same literary strategies make the book the most compelling and moving of the five (“2015 Day One” min. 31:05-31:28). In her response, then, Kreuk both shows how varied affective responses can be, and models how affective response can enable or bar a reader from listening to testimony's claim. Kielburger, on his part, notes that he found *Ru* to be the least effective book and tries at a rational rather than emotion-based analysis, grounding his argument in the three criteria specified for the annual theme, i.e. “the challenging stereotypes, the changing perspectives, and illuminating issues” as parameters for effectiveness rather than affectiveness (“2015 Day One” min. 31:49-33:04).

Despite his attempt, Kielburger cannot escape affect-based analysis. This becomes more evident as Kineu posits his follow-up question, asking which book panelists found to be the most hopeful, and whether a sense of hope is required to break barriers (“2015 Day One” min. 34:25 - 34:40, 36:10-36:20). As he proceeds to argue that hope is not necessary in order to break barriers, Martha Wainwright cuts in and states that it is precisely the end of King's book that opens the possibility for change. This is immediately followed by Bailey questioning whether the end is indeed hopeful: “I felt like [King] was trying to be hopeful. That really, the bulk of the book is just about how awful things have been and continue to be for a long time, so let's try to find a few straws of hope... I didn't know that I fully believed that” (“2015 Day One” min. 36:18-37:00). At this point, Kielburger makes an argument for hope in King's very writing of the book, a book that “never existed for previous generations,” and situating as a gift to next generations of Indigenous and settler peoples in Canada, a hope in sharing truthful accounts as means of changing the historical narrative (“2015 Day One” min. 37:05-37:31).

In response to the question of hope, Lui states that not only is there hope at the end of Reid's book, through the character of Jude's brother, but that this character provides a model for readers:

That brother is us the audience, we the reader are supposed to assume the responsibility that the younger brother has taken to respect people's individuality and love people as who they are and go forth into this world, to make sure that there are no more Jude's. And I don't think that you can read that part without feeling a sense of hope and optimism and take in, each of us, what we can do for everybody else, ("2015 Day One" min. 38:40-39:35)

Once again, like her introduction of the book, Lui positions readers as ethical subjects and the book as a text that holds truth-value and makes a rights-claim. In her response, she not only positions hope as an affect that breaks barriers in the book but makes an affective plea that readers should feel ethically compelled to follow this model. Her analysis models how a reader's empathetic recognition of testimony's claim is regarded as the end goal of testimony's work; she makes the leap from feeling empathy, to finding a model in the text, and assuming readers will use it in real life thus invoking social change.

Whether strategy or not, by the end of the second day both non-fictional texts are voted off the show; *Intolerable* was voted off on day one, and *The Inconvenient Indian* on day two. In the Q&A discussion that followed the day two debates, in-studio audience members offered their reflections on King's work and the issues it raises. Comments varied from an expression of angst over the vote since the book requires all Canadians (immigrant and non) to take responsibility for their settlement on this land, to notes regarding why the book is too divisive for Canadians to unite around as the one book they need. On the fourth day, *Ru* ends up winning the final vote,

perhaps because it was both the least unsettling and the least divisive text, sharing the “quintessentially Canadian experience” of migration and celebrating the multicultural sanctuary brand of Canada.

What the events of the “breaking barriers” series make evident is that the show’s discussions revolved around affective interpretations because those are assumed to mobilize social change regardless of a text’s genre. In so doing, the 2015 season models both the limits of recognizing truth claims, and the contours of affective responses as honoring the ethics and relationality of bearing witness to testimony. Discussions indicated which texts exceeded the scope of a civil debate, demarcating the boundaries of Canadian public discourse by marking which issues are officially recognized and to what extent that can be sustained within a framework that promotes cultural nationalism. In other words, the season indicated what issues CBC audiences are willing to officially recognize and openly discuss, and where they draw their lines or what truths they avoid addressing. Meanwhile, though affective interpretations have been shown to both bar and foster recognition of truth claims, any possibility of witnessing has been stifled due to the nationalist mandate of the platform of circulation and consumption—which does not allow for readers’ consideration of their or the show’s complicity in the structures that entrench the conditions of injustice presented in the texts. The discussion comfortably remains within the bounds of multicultural and humanitarian Canada while making claims of working for good relations within the nation. The show’s mandate and format keep discussion in a non-threatening cultural register and rely on affective responses and civil debate to air grievances and thus consider the social matters ‘resolved’ or reconciled, the barriers broken.

3.6 Moving Beyond Affect

As a Mass Reading Event, *Canada Reads* showcases both the potentialities and limitations of testimonial transactions on a mainstream market scale. The “True Stories Edition” (2012) and the “Breaking Barriers” (2015) seasons showcase readers’ acknowledgments of truth claims and refusals to recognize rights’ claims, while the “Breaking Barriers” (2015) and “One Book to Move You” (2019) series encompass models of affective recognition as bearing witness to testimony and its call for political action. Though the *Prisoner of Tehran* is dismissed as untrue, *Something Fierce*’s truth is acknowledged, but its rights claim is partially rejected; and while *By Chance Alone* and *Homes* are recognized as truthful and urgent calls to actions, *Intolerable*, and *The Inconvenient Indian* are dismissed for not invoking the right kinds, or strong enough, affects. The recognized texts, the ones panelists openly engage with and agree to bear witness to — *Ru*, *By Chance Alone* and *Homes* — are ones that do not challenge Canada’s myths of humanitarianism, multiculturalism, and reconciliation. In many ways, the discussions of these texts serve to situate them as ones that invoke such values, and perhaps even celebrate them. At varied stages, each season highlights the affective resonances of hope; either presented as a question or emerging through panelists’ responses, hope is posited an affective solution to justice claims. The recurrence of hope, whether modeled within the texts or experienced by panel readers, is formulated as the affective move from the individual’s response to a shared one. In other words, the debates demonstrate how panelists shift their individual responses to advocate for collective responsibility or action by moving from expressions of empathy to articulations of hope.

This is the move demonstrated during the last round of debates on *Canada Reads* 2019, as host Ali Hassan initiates a discussion about hope, in part in response to Joe Zee, who on the

previous day noted that, “we are at such desperate times, we are at such a crossroads in this country, we need a little bit of hope.” Zee then adds that “not every book needs to have hope. We have to tell different stories and uncomfortable stories to understand the society we live in. That being said, *Canada Reads* is the book that everybody in this country should read, and I feel like we do need to inspire some hope” (“Canada Reads 2019 Day Four” min. 24:00-26:10). Earlier in the week Zee highlights how *Homes* deeply moved him:

“Abu’s story is so deeply important and personal, and, as I was saying before, we live in a political situation... we see these things on TV, but it’s so foreign to us. But I sat there and watched 9/11 out my window, I watched that plane fly through the building, I watched that building come down blocks from me... so, when war happens at your front door, then it changes your perspective... and Abu’s story, in first person, with his family, being forced out of his home because of unforeseen war is incredibly touching” (“Canada Reads 2019 Day Two” min. 17:06-17:47).

It is empathy to al Rabeeah’s story that moves him as an individual reader, but it is an argument for hope that he articulates as the necessary affect to move the nation. Comeau virtually makes the same move. Like Zee who empathizes with the realization that “war happens at your front door,” Comeau opens his championing of *Homes* by empathizing as a father. By the closing debates, he moves from *Homes* as a book that “will fill your heart with empathy and compassion,” or “a memoir [that] will make you more compassionate and profoundly grateful,” to championing *Homes* as “the ultimate journey of hope” (“2019 Day One” min. 13:52-13:54, *q* min. 2:56-3:19, “2019 Day Four” min. 27:00-28:00).

Comeau and Truesdale also model the limits of empathy and hope, advocating that ethical engagement must move readers to enact their privilege as Canadian citizens to fight

islamophobia and pressure their representatives for change and bring forth a hopeful future. Tong, however, presents a radically different model in which empathy and hope fulfill the ethical demands of testimony, equating being informed as individual readers, to feeling as an intimate public, and effecting change as collective responsibility. On the first day she opened her argument with presenting Eisen's testimony as an "antidote" or "vaccine" to the alarming rise of antisemitism in the country. In her closing remarks she frames *By Chance Alone*'s power to move readers as the power to "inoculate the country," formulating the very acts of reading and feeling both as an ethical response and as political action:

"The entire purpose of Max's book is [reads from epigraph] 'a reminder to stand on guard against radical ideologies and never be bystanders.' The very first thing each and every one of you can do, with respect to this book, is just simply to not look away... I believe that we can start a movement right here with books... There was a reason why I used the vaccine as a metaphor...right now, we have a very big disease that is a global threat. Each and every one of you [looking at the panelists] have recognized that [i.e. the rise of white supremacy in Canada and the world]. Right now, we have a chance to talk to all of Canada. We have a chance to inoculate this country, by giving them a better chance at what they read. ("Day Four" min. 33:50-37:32)

With this statement, as a reader, Tong recognizes Eisen's human-rights claim, and assertively advocates it on the show. With this same move, she also urges fellow panelists to enact their shared responsibility and be accountable to Canadian readers, "giving them a better chance at what they read," so that, through reading and feeling they can be inoculated. In so doing, Tong demonstrates what seems to be an ethical engagement with Eisen's Holocaust memoir. Yet, by mobilizing a vernacular mode of reading that equates empathic response with fulfilling an ethical responsibility

and effecting political change, her argument risks serving the very supremacist structures she calls to resist.

During the three seasons —2012, 2015, and 2019 — discussions honour calls for kindness, forgiveness, acceptance, yet resist recognizing anything that would challenge the status quo, let alone suggest decolonizing the nation, thus maintaining the calls for political change within the confines of existing systems. In many ways, the politics of shared reading on *Canada Reads* display prevalent models of testimonial transactions, demonstrating the dangers of affective recognition as bearing witness to testimony, and more so, the reliance on this very same response as fulfilling testimony's demands for political change. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the dangers embedded in testimonial transactions originate from the fact that testifying subjects lose control over their testimony and its claim once it is shared (Jolly 6). But perhaps the most evident risk is that of recognition itself, as it serves to centralize the reading-witness:

The 'rights' that are attached to those who testify in human rights discourse, the emotional attachments created by benevolence and humanitarianism, and the humane recognition bestowed through empathic identification are privileges of the witness... and historically contingent. These can be withheld, or they can disconnect — through aversion, disgust, shame, and compassion 'fatigue'. (Whitlock *Soft Weapons* 9)

Whitlock's concerns regarding the power dynamics that shape contemporary transactions of testimonies, echo Lillian Robinson's question of "and, always, *cui bono*—who profits?" And while several scholars warn that by virtue of centralizing the reader, empathy-based approaches to witnessing risk both identification and appropriation, blurring "the line between identifying with and identifying as" (A. Dean 3, Chun 158); the power dynamics of testimonial transactions, as demonstrated in the *Canada Reads* events, circulate in far more cunning ways.

In “De-colonising Empathy: Thinking Affect Transnationally,” Carolyn Pedwell echoes Whitlock’s attention to power dynamics but pushes forward a critical engagement with empathy, indicating the manifold challenges embedded in an affect-based ethics of recognition. Pedwell highlights that “creating more or better empathy is now framed as an affective ‘solution’” to justice and rights’ claims, and warns that “empathy—understood in shorthand as the affective ability ‘put oneself in the other’s shoes’— can easily become a kind of end-point” (“De-colonising Empathy”). And that is exactly the problem which plays out in *Canada Reads*. It is perhaps most evident in the 2019 series, when each panelist makes arguments for the timeliness and urgency of the political claims in their books — Tong and Comeau warn of the alarming rise of xenophobia, islamophobia, and antisemitism, Ray addresses systemic racism, and Zee asserts a mental health crisis. But testimonial accounts are not magic solutions (despite being positioned as such during the third day of the 2019 debates). The alarm bells on these issues have been rung in 2015 when Kreuk draws panelists’ attention to the rise of islamophobia in Canada, Lui warns against prevalent homophobia, and Kielburger cautions them of inherent systemic discrimination and abuse of Indigenous peoples. But, evidently, empathic readings of these books — or as Tong describes Eisen’s book “a VR empathy machine” (“Canada Reads 2019 Day Two” min. 36:38-36:43) — have not magically solved any of the deeply entrenched socio-political problems.

My argument here is not one that denies the power of testimonial accounts in particular (and literature in general) to effect very gradual change of public discourse, and hence hopefully invoke political and systemic realities. Rather, like Pedwell, my critique here is of reliance on empathic response as the end point, i.e. the fulfillment of said change. Let me be clear, affect is important. Emotional and embodied acts of reading draw readers to literature; it can potentially introduce readers to unfamiliar experiences, and hopefully inspire them to rethink their

prejudices. But none of these are guaranteed, and they aren't without their own dangers. Relying on affective responses in general — and empathy in particular — as effecting political change, is, simply put, a manipulative logical fallacy.

More importantly, it is a logical fallacy with very high stakes, as it serves to perpetuate the dominance of the very systems it arguably changes. The politics of shared reading on *Canada Reads* are grounded in the responsibility of the individual for self-betterment, and the assumption that if individuals better themselves, so will our society, and our political conflicts and injustices will be resolved. The stakes then, lie in the politics of shared reading and empathy-based responses as mirroring the same risks and failures embedded in the politics of recognition.

As she unsettles empathy by indicating how Western discourses of this affective-response are rooted in colonial modernities and work in service of neoliberal politics and economies, Pedwell unpacks the power dynamics that empathy serves to elide, the subject-positions it serves, the histories it collapses, and the political structures it maintains. “Although mainstream liberal narratives pose empathy as universal (as something everyone has the potential to develop),” Pedwell notes, “in the vast majority of Euro-American calls for empathy as affective solution, it is an imagined subject with class, race and geo-political privileges who encounters ‘difference’ and then chooses whether or not to extend empathy and compassion” (“De-colonising Empathy”).

In the opening chapter of *Scenes of Subjections: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* Saidiya Hartman traces the colonial routes of empathy back to slavery and advocations of abolition by empathic white subjects. In her discussion of John Rankin's letters to his brother, advocating the abolition of slavery by sharing the obscene spectacles of slavery that he has witnessed, Hartman seemingly warns of the dangers of over-

identification and the humanitarian-witness usurping the place of the survivor-witness. Her argument demonstrates the far more insidious roots of empathy as the ethical vehicle that formulates or mobilizes testimony — as “empathy is double edged, making the other’s suffering one’s own, this suffering is occluded by the other’s obliteration” (19). Extending the work of Jonathan Boyarin, Hartman indicates how the position of empathy is grounded in the “‘obliteration of otherness’ or the facile intimacy that enables identification with the other only as we ‘feel ourselves into those we imagine ourselves’” (19). Consequently, Hartman argues that “empathy fails to expand the space of the other but merely places the self in its stead. This is not to suggest that empathy can be discarded... but rather to highlight the dangers of the too-easy intimacy, the consideration of the self that occurs at the expense of the slave’s suffering, and the violence of identification” (19-20).

Hartman does not merely outline the implications of empathy’s colonial resonances. In fact, rather than simply unpack the dangers of an empathy-based ethics for the individual reader, Hartman warns of its institutional repressive effects, covering over the very power structures that necessitate it and are fostered by it:

By slipping into the black body and figuratively occupying the position of the enslaved, Rankin plays the role of captive and attester and in so doing articulates the crisis of witnessing determined by the legal incapacity of slaves or free blacks to acts as witnesses against whites. Since the veracity of black testimony is in doubt, the crimes of slavery must not only be confirmed by unquestionable authorities and other white observes but also must be made visible, whether by revealing the scarred back of the slave—in short, making the body speak—or through authenticating devices, or, better yet, by enabling

reader and audience member to experience vicariously the ‘tragic scenes of cruelty.’
(21-22)

In attesting to the power dynamics between the black survivor-witness and the white abolitionist advocate in nineteenth-century America, and by contending with the cultural politics and the frameworks of circulation and consumption that define the transactions of testimony at that place and time, Hartman unequivocally demonstrates that enacting an ethical response to testimony through empathic avenues merely serves to entrench the racist colonial structures that justice and rights claims seek to dismantle.

In relying on an ethics of recognition enacted through empathy, the power is entirely entrusted in the hands of readers, who are asked to recognize an other’s suffering, yet are never required to consider that “the act of ‘choosing’ to extend empathy can itself be a way to assert power” (Pedwell “De-colonising Empathy”). More so, given the assumption of empathy as universal, a single act of recognition serves to strengthen the reader’s perception of themselves as an ethical humanist subject, while concurrently allowing the reader to ignore their power or complicity in the conditions that cause the other’s pain. In fact, relying on empathy as the aim of ethical recognition serves to create a distorted image of the testifying-subject and the reader-witness as different but equal, as two individuals who are transformed by sharing an understanding of truth. In so doing, empathy both ignores the specificity of historical and cultural contexts and denies structural and political responsibility. In “Response to Empathy from Settlers,” Sto:lo author Lee Maracle highlights this argument, when she refuses to engage with settlers’ empathy because, in addition to its potential dishonesty, empathy benefits the settler, i.e. reader, rather than her, while allowing them to ignore the responsibility, accountability, or relationship that lie at the heart of ethical engagement (127-132).

Much like the dangers of political recognition, then, empathy-centred recognition of testimony's claim, mirrors the logic of "tactical acknowledgement," merely serving to replicate "the dynamics of colonization and dispossession," as it is "bound up with, and produced through, these very relations of power" (Walcott 344, Whitlock *Soft Weapons* 9, Pedwell). In fact, when relying on empathy-based responses to creative testimony as the endpoint of ethical recognition, the transformative capacities of bearing witness are left undone. In this way, like land acknowledgements and official state apologies, the empathic trap of testimonial transactions works in service of recognition — or, in Canada, the service of reconciliation, multiculturalism, and humanitarianism. So, how do we move beyond empathy, and promote modes of reading that honour the responsibility, reciprocity, and relationality of bearing witness?

From Reading to Witnessing

“Listen to the bones.”

(Louise Bernice Halfe, *Blue Marrow* 19)

With this directive, *âcimowinis* — the poetic voice of Cree poet Louise Bernice Halfe’s *Blue Marrow* — instructs readers to listen to the stories and teachings of *âcimowinis*’s relations, to know the lives of the prairie-land and its people (Halfe 19). At the outset of the book, Halfe directly frames *Blue Marrow* as a gift bestowed to readers (1), and in so doing, sets a particular mode of relationality between the poetic voice, the textual object, and the reader. From the use of family photos, to place names, and the naming of relations, Halfe positions the book as an autobiographical account that shares the lives and stories of her familial relations, primarily her four *nôhkomak*, her grandmothers. But in sharing the lives and stories of Adeline, Emma, Bella, and Sarah, *âcimowinis*—the present-day keeper of stories—admits that in order to keep the relations as ongoing, they can no longer hold their *nôhkomak*’s bundles and “must pass all that [they] posses/ every morsel to [their] children,” (Halfe 20, 9, 7). The bundles of *âcimowinis*’s *nôhkomak* hold the knowledge of life-making and community-building on the prairie, the stories and histories of relation to land, people, language, and nation, as well as the legacies and realities of colonial dispossession and oppression.

The stories, lives, and loss encompassed in these bundles, the urgency of sharing them, and the directive instructing readers to “[l]isten to the bones,” position the text as a testimonial act and invoke readers’ role as witnesses to this poetic testimony, framing their relational responsibility and accountability to *Blue Marrow*. But what does it mean to be in relation with

testimony? What does it mean to be responsible and accountable to a book of poetry? How can readers know that they are honouring *âcimowinis*'s gift, know that they are indeed “listen[ing] to the bones” (Halfe 19)? Who and what are they responsible to? How are they guided to enact those responsibilities, to listen? And what are they expected to do with the knowledge that *âcimowinis* gifts them? In other words, how can readers of *Blue Marrow* move beyond passive reading, or beyond affect and empathy, to enact modes of reading that honour the responsibility, reciprocity, and relationality of bearing witness to literary testimony?

My answers to these questions explore modes of reading as acts of relation making and breaking between testifiers, testimonial accounts, readers, and by extension, their communities. I turn to the material and creative framings of testimony and consider how the producers of testimony — authors, editors, and publishers — use them to offer readers tangible strategies that encourage modes of “ethical relationality” (Donald, “Indigenous Métissage” 535). As I focus on private reading practices — namely acts of not-solitary-but-indeed-solo reading, be they by general readers, students, critics, or literary scholars — I propose that the materiality of testimonial accounts can provide deliberate entry points to experiences of reading as specifically situated and critical acts of witnessing, inviting readers to recast their acts of reading as experiences of bearing witness to testimony.

4.1 Responsible Relations and Relational Responsibilities

From autobiography to Indigenous literatures and postcolonial studies, literary scholars have long been pre-occupied with the ethical responsibilities of their roles as readers, concerned with the question of “who profits” (Robinson L., 887) and the power dynamics inherent in literary interpretation of marginalized communities' experiences. In Canada, this conversation

has been confidently, openly, and continuously led by Indigenous and settler scholars who study Indigenous literatures and arts. From Jo-Ann Episkenew, Lee Maracle, Deanna Reder, Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair, David Garneau, to Ashok Mathur, Sam McKegney, Keavy Martin, Pauline Wakeham, and David Gaertner — scholars have been calling for approaches to reading and research that benefit Indigenous communities on their own terms. In *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* Justice positions relationality as “the central ethos of Indigenous literature,” both representing and imagining relations within and between communities (whether human or non) and offering pathways through historical and ongoing political conflicts (156). In so doing, he articulates relationality not only as the core tenant of Indigenous literature but also the ethical responsibility it bestows on scholars; a responsibility that, while enacted through the text, extends far beyond it. For Justice, alongside researchers like NunatuKavut scholar Kristina Fagan (now Bidwell), the responsibility for the modes of relationality invoked in Indigenous literatures, can and should be enacted through the practice of Indigenous literary nationalism — a theoretical approach that demands readers to centre nation-specific thinkers and knowledge systems to foster models of ethical relationships between researchers and the communities whose cultural production they study (Fagan, “Canadian Indian Literary Nationalism?” 36).⁸

This way to understand and frame relationality as both interconnected *and* specific is crucial when seeking to develop ethical reading practices that can honour the responsibility of bearing witness to testimony beyond political and affective recognition, to practice modes of reading as acts of witnessing that can work through the text but also push beyond it. When discussing settler-scholars’ “Strategies for Ethical Engagement” with Indigenous literatures, Sam McKegney interrogates the prevalent practices of intense self-reflexivity, qualified and tentative critique, as well as a shift of attention to non-Indigenous perspectives, topics, and approaches for

fear of misinterpreting Indigenous cultural knowledge. Concerned with the decades of “violence perpetrated against Indigenous texts” by non-Indigenous academics who have been applying Western research methods and aims, McKegney terms these practices as “strategies for ethical disengagement” (56, 58). When I first encountered *Blue Marrow*, I’ve found myself quickly retreating to practicing a mixture of all three strategies to different extents.

I first read Halfe’s long poem in the winter of 2014. It was my first year in Canada and I had only begun learning about the traditions, lives, and histories of the Indigenous peoples of Turtle Island. My very limited knowledge of these stories and histories was framed through the prism of residential schools. But, as *Blue Marrow*’s prefacing section moved back and forth between prayer-verse and narrative-prose, the voice of *âcimowinis*, the keeper of stories, turned to list the names of women – first names, surnames, nicknames, traditional names — whose stories and whose gifts, *âcimowinis* feels compelled to share. The prayer, the narrative, and the names introduced me to a story that was more than a narrative of colonial violence, intergenerational trauma, and survivance; it was primarily a story of kinship, place, storytelling, and ways of being and knowing. During this initial reading experience, the voice of *âcimowinis* drew me back and forth, not so much between narrative and prayer, but between the familiar and unfamiliar. Both the guidance of grandmothers and the manifold forms in which their teachings are shared, as well as the effects of forcibly estranged and severed lines of relation, language, and memory, were deeply familiar, as I too have been privileged to learn from the teachings of grandmothers and have been living with the losses of kinship and culture. Yet, perhaps because some things were so familiar, the poem’s oscillation between English and a language I entirely did not recognize caught me off guard. The bilingualism of *Blue Marrow* was not unfamiliar — I grew up in a polylingual home and read using Hebrew, Roman, and Cyrillic alphabet to varying

degrees. But during that first reading of *Blue Marrow* I realized this is perhaps the first time I am encountering a language that is indigenous to this land and its peoples. I later learned, consulting the bibliographic information in the book, that the language was Cree, but not quite Cree — as the words are transcribed in a Roman alphabet rather than Cree syllabics. I didn't understand a single word in the representations of Cree, yet what I did know — immediately, and at the very core of my being — is this living, and writing, and reading, always in translation, always in between. But something about the Cree transcription into a roman alphabet felt like I was being barred entrance, uninvited to certain registers or meanings in the text. As early as the preface, I felt like some gifts were not for me to know or hold.

That made me pause. Perhaps none of them are for me, perhaps I should not be privy to any of it, not the kinship or the trauma, neither the lives nor the loss. I retreated, concerned that I was intruding; worried that I was merely consuming another's sufferance. But, drawn to the intergenerational matrilineal kinships, which I sorely missed at the time, I kept on reading. As I reached the end of *Blue Marrow* and its closing statement — “All my relations. ahâw.” (99) — I realized I had failed at reading the book, miserably, because I still didn't know what the gifts were and how I was asked to care for them. Concerned about language code-switching as a “no entry” sign, as contouring the limits of my welcomed presence, I had glossed over the Cree parts, skipping directly to the English. In so doing, I continued reading only for the familiar. All of a sudden, my fear was different, I worried that it wasn't Halfe who was limiting my engagement, but rather that I was reading solely to consume knowledge and to relish in self-identification, holding on to the things that felt familiar while glossing over the parts that were not, searching for my place in the text, rather than care for its gift.

Despite what felt like an ethical response — actively reflecting about my engagement and responsibility to the text, and flagging to myself the limits of my knowledge, access and authority — what I had still failed to notice, and what McKegney highlights as the shared failure of all disengagement strategies, is that the focus remained all about me (59-60). The way I've narrated the above and following personal sections — crafted from excerpts of my research journals — deliberately demonstrates this process, as I started with qualifying the limits of my authority, moved to reflect on both my personal and reading experiences, and even retreated to silence. Though my reading was not passive, I wasn't driven by empathy, was indeed conscious of the inherent power dynamics given my institutional authority and intersectional privileges, and even cautious about my points of identification, I still failed to engage with *Blue Marrow* on Halfe's terms, failed to centre the teachings of *âcimowinis's* nôhkomak.

As I returned to the book, I struggled to engage with *Blue Marrow* on Halfe's terms. The prefacing section indeed guided me to reflect on nation-specific contexts, but I reverted to my own cultural and national knowledge. The opening of *Blue Marrow* invited me to think of my relation to this testimony and its claims as both interconnected and specific, but rather than be guided by its own specific contexts and find points of connections with them, I failed to recognize and acknowledge that I was centring my own national knowledge and privileging it as the guiding principle of my interpretation. Indeed, it allowed me to push aside over-identification and beyond affective recognition, but I was still unable to move past practices of disengagement that centre Western knowledge. The naming and listing practices were perhaps the things I recognized most immediately and profoundly in *Blue Marrow*, practices that are both intimate and formal, ones that concurrently memorialize loss and give life. They are practices that, as the granddaughter of people who survived the Holocaust, I recognize all too well; echoing the

command of *Zakhor* [זכור] — “ולעולם לא לשכוח” — to remember, and never forget. It is a practice that, as a Jewish Israeli woman, I recognize from commemoration ceremonies on יום הזיכרון, the state’s official Memorial Day for the Fallen Soldiers of Israel and Victims of Terrorism. Naming identifies those worthy of nation-wide ceremony and grief, names that are revered as “the silver platter/ Upon which the Jewish State was handed to [me],” of those who paid the ultimate price for our free and secure lives (Nathan Alterman “The Silver Platter”). It is a practice that keeps personal stories alive but memorializes them for the survival of the nation; it is a practice that re-casts grandparents who had full lives and also survived the Holocaust as ‘Holocaust survivors’, a practice that remakes the life stories of parents and siblings and friends who were killed in war or a bus bombing as ‘victims of terror’, and a practice that never names those who live with visible and invisible injuries, those who battle the post-trauma as victims and/or perpetrators, let alone acknowledges Palestinian lives lost and harmed.

This practice of remembering through naming keeps people’s stories alive in the public memory and the national imaginary, but it also contours the limits of whose lives are worthy of grief and commemoration, how, and for what purpose. In so doing it frames the value of life, suffering, and loss within our own communities and the communities we other. In other words, practices of naming and listing define “grievable lives.” Much like the war photography which Judith Butler discusses in *Frames of War*, naming and listing formulate “frames that allocate the recognizability of certain figures of the human,” and how these “are themselves linked with broader norms that determine what will and will not be a grievable life” (63-64). In hindsight, that is why *âcimowinis*’s prefacing naming practice compelled me back to *Blue Marrow*, because from the outset it framed the lives and loss of Adeline, Emma, Bella, and Sarah, of *âcimowinis*’s nôhkomak and the other women named in the prefacing section as grievable. *Âcimowinis* names

the lives who are often the ones glossed over by national practices of commemoration, the ones forcefully erased by the state.

But as I was reading *Blue Marrow* in 2014, I was unable to articulate this grievability, nor was I able to recognize that I was still entirely focused on my own personal and national knowledge; and, while I clearly recognized Halfe's opening statement of gifting, which for me indeed invoked a sense of relation and obligation, as I reached the end of the book, I was still unable to situate my relation or obligation to the text, or to *âcimowinis* and their relations. In hindsight, the practice that I initially enacted when reading *Blue Marrow* can be described as what Pedwell names "affective translation" — a method for ethical engagement with transnational literature that works to push readers beyond the manifold risks of empathy which reproduce colonial exclusionary hierarchies, a mode of continuous cultural negotiation that "involves multiple and ongoing processes of linguistic, cultural, temporal and affective negotiation, attunement and blurring which ... interweave 'the emotional' and 'the political' in ways that both include and exceed human subjects, offering a version of empathy as something other than emotional identification with another subject" (36, 42, 37-38).

Pedwell employs her mode of affective translation through literary analysis of themes and characters that model such affective negotiations within postcolonial or transnational novels. In my reading experience, it wasn't themes that drove my reading. Rather, Halfe's use of bilingual strategies and culturally grounded storytelling traditions demanded my active engagement and invited me to recognize the affective dimensions in the text as well as my responses to it, to recognize the familiar and the foreign in her poem, and to engage with the political efficacies of her testimony, without eliding its complexities and complicities, refusing a settled or neutralized interpretation of *Blue Marrow* through the prism of empathy. However, while Pedwell's

approach invited me to consider *Blue Marrow*'s situated contexts and to interweave the emotional and political registers in the text and in my reading experience, it also encouraged me to centre myself and navigate engagement through my own recognition. In other words, when practicing "affective translation," I was still unable to articulate "what it means to become ethically responsive" to her testimony (Butler 63-64). In this sense, despite my active and continuous engagement with *Blue Marrow*, my reading remained entrapped in the practices that McKegney defines as those of "ethical disengagement."

In a sense, McKegney's "practices of ethical disengagement" mirror several of the fallacies and risks embedded in Smith and Watson's "ethics of recognition." As I indicated in the previous chapter, an "ethics of recognition" allows readers to comfortably remain within their own cultural and intellectual contexts, offering recognition which merely results in affective response, focusing on the individual reader as a moral humanist subject, never extending to the systemic critique articulated in the text, the colonial dynamics embedded in the positioning of Western readers as testimony's addressee, or a consideration of readers' responsibility-for and complicity-in these structures. In effect, McKegney's critique echoes both Saidiya Hartman and Carolyn Pedwell's core concerns about expressions of Western readers' empathy as the ethical response to testimony. In allowing non-Indigenous readers to remain focused on their fears and their own cultural and intellectual contexts, though the "practices of ethical disengagement" are not affect-driven. In effect, the self-reflexive and hedging approaches serve to entrench power asymmetries, and hence fail to offer an ethical response to Indigenous literature (McKegney 63). Though they address different contexts and readerships — from Indigenous literatures to abolition narratives and the colonial politics of empathy, and from scholars in a particular field to general readers — McKegney, Hartman, and Pedwell demonstrate how the prevalent

interpretative practices posited as ethical modes of engagement never require readers to push beyond self-engagement, thus never challenging the colonial systems and structures that the texts and their authors seek to dismantle.

To push beyond the risks of disengagement and to ethically work with indigenous literatures, McKegney argues that scholars of Indigenous literatures should aim to promote decolonization and should consider their work (and responsibility) as that of an ally:

An ally is one who acknowledges the limits of her or his knowledge, but neither cowers beneath those limits nor uses them as a crutch. An ally recognizes the responsibility to gain knowledge about the cultures and communities whose artistic creations she or he analyzes before entering the critical fray and offering public interpretations. An ally privileges the work of Native scholars, writers, and community members—not as a political gesture, but as a sincere attempt to produce the most effective criticism—yet she or he does not accept their work uncritically; she or he recognizes that healthy skepticism and critical debate are signs of engagement and respect, not dismissal. Further, an ally appreciates that multilayered and ultimately valid understandings of cultures, communities, and histories can never emerge solely from book research and that the ongoing vitality of Indigenous communities must serve to augment and correct what Jana Sequoya calls ‘the alienated forms of archive material’ (458). Most importantly, the non-Native ally acts out of a sense of responsibility to Indigenous communities in general and most pointedly to those whose creative work is under analysis. (63-64)

As he outlines the ethical responsibilities of the literary scholar as an ally and how they can be fulfilled, the strategies McKegney presents assume varied levels of familiarity with the scholarly field and its ethical demands. However, this is where his approach is slightly limited — it is

directed primarily at scholars within the field, and necessitates, at the very least, a point of entry or access to both the scholarly and Indigenous communities. So how can a wider circle of readers — both scholarly and non — push beyond the fallacies of disengagement, to find entry points and begin to work towards becoming allies? Since reading and literary research are first and foremost text-focused, how can readers begin to make responsible relations through textual encounters? How can they find entry points to a text, to begin responsibly educating themselves beyond affect and self-identification, through a practice of engagement with the text itself?⁹

Granted, within the context of Indigenous literatures, the first response to this question would be to practice Indigenous literary nationalism. In autobiography studies, the answer is, in fact, rather similar. Caren Kaplan's work on transnational testimonies by non-Western women, for example, develops strategies of reading cultural production as a transnational and intertextual activity, while situating testimony vis-à-vis the authors' national intellectual traditions (122). Gillian Whitlock, on her part, formulates a comparative and engaged postcolonial approach that takes into consideration the historical and cultural contexts of colonial modernity alongside the dissemination of testimonial texts (*Postcolonial Life Narratives 2*). Scholars of life writing and Indigenous literary studies, then, centre the concept of relationality as both interconnected *and* specific, and its implication to notions of community and responsibility bear crucial lessons to considerations of readers' ethical engagement with testimony. Further, both fields directly indicate national knowledge systems as key to reading in and for relations — pushing beyond political and affective forms of recognition, and working towards allied decolonization. Indeed, focus on nation-based knowledge, methods, and aims as the driving framework of interpretation is key for ethical and relational engagement, but literature in general, and testimony in particular, do not merely address readers within a particular academic field. So how can wider audiences

(both scholarly and non) mobilize their reading practices to ethically engage with testimony? What strategies can readers use as text-based entry points that allow them to push beyond affective risks and modes of disengagement, to build nation-based knowledge, and respond to testimony's ethical claim — to honour this task in a meaningful way, and move from a consumption of testimony to bearing witness?

4.2 Reading through and for Relations

To move from reading to witnessing of testimonial literature requires critical engagement with the manifold registers of relationality that testimonies encompass — from those recorded in the text within and between communities, to the relationships between the producers and consumers of testimony, and the dynamics between the text and the narratives, histories, and material condition that frame it. Attentive to these modes of relationality, and the inherent power dynamics between non-Western testifiers and Western audiences, I suggest a turn to focus on testimony's paratexts as interconnected and specific entry-points to reading testimony, as a turn that can promote ethical reading practices and foster the transition from reading to witnessing for wide and diverse audiences. In other words, to foster reading of testimony through and for relations, I suggest that we turn our focus to testimony's paratexts, defined by Gérard Genette as “thresholds of interpretation” that comprise both the materiality of a work and the materials that surround a work (9). Genette's paratext is comprised of *peritext* (i.e. everything between the covers including title and author's name, preface, chapter titles, or epilogue) and *epitext* (namely, materials that are originally produced outside the book but in direct relation to it, such as interviews, letters, reviews) (8-9). Whether within or beyond the covers of a book, paratext thus serves to guide, or rather mediate, the consumption of a text in its own terms. And this is the key

point — critical attention to testimony’s paratexts draws attention to the text’s own situated contexts and terms, positioning them as guiding entry points of engagement and interpretation, in ways that are accessible to wide audiences and can be mobilized by readers to varied degrees.

In the context of life narratives, paratext has long served as a crucial component that mobilizes the truth value of autobiography, as peritextual elements are frequently used to authenticate a text, setting in motion what Philippe Lejeune defines as “the autobiographical pact” (10-11). Lejeune’s pact formulates an informal agreement between author, reader and text, which situates a life narrative as truthful based primarily on a host of peritextual elements — from the title and subtitle, to the author’s name, and cover images, at the very least (10-11). In other words, these peritextual thresholds are required to ground the three basic components of life narrative as truthful: its claim to telling a truth, the active role of readers in believing or rejecting this truth, and the responsibility bestowed upon writers and readers in sharing a truthful account (Lejeune 10-11). In effect, the crucial role of paratext for the consumption of life narrative informs Genette’s work, as he directly references Lejeune’s pact and its use of paratext as “a fringe of the printed text which in reality controls one's whole reading of the text” (Lejeune qtd. in Genette 1). However, this guiding fringe, Genette notes, is an edge rather than a hard boundary, a threshold “not only of transition but also of transaction: a privileged place of a pragmatics and a strategy, of an influence on the public, an influence that - whether well or poorly understood and achieved - is at the service of a better reception for the text and a more pertinent reading of it” (1). More than simply guiding the reader, paratextual fringes—comprised of porous material thresholds that invoke the truth value and readers’ responsibility to literary testimony—can thus foster an entry point to practices of ethical engagement that can guide audiences from reading to witnessing.

In my turn to paratext I am building on the work of scholars in the fields of Indigenous literatures and life writing, who have been attuned to material strategies, book production, book history, and other publicly-available sources that envelope literary testimony, as guiding practices of ethical engagement. Exploring Inuit autobiographical literature, settler scholar Keavy Martin's *Stories in a New Skin* warns against readings and interpretations of Indigenous life writing that perpetuate or benefit from a long tradition of ethnographic exploitative readings of Indigenous autobiography, and, in response, promotes practices of "[r]eading Indigenous autobiographies as literary texts," "aim[ing] to liberate Indigenous authors from ethnocentric assumptions regarding their choice of genre and from ethnographic readings that diminish readerly appreciation of their skill" (101, 104). However, with this move, Martin does not do away with the historical and political significance of these texts, but rather proposes to shift the power dynamic between the literary and the historical.

Guided by the Nunavut Social Development Council's (NSDC) Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) Task Force that was dedicated to "traditional knowledge and its role in developing policy," Martin argues that ethical engagement with Indigenous autobiography in general, and Inuit life writing in particular, requires reading these texts not simply through nation-specific historical and intellectual knowledge, but that those should be framed through the nation's specific literary traditions (98, 104). In this sense, Martin does not simply rely on Indigenous Literary Nationalism but rather promotes a more nuanced interconnected and specific practice of ethical engagement. When considering Martin's approach vis-à-vis testimonial accounts in general, and Indigenous testimony like *Blue Marrow* in particular, Martin's attention to the literary may be mistaken to disregard the justice claims of the testimonial act as secondary or exclusive to its nation-based literary form and tradition. However, as Martin reaches out to existing nation-based

sources of traditional knowledge that explore Inuit autobiographical forms she remains attentive to the ways these sources tie the traditions of story-telling and truth-telling. In particular, she turns to projects like the Nunavut Arctic College Interviewing Inuit Elders series, as sources that can and should guide interpretations of *inuusirmingnik unikkaat* (Inuit life stories). Such oral history projects, Martin argues, provide a means of understanding the nation's literary traditions, its pedagogical uses, and its function in preserving historical and cultural knowledge and identity (106, 109).

In this sense, Martin builds on existing nation-specific community-sourced and publicly-available materials as sites of consultation that mobilize Inuit literary traditions and knowledge to guide the ethical, political, and historical efficacies of these life stories. In so doing, she draws attention to the dynamics not only between knowledge, experience, and literature, but also between speakers and listeners:

While elders are more likely to refer to their life stories as direct representations of their own experience (rather than as carefully crafted works of aesthetic value) for the listeners or readers of these stories, the words spoken immediately fall under the category of something that one has 'heard about.' As a result, listeners become responsible for the form of the *unikkaat* [i.e. stories from *inuusiq*, "one's life; one's experience"], since the stories conveyed not only the elders' experience—they convey it in a good way. (113)

Consulting the Interviewing Inuit Elders series, Martin thus draws attention to the relational ethics of producing as well as consuming oral histories, noting that the heart of the matter is doing the work in "a good way," which in part means not simply subsuming Inuit literary traditions in Western frameworks of analysis, but rather interrogating the very premise of these frameworks in light of Inuit practices (113, 119).

In her attention to listeners and readers, Martin notes that cultural projects like the *Interviewing Inuit Elders* series are not necessarily written for a Southern, or Western audience. Rather, they are written for the preservation of the community's knowledge as they are continuously adapting to changing realities and developing new policies (119-120). In other words, to educate herself about the traditions and aesthetics of Inuit storytelling, to learn about Inuit life stories and how they mobilize particular forms of traditional knowledge and storytelling in order to share lessons on Inuit history, reality, and legacy, Martin turns to resources produced by the community, for the community. As a reader (and particularly as a Southern reader who perhaps was not part of the project's intended audience), Martin is attentive to the responsibilities bestowed on readers, to listen "for the form of the unikkaat" (113). She then takes on the responsibility to practice their teaching -- to listen in a good way to the lessons that students and elders have taken the effort to share in the ways they have, to be guided by the literary and historical lessons they share, through engagement with their storytelling form.

Concerned with the literary value, political urgency, and ethical efficacies of Indigenous autobiography, Cree-Métis scholar Deanna Reder calls for a reading practice that interlaces Indigenous intellectual traditions—including autobiographical forms—and considerations of a work's publication history, thus asserting "intellectual sovereignty" ("*Indigenous Autobiography in Canada*" 172) while also contending with the relational ethics of testimony. In this sense, both Reder and Martin suggest that readers' responsibilities for ethical engagement require attention to storytelling traditions, and doing so by exploring the materials that engulf Indigenous autobiographies to include the stories of these texts as an integral part of their interpretation both as cultural and historical objects. What I find particularly compelling about their approaches is that in their practices of Indigenous "intellectual sovereignty" as guiding the process of

interpretation, Reder and Martin each maintain focus on text-based methods and turn to existing work that writers, community historians, and elders have laboured to produce and circulate. In so doing, they develop relational protocols and practices of ethical engagement with Indigenous autobiographies that offer grounded entry points accessible to both scholarly and general readers (albeit potentially at different levels).

Their approaches are echoed in Gillian Whitlock's argument in *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit* (2007), that Western scholars must engage with non-Western autobiography by attending to material processes and book histories as integral aspects of interpretation which allow reading to be both interconnected and specific:

Textual critique needs to be immersed in a thoroughgoing sense of the material processes and ideological formations that surround the production, transmission and reception of autobiographical texts: these are the components of textual cultures. This criticism has a practical and materialist emphasis and it attends to synchronicities and intertextuality by taking the pulse of autobiography. (13-14)

Whitlock's call is attuned to the power dynamics embedded in autobiography's movement across local and global markets and readerships, drawing necessary attention to the external forces that frame and guide the stories of autobiographical texts. In a way, Whitlock's focus on external context is complimentary to the nation-specific knowledge highlighted by Reder and Martin, both perspectives are necessary to account for the ethical and political efficacies of testimonial transactions. However, where Martin and Reder nuance their practice further and formulate a relational approach is in their assertion of the power dynamics at play. For Reder and Martin, the specificity of nation-based traditions and histories must be the leading and guiding principles of

interpretation, and these should set the terms of interconnectedness (rather than the Western reader's affective or political recognition).

Critical attention to paratext, I argue, can account for these concerns, priorities, and potentialities. Paratext offers multiple yet situated thresholds of engagement with publicly available sources, while strategically guiding which contexts are the ones that set the terms of engagement both between the covers of the book and beyond it. But mostly, paratext provides tangible strategies to engage with the transactions of testimony, practices readily available to both general and scholarly readers across communities, experiences, and location, and pushing them beyond affective recognition, but resisting practices of ethical disengagement, and ensuring that testimony's nation-specific literary, historical, and intellectual contexts are the ones guiding the interpretative act.

When I first finished reading *Blue Marrow*, I discovered that immediately following the poem and acknowledgements, there is a Cree glossary nested within the final pages of the book. I didn't realize it at the time, but I was reading the second edition of *Blue Marrow*, published by Coteau Books in 2014 and edited by Tim Lilburn. Originally published by McClelland & Stewart in 1998, it is only the Coteau Books edition that features the glossary. The discovery of the glossary compelled me to change my practice as I kept returning to the book, to push beyond my self-identification and ethical recognition, to consider the ways Halfe (and Lilburn) strategically navigate readers experience of the book, the knowledge she is willing to share and the labour she requires in response.

Re-reading the poem while working through Halfe's use of Cree, and the ways the glossary re-directed me through the book, further drew me to reconsider my approach to other material strategies used in *Blue Marrow*. From the very outset of the book, as early as its cover,

Adeline, Emma, Bella, and Sarah face me, as a reader. By the beginning of the long poem, three images are featured — on the outer cover, inner cover, and immediately following the prefacing section. In fact, I am able to identify the prefacing section as such, only because it is separated from the rest of the poem with an image page. All three images are portraits. The book's cover image features the uncaptioned images of Halfe's four grandmothers, whose faces look over the prairie land, staring directly at the camera (and by extension the reader) as they are lit by the northern-lights in a montage created by Duncan Campbell. I learn the women are her grandmothers, because this is disclosed in the book's bibliographic information, but I don't know who is who. The inner images are caption-less, but I identify the women's faces from the cover, and assume that the men may be her grandfathers, while the young child in the third image may be Halfe herself. In my first readings, I kept thinking the images are looking at me, addressing me, putting responsibility on me. But as I kept returning to the book through the glossary, I began to reconsider this relation — understanding, that, while their images and the opening statement directly address me, Halfe is concurrently compelling me to see them on their own terms.

As I kept returning to the book, the material components — from the outer and inner covers, dedications, the prefacing section, the acknowledgements, and the Cree glossary in the back of the book — made me rethink on whose terms and for whose profit I am reading. In other words, they afforded me tangible ways to consider the responsiveness that Halfe invokes, and how I, as a reader, am invited to learn to be “ethically responsive.” As the prefacing section opens with *Ācimowinis*'s declarative opening statement — “Voice Dancer *pawâkan*, the Guardian of Dreams and Visions, prayer, brings you this gift” (1) — it situates the text as well as the act of gifting knowledge and story as declarations of relationality, a relationality that invokes

Dwayne Donald's "ethical relationality," a mode of engagement that "requires attentiveness to the responsibilities that come with a declaration of being in relation" ("Indigenous Métissage" 535).

Allowing peritext to guide me through *Blue Marrow*, the preface, the glossary, the images, and bilingual transcription and translation, paced my reading and re-reading of the book, guiding me through it and affording a constant reminder that the lives of Adeline, Emma, Bella, and Sarah were not laid bare for me to consume, nor was *âcimowinis*'s voice that of a witness bound by the Western juridical frameworks of testimonial literature. In other words, paratext, drew my attention to the ways Halfe set our terms of engagement, and provided me with tangible ways to honour her terms and learn to "[I]isten to the bones" (Halfe 19). And this is what matters here, entering the text through its peritextual materials can alert readers to the terms and contexts of engagement as set by the author, rather than their own frameworks and responses. In this way, *Blue Marrow*'s peritext framed my engagement with Halfe's testimony as a text in which personal stories are never just one's own, as sharing a communal experience that formulates embodied, spiritual, and intellectual traditions of knowledge, a text defined by relationality and responsibility.

These very terms are ones that Reder defines as the core of *Âcimisowin*, Cree autobiographical narratives. In her dissertation — entitled *Âcimisowin as Theoretical Practice: Autobiography as Indigenous Intellectual Tradition in Canada* — Reder argues that autobiographical Indigenous writing in Canada is grounded in "Indigenous intellectual traditions" of autobiographical storytelling, or *Âcimisowin*, which share personal experience and knowledge (ii, 19). Reder's knowledge of *Âcimisowin* is both experiential and intellectual, both family-practiced and nation-based. As a Cree scholar, in her theorization and praxis of

Âcimowin, Reder focuses on the ways it is informed by “*wahkotowin*, the Cree value of kinship or interrelatedness, as well as *kisteanemetowin*, respect between people,” as “Cree philosophy is based on the concept that everything is interconnected and *kisteanemetowin* is the recognition of these relationships” (*Âcimowin as Theoretical Practice* ii, 149).

As a reader of Halfe’s work I was unaware of either one of these values as central to Cree philosophy, nor was I familiar with Indigenous (or particularly Cree) autobiographical traditions. But *Blue Marrow*’s peritext introduced me to these very values — interrelatedness and respect — even if it did not name them or flag them as such. Further, Halfe’s use of images, prefacing section, and glossary serve to frame relationality, storytelling, and experience as part of a Cree epistemology rather than a Western autobiographical or ethnographic tradition. For example, as early as the preface the voice of Âcimowinis as the keeper of stories, interlaces their own experiences with those of their ancestors beyond the scope of human kinship alone, and their intellectual knowledge is inseparable from their spiritual which is both Christian and pagan. Âcimowinis sense of relationality to people, spirits, bones, lands, and stories is one that Reder would describe as Cree, because “according to Cree epistemology, I have responsibilities to those I am in relationship with” (*Âcimowin as Theoretical Practice* 133). Again, without naming them as Cree values, by naming Âcimowinis as “the keeper of stories” the preface frames the voice’s relationality through responsibility (Halfe 1). With the declaration of the book as a gift, and the latter call to “listen to the bones”, Halfe extends the notion of responsibility as the condition to relationality to her readers (19).

Through her use of peritext, then, Halfe shaped my relationship with the book, with âcimowinis’s relations, and my knowledge of Indigenous histories, traditions and realities on Turtle Island. In other words, the paratext of *Blue Marrow* provided me with tangible ways to

educate myself. But mostly, the paratext afforded me different ways into the text, strategies to shift from my own response or recognition to an approach focused on Halfe's terms, beginning a shift from passive reading to an active practice of bearing witness to the lives whose stories Halfe shares, the lives of *âcimowinis*'s nôhkomak — Adeline, Emma, Bella, and Sarah — to work through the difficulty of reading and the difficult knowledge shared, to work at translating language and cultural knowledge not as mining for factual information but rather in order to understand the truths they attest to, developing an interconnectedness and responsibility to them.

4.3 Implication and Relation

Interconnectedness and responsibility, as invoked by Donald and Reder demand a consideration of accountability, and hence of the place and role of readers' own contexts in ethical engagement with Indigenous, and I would argue testimonial, literature. To push beyond the cunning of affective and political recognition and to honour the role of readers as witnesses to testimony, the texts' nation-based literary, material, and historical contexts should guide both general and scholarly interpretations. However, as we seek to push readers beyond affect-based ethics of recognition or the self-centring practices that McKegney deems as "strategies of ethical disengagement," we should be wary of entirely eliminating the role and significance of the contexts that non-Indigenous audiences bring to their interpretations of testimonial texts. I draw attention to what audiences bring to the text because a shift from reading to witnessing is anchored in the interconnectedness and responsibility that define ethical relationality, and both require accountability — demanding audiences to contend with their own contexts and the ways those have been framing their relation and responsibility to testimony's rights claims and the lives it shares.

David Gaertner engages with the framing of witness responsibilities vis-à-vis the TRC. He promotes a shift from consumption of trauma to witnessing testimony by positing a move from the individual witness perspective to a collective, or shared model, that contends with both relationality and responsibility. Formulating an Indigenous-driven approach, Gaertner suggests that bearing witness to Indigenous trauma requires the practice of an Indigenous rather than Western model of witnessing. In “Aboriginal Principles of Witnessing” Gaertner pinpoints the dangers of mere recognition, because recognition marks a failing to honour the call to bear witness to testimony of rights abuses. In his analysis of the Canadian TRC’s use of an Aboriginal principle of witnessing within the framework of a Western political enterprise, Gaertner critiques the commission’s mere (and mis-) recognition of this principle and unveils the procedural protocols that render the gesture mute. In its recognition of principles of witnessing, Gaertner notes that the commission uses an umbrella term (Aboriginal) rather than direct reference to the specific nations whose epistemology and protocols it is invoking (Coast Salish and Interior Salish). The gesture itself is an act of misrecognition that introduces protocols without properly situating them, detached from any contextualization or critical engagement with their inclusion in the committee’s practice of Western legal protocols. But more than that, it is a move of erasing a nation’s agency and the traditions and histories that surround its protocols. This tokenistic gesture obscures the fact that the committee recognizes the role of witnesses, primarily honorary witnesses, but still puts survivors at risk, situating them under a scopophillic gaze with the onus of verification falling solely on them to prove abuse in order for redress to take place (138-139).

Gaertner differentiates the notion of witness in the Canadian legal system, limited to the scope of an eye witness whose responsibility is to relay or verify evidentiary information, and

the Coast Salish and Interior Salish notion of witnesses as keepers of history, the recipients of a testimony, a living archive, a repository of history (137-138). In its mere recognition of an “Aboriginal principle of witnessing” while de-facto imposing solely Western legal protocols of testifying, the Commission discounts the active witnessing that Coast Salish and Interior Salish protocols require. Though his analysis pertains to testimonies that are shared orally during TRC events, given Gaertner’s focus on the relationships between speakers (survivors) and their audience, as well as his engagement with the power dynamics and protocols at hand, I wish to extend his critique to creative testimonies that attest to rights abuse. For me, this is particularly evident when Gaertner’s introduces the critique that Cree-Métis writer and poet Samantha Nock offers in “Being a Witness.” In her essay, Nock suggest that while Western formulations of witnessing require listening, listening is passive because a listener can think and do other things while listening. The responsibilities bestowed on those called to witness, on the other hand, demand to be present not only physically (not only in listening), “but emotionally and spiritually, to hold this story in our hearts. [Because,] to witness someone's story... [means to carry] a part of that person with you now” (Rabble.com). Like Laub, Nock and Gaertner, address witnessing as an event in which both parties enter a binding relationship and share a responsibility. But unlike Laub, and grounded in Indigenous epistemologies, Nock and Gaertner’s notions of witnessing formulate an event that may be temporary but grounds relations that are not limited in time. Further, they suggest that the stakes of bearing witness to testimony lie in reciprocity that demands accountability and care rather than affect-based recognition.

These are the stakes that lie in taking up Halfe’s call to “listen to the bones,” to bear witness to the lives, relations, and loss of Adeline, Emma, Bella, and Sarah, and to enact the reciprocity encompassed in testimony. Writing about “Socially Responsible Criticism:

Aboriginal Literature, Ideology, and the Literary Canon” Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew contends with the contours of reciprocity in readings of Indigenous literatures, and argues that “[w]hen analyzing literary works, most scholars are very conscious that ideology is embedded in the text; what they often forget is the ideology that they bring to their reading” (34). This blind-spot, Episkenew argues, promotes both decontextualized interpretations in which “Aboriginal people become abstractions, metaphors that signify whatever the critic is able to prove they signify,” but more dangerously, they advance critiques that do not contend with “Aboriginal people as victims of colonization” (65, 56). Episkenew’s warnings, then, draw my attention to my responsibilities to *Blue Marrow*, beyond the covers of the book, and both prior-to and following the initial reading experience. While she does not discuss testimony, her claims demand a bilateral approach that can engage with the accountability which lies at the heart of reading as witnessing.

What Episkenew asks of me — as a non-Indigenous reader and literary scholar — is akin, in many ways, to the provocations that Reder and Martin invoke, as well as those that Anishinaabe scholar Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair offers in the essay “Responsible and Ethical Criticisms of Indigenous Literatures.” His arguments, Sinclair notes, are designed as starting points, that demand readers to “recognize the full humanity of Indigenous peoples,” to ground analysis in Indigenous-centred literary approaches, to recognize that literatures (and hence their critique) are responsible to real audiences and communities, and to work to “promote dialogic exchanges that include all interested parties, Indigenous or otherwise” (302-307). Both Episkenew and Sinclair draw attention to the specific literary, intellectual, and historic contexts invoked in *Blue Marrow* beyond the scope of suffering, to recognize the tradition, beauty, relations, and life that Halfe testifies to. But Episkenew demands more. The move she demands

requires all her readers to situate *Blue Marrow* in both its Cree and colonial contexts, while accounting for one's relation to them. As she invokes the reader's relationality, Episkenew notes that "non-Aboriginal scholars need to be cognizant of the authority that society accords their voice," an institutional and cultural authority, "which could easily overpower the voices of Aboriginal people" (56).

This is where the stakes in socially responsible criticism lie — putting the honours on the reader, who must contend with their complicity in both academic and colonial structures and the responsibilities they have to dismantling them — thus provoking accountability. In other words, Episkenew's reading practice pushes from an individual perspective to an institutional one, to account for both the political structures responsible for oppression, the cultural paradigms that sustain them, and the individual's place and role within them. Episkenew's approach is later echoed in the work of Stó:lō writer Lee Maracle, whose response to settlers asking "what can we do to help?" after listening to her reading or lecturing, requires them to take responsibility and act to change their own society rather than offer their benevolence to Indigenous communities, since "[r]acism, and colonialism, and patriarchy are Canadian social formations, not Indigenous ones" (49-50). As such, both Maracle and Episkenew provoke readers to turn the focus onto themselves not as individuals, but rather as parts of collectives and institutions. In this sense, Episkenew's provocation refuses the humanitarian approach which positions the Western reader as the centre of the narrative — as the powerful party who bestows recognition and empathy. Similarly, Maracle's model for settler-Indigenous relationality, grounded in Salish teachings which resist hierarchies, urges audiences to account for shared responsibilities: to "look at our responsibility to the lives we are dependent upon... [those of] all beings: earth, sky, and human" (Maracle 127-130). In so doing, their approaches refuse the entrenched power dynamics between

narrating testifier and reading witness. Rather than focus on readers' empathic recognition of Indigenous suffering, their approaches demand a recognition of colonial oppression by turning the lens onto the reader, requiring the recognition of their own positionality and complicity in oppressive structures.

In *Feeling Power* Megan Boler seems to propose a similar model for readings of testimony. She asks for engagement with the relationality of reading as acts of witnessing by accounting for the relations between individuals and communities, as well as ways to take into account the power structures embedded in the transactions of testimony. Boler thus proposes "a pedagogy of discomfort" as a mode of inquiry that "emphasizes 'collective witnessing' as opposed to individualized self-reflection" (176). She argues for a move away from self-reflection because "like passive empathy, [it] runs the risk of reducing historical complexities to an overly tidy package that ignores our mutual responsibility to one another" (177). As part of "a pedagogy of discomfort" Boler promotes "testimonial reading," an approach which requires readers "to turn the gaze equally upon our own historical moment and upon ourselves ... to examine how our modes of seeing have been shaped specifically by the dominant culture of the historical moment" (177, 179). In so doing, while testimonial reading does not deny empathic recognition, it ideally "inspires an empathetic response that motivates action: a 'historicized ethics' engaged across genres, that radically shifts our self-reflective understanding of power relations" (156-157).

As Boler argues for a reading method in which readers learn "to develop genealogies of one's positionalities and emotional resistances" that can allow them understand their relation to others vis-à-vis "personal and cultural histories and material conditions" (177-178), her move towards collective witnessing seems to resound the modes of accountability demanded by

Episkenew and Maracle. However, rather than grounding herself in the text's own contexts and her relationality to them, Boler's testimonial reader "must attend to herself as much as to the other—not in terms of 'fears for one's own vulnerabilities,' but rather in terms of the affective obstacles that prevent the reader's acute attention to the power relations guiding her response and judgements" (167). This is where Boler's approach is limited, as her reader must be accountable to her emotions rather than her complicity. To be able to shift to collective accountability, to reflect on the structures, Boler's reader needs the instructor-mediated class discussion. As her reader must be attuned to her emotions — rather than positionality or ideology — Boler's reader still centres herself as an individual, regarded as unable to reflect on collective structures without some external intervention or mediation, and yet again falling into the traps McKegney terms as "ethical disengagement."

But *Ácimowinis*'s prefacing section and the inclusion of the glossary at the back of *Blue Marrow* formulate mediating structures that envelope the poem and draw reading attention away from emotion or individuation and toward structures of cultural and language knowledge. In this way, Halfe's material and poetic strategies position readers as participants whose relationality with the text requires them to partake in the process of re-storying the prairie. Justice suggests that "[f]or many, our lives are a process of restoring—re-storying—the bonds that connect us and our families to those who came before and to those who come after, while grappling as honestly and fiercely as possible with the consequences of the ruptures in those relations" (*Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* 186). For Justice, the process of re-storying is one conducted by and for Indigenous peoples and relations. In *Blue Marrow*, Halfe extends the circle of relations, inviting non-Indigenous readers to partake in this process, not as equal, but rather as accountable partners. When contending with Indigenous-settler relations, Justice argues that:

We need to think of relationships as ongoing commitments, not one-time-only resolutions. If we're going to figure out how to live together, we need to accept that we're actually going to be doing so—and the terms of that relationship can't only be those that benefit settler society.... To do otherwise is to replicate the injustices and exclusions of the past, and that hasn't ever served any of us very well. (*Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* 159-160)

Halfe's prefacing section alerts readers' attention to relationships as ongoing commitments, as sharing the load of the bones, tracing relations across the prairies, and sharing their truths.

This is also where, for me, Halfe's poetic and material strategies have invoked my own cultural and nation-based experience with relations, ruptures, responsibilities, and storying. During my first reading, the preface triggered a nationalist mode of זכור, repetitive yet also defused, recognizing the lives and loss, without pausing to consider what Deborah Britzman defines as "difficult knowledge," without contending with the representation of social traumas or my encounters with them (Pitt and Britzman 755), and mostly, without centring and being guided by Cree knowledge. But the more my reading experience was guided by *Blue Marrow's* paratextual thresholds, the more I was able to recognize the modes of experience, knowledge, relationality and responsibility that Halfe attests to, and paradoxically, realize that they invoked my meaningful knowledge of זכור, not as the nationalist practice, but rather as a deeply intellectual and experiential mode of "ethical relationality" (Donald, "Indigenous Métissage" 535). This form of זכור is the one defined by Roger Simon in "The Paradoxical Practice of Zakhor: Memories of 'What Has Never Been My Fault or My Deed'" as the Jewish command and practice of זכור, as "an injunction and responsibility," as "both an imperative and an obligation: 'remember'" (10-11).

However, while *zakhor* invokes an individual command, Simon notes that it concurrently moves “remembrance beyond the boundaries of the singular corporeal body,” invoking a communal mode of relationality (9-10). As a practice of collective remembrance, then, *זכור* is “a practice that has brought previous generations into presence.... Thus *zakhor* implies both a deep commitment to attach oneself to a teaching that comes from without *and* the perpetual task of revitalizing this teaching so as to integrate it into the marrow of one’s life” (Simon 10-11, emphasis in original). The teaching and responsibility of the *זכור* command encompasses four promises: “to learn it, to teach it, to keep/ preserve it, and to do it” (11). Invoked through Halfe’s Cree values, imperatives, and practices of relationality and responsibility, *Blue Marrow* invited me to “listen to the bones” through Cree knowledge, while it also triggered my Jewish knowledge in a renewed way, to actively and repeatedly engage with *Blue Marrow* as to hold the stories of Sarah, Adeline, Emma, and Bella in my hands and in my heart. Building on Levinas’ reading of the Tractate Sotah (the *תלמוד*), Simon indicates that the mode of historical memory invoked in a practice of *זכור* requires “a decidedly socially inflected repetition, or better, a rearticulation of past events through which I incur a responsibility in which I am ‘thrown back toward what has never been my fault or my deed’” (9-10). A practice of *zakhor* — demanding learning, teaching, and preserving — thus formulates remembrance as “a practice that supports a learning from ‘the past’ that is a fresh cognizance or discovery that unsettles the very terms on which our understanding of ourselves and our world are based” (Simon 13).

Following Halfe’s Cree teachings as I labour to learn how to “listen to the bones”, resulted not in a return to my own cultural knowledge or context, not to a comparison or conflation of the two. Rather, learning to “listen to the bones” of *Blue Marrow* invited me to deepen my praxis of *zakhor*, contending with the ways in which my diasporic and national roots are intertwined with

the time and place of my own migratory routes. As an Israeli and a Sephardic Jewish woman (of Bulgarian and Iranian origins), I am both a diasporic subject born in what is regarded as the ancestral land of its people, and the citizen of a state that occupies that land and people of Palestine. Since my arrival to Edmonton in 2013 these roots have also shaped my experience as an international student who chose to come to treaty six territory, the territory of the Papaschase, and the homeland of the Métis nation. My presence and work in both lands is thus always marked by diasporic, settler, and immigrant experiences and identities, rooted in and routed through an interlaced and intricate web of belonging and dispossessions.

The mode of relationality invoked in *Blue Marrow's* Cree teachings—and for me, in the relationality and responsibility encompassed in *zakhor* — can foster accountable relations, or fulfill Justice's demand for an ongoing commitment (159-160), when readers partake in the process of re-storying, contending with both the presences and absences on the prairies, with both the voices and the ruptures — to use Justice's terms. Justice notes that absences, which he refers to as ruptures, “can be read... [as they] tell stories of their own” (*Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* 187). The absences that Justice refers to are the ruptures caused by lost lives and traditions, by forcibly severed relations. The stories they tell are complex and layered, their narratives refuse closures that can be settled; instead they chronicle “both Indigenous suffering and survivance, texts worthy of contemplation, understanding, even mourning, for they, too, reveal an aspect of our adaptive defiance too easily missed in simplistic notions of land loss and assimilation” (*Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* 195). These absences, or ruptures, are regarded by Simon as “traces” of lives and their stories, as remainders that should disrupt readers' present and presence, accounting for historical memories of others in ways that encompass the potential to “shift and disrupt the present, opening one to new ways of perceiving,

thinking, and acting” (13). Threading the voice of *Âcimowinis* with those of their grandmothers, framing *Blue Marrow* with the prefacing section and the closing glossary, constantly shifting between languages, and using frequent repetitions, Halfe mobilizes peritextual strategies to demand readers’ active engagement with literary, liturgical, and lingual structures. In so doing, Halfe refuses any straight forward or settled interpretation, denying a separation of the stories from the ruptures, the lives from their traces, for the bones are always both a presence and an absence.

For example, through the intertextual use of the Lord’s Prayer and the Hail Mary prayer in the prefacing segment, to repetition of the Catholic confessional “forgive me father, for I have sinned” throughout the poem, *Âcimowinis* offers a Cree revisioning of liturgical practices that re-story the prairies through the bones’ testimony. Using phrases like “*Forgive me father, I have sinned. I have hauled these/ tongues of Iskwêwak since 1492. I no longer know /which of me speaks*” (30, italics in original), *Âcimowinis* mobilizes the confessional to expose both religious and colonial structures, turning the lens away from the confessing individual as the culpable party, towards the oppressive structures they confess of. But only if the reader can do the work of translation they learn that *Iskwêwak*, does not refer to white people, or colonizers, or men, but rather means women (Halfe 104). It’s the work of glossary-led translation that shifts attention from what may be understood as abstract structures to wider circles of accountability, suggesting both the direct continuation of colonial structures as lived realities (from 1492 to present day) and the complicity of wider community circles (i.e. women alongside men and official representatives of the church or the state). Interlacing religious structures with historical presence in the prairies, threading confessions of shared trauma rather than individual moral digression, hailing ancestors and spiritual beings rather than a Christian god — Halfe draws attention to

structures of storytelling and governance, belief systems and institutions of knowledge and power. In so doing, Halfe shifts readers' attention away from individuals and their emotions towards communities and structures, mobilizing readers' focus to the cultural, historical, and political structures that she testifies-to, towards attention to their own relationship with her text and these structures. The material and intertextual strategies that Halfe uses, thus indicate to readers that what they recognize as familiar or foreign, as an element that shapes their own story-in or belonging-to the prairies, in effect does not merely acknowledge her rights claim or her act of re-storying, but also flags their own position and implication in the frameworks, relationalities, and realities she attests to, both within and beyond the covers of her book.

Michael Rothberg suggests that it is precisely the notion of implication that allows for the formation of accountable and socially responsible criticism. In *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators*, Rothberg differentiates implicated subjects, from the oft-cited complicit subject, noting that implication accounts for ongoing temporality of relations, or, in other words, claiming that while "we cannot be complicit in crimes that took place before our birth," "[w]e are implicated in the past" (14). Rothberg's implicated subject accounts for those who "occupy positions aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm," including ones that do "not always or necessarily correspond to our stereotypical images of privilege (the "straight white cis-gendered man," for instance)" (1, 22). Implication, Rothberg notes, can provide a relational methodology, that highlights responsibilities for large structures of violence and injustice as well as shift notions of accountability away from legal or emotional conventions of guilt towards collective historical and political responsibility (20). Implication, then, is precisely the mode of relationality invoked in *Blue Marrow*. But rather than simply invoke a theme, or model such relationality in the text, Halfe provokes implication

primarily through her use of paratext and intertext in *Blue Marrow*. Using these material strategies to set the terms of engagement, the modes of relationality and responsibility that the poem speaks to and invites, thus guide the transactions of Halfe's testimony.

4.4 Mediated Relations

Halfe is far from the only author to use paratext to strategically guide the transactions of her testimony. In *Something Fierce: Memoirs of a Revolutionary Daughter* Carmen Aguirre's use of paratext as a threshold of transition and transaction (Genette 1) strategically guides readers from the front matter of the book, through key moments in the narrative, and immediately following it. From the title onward, Aguirre positions the text as a testimonial account — narrating her coming of age as a member of an exiled Chilean family who have found refuge in Canada but return to live undercover in active resistance to Augusto Pinochet's regime, expressing an urgent social-justice claim despite the fall of the dictatorship, and invoking readers' role as accountable ethical subjects. Though she uses multiple and varied peritextual strategies, and while different elements emerge more clearly or directly at different stages in the memoir, throughout the book the key guiding principles persist. Namely, throughout *Something Fierce*, Aguirre uses paratext to ground the historical, ideological, material, and intellectual contexts that shape the terror and abuse she testifies to, the recognition of her testimonial claims, and the consumption of her narrative. In so doing, Aguirre mobilizes paratext to guide the transactions of her testimony, to model herself as a testifying-subject and a witness to others' testimony, and to invoke the role of Canadian readers and the Canadian nation-state as implicated parties in neo-colonial and neo-liberal structures of expansion and oppression under the guise of humanitarian and peacekeeping myths. She invokes these elements already at the

opening pages of the book, but they become most apparent and directly addressed in the self-reflexive Epilogue, Acknowledgements, and Afterword that immediately follow the narrative.

Like Halfe's testimony, Aguirre's memoir attests to colonial trajectories of dispossession and abuse, but as they each speak from different positionalities, their testimonies are often framed vis-à-vis varied rights discourses, thus invoking other modes of recognition and relations. The modes of ethical relationality that Halfe fosters in *Blue Marrow* are not necessarily different from the ones that Aguirre invites in *Something Fierce*, however, the ways in which their texts are framed in the cultural field direct readers to different models of relations and responsibilities. Attesting to the dispossession and abuse of Latin American dictatorships to a Western (and perhaps mostly Canadian) readership, *Something Fierce* would primarily be situated within a transnational framework vis-à-vis the discourse of human rights and Western liberal values. In *Human Rights and Narrated Lives*, Sidonie Smith and Kay Schaffer frame discussions of the production, circulation, and consumption of life stories as rights narratives through the prism of the Western discourse of human rights. They argue that the economies and discourses surrounding life narrative "[attempt] to manage the chaotic forces of affect, thereby directing political awareness into privatized emotional response" (Schaffer and Smith 232). Schaffer and Smith demonstrate that when interpreted within the framework of human-rights, the relationality of testimony is managed through affect-based transactions and remains contained as an individual or private "ethics of recognition," which sustain "asymmetries of power: the powerful bestow recognition onto the powerless" (Schaffer and Smith 232). In this sense, while life narratives that attest to rights violations and abuse are necessary grounds for social change (Schaffer and Smith 226), focusing on affect-driven movement of testimony in the cultural field is neither a sufficient nor a necessary mode of engagement, as it denies the very relationalities

that socially responsible criticism or ethical relationality invoke — namely, the responsibility and accountability that Donald, Reder, Justice, and Maracle call for, or the reciprocity that Whitlock does.

Nonetheless, many life writing scholars are not quick to dismiss the framework of human rights, particularly in the contexts of the Western classroom, aiming to demonstrate ways to develop accountable relationalities within this frame. In her introduction to *We Shall Bear Witness* Margareta Jolly contends with the very question of testimonies' effectiveness as “tools for enhancing human rights,” accounting for “the particular historical conditions and opportunities” that allow testimonial accounts to “gain political purchase” (5). To do so, Jolly calls for developing a “cultural politics that can push the limits of testimony even as it endorses testimony’s moral aims,” by considering testimony “as *a process told in stages*” (psychological, social, juridical, and literary),” and proposing a “life-narrative-based approach to thinking about human rights” primarily through thematic scopes (6, 11, 16, italics in original). In “Using Life Narrative to Explore Human Rights Themes in the Classroom” — the concluding chapter of *We Shall Bear Witness* — Jolly joins Meg Jensen, Brian Brivati, and Alexandra Schultheis Moore, to suggest strategies of thematic analysis for ethical engagement with rights narratives through two models from the human rights field – generations of rights, and Hilberg’s triangle (268). The former model “suggest[s] that there are three generations of human rights: a. civil and political rights (e.g. the right to vote), economic and social rights (e.g. the right to work), and cultural rights (e.g. the right to a language).” The latter model tends to the relationality emended in human rights events based on “Raoul Hilberg’s conceptualizing of the Holocaust as a triangle of victims, perpetrators, and bystanders,” extending his model to the life cycles of testimonial events (Brivati et. al. 269).

Building on these models, the authors posit a series of questions and classroom activities that explore a human-rights life-narrative from the vantage point of each triangle position, and accounting for the three generational perspectives. Brivati et. al. are certainly not the only ones attuned to the temporal urgency shaping rights testimony, yet because both the generational and triangle models are still caught up in the hierarchical modes of relationality set up in the discourse of human rights they impose artificial boundaries on duration and scope. The generational model does attend to the evolving nature of human rights events, accounting for varied stages in the cycle of a rights claim, but this very framing isolates claims to specific and contained historical events. Through the prism of human rights events or claims, Aguirre's threading of the Chilean resistance movement with the Zapatista or Palestinian struggles, would be compartmentalized as separate issues that are contained in specific temporal or local frames, rather than situate them on a continuous spectrum of colonial legacies and realities. In this same vein, testimonies attesting to residential schools, the Sixties Scoop, or missing and murdered Indigenous women and girls across the country would be compartmentalized as well. Within the scope of human-rights, then, *Blue Marrow's* invocation of the continuous, intergenerational, and inter-related effects of the varied modes of colonial dispossession and abuse, could neither be distilled to a single rights event or claim, nor contained in a specific time period, and thus perhaps not even amount to a testimonial account.

However, from content, to form, and claims, the testimonial acts of *Something Fierce* and *Blue Marrow* demand otherwise. They invite engagement that attends to relationalities — from Halfe's familial relations or Aguirre's resistance kinships, to the relations between communities and governments, and the relationships between cultural producers, texts, and readers. This latter relationship is also one that is somewhat obscured or placated in the human rights models.

Though Hilberg's triangle does contend with the role of bystanders during a human-rights event, the discussions formulated by Brivati et. al. — albeit attuned to the complex, layered, and changing contexts of testimonial accounts — rarely account for the roles and responsibilities of student-readers as bystanders who are ethically and politically implicated in the events by virtue of reading and/or positioning. Both Halfe and Aguirre utilize both paratext and intertexts not only to address but to strategically navigate the relationships between cultural producers, their text, and its readers, thus demanding relational models that exceed the affective ethics of recognition or the limited triangle positions invoked by human-rights frameworks, and invoking readers' implication in the transactions of their testimonies.

Like Halfe, Aguirre uses images and intertextual references to situate her testimony along the specific historical, intellectual, and literary traditions she'd like readers to use as their guide. Aguirre's strategic guiding precedes the opening scene, as the first page of the book dedicates it to Aguirre's son and stepfather, alongside an epigraph that cites Cristina Peri Rossi's *Estado de Exilo (State of Exile)* both in the Spanish original and the English translation. The poetic epigraph is an excerpt from Peri Rossi's autobiographical collection, written in the early years of her self-exile from Uruguay following the banning of her works in the aftermath of the country's military coup. While written between 1973 and 1974, Peri Rossi only published the collection in 2003, with the original Spanish-language accompanied with an English translation by political prisoner Marilyn Buck. When asked about the decision to publish the collection three decades after writing the poems, Peri Rossi admits that both personal and material reasons shaped her decision — publishing in 1970s Spain would not have passed the censorship of the Franco regime, publishers in Spanish-speaking countries would not risk sharing her work with the public, and she too felt that only when “Latin American dictatorships fell, and the pain

loosened... it was the moment to bring [her] poems to light. The pain in [her] poems then could be better tolerated” (qtd. in Trevisan). Featuring Peri Rossi’s poem alongside the dedications, Aguirre invokes the theme of exile while situating it in the particular political histories and truth-telling traditions that set-in-motion both her life in resistance and her autobiographical act.

But the memoir does not open with exile. Rather it opens with a return; as the political and literary framing is followed by a physical one. The second page of the book features the drawing of a map which physically situates the geographical parameters of the memoir, with south America at the centre of the frame, the USA looming from the North, and Canada entirely absent from the frame. This framing carries throughout the memoir, with three inner covers that divide the narrative into sections — “The Return Plan,” “The Fall,” and “The Decisive Year” — tracing the linear progression of events. While the title of the memoir — *Something Fierce* — can be regarded as describing both life in resistance and as invoking a strongly affective reading experience, the titles of the sections ground readers’ focus on Aguirre’s lived experiences. Coupled with personal photos that portray Aguirre during the respective periods, the cover pages invoke Carmen’s changing images as she comes of age in the Chilean resistance. The inner covers pause readers’ progression through the plot and narrative of the memoir, continuously formulating material thresholds that guide the consumption of her testimony, encouraging active engagement that highlights the situated contexts of the testimony and readers’ own relation to it.

This is most evident when considering the title of the first section. While the latter titles are solely thematic, the first one—setting the narrative in motion—is a historical reference. As General Augusto Pinochet overthrows Salvador Allende’s Chilean government in a military coup-d’etat in 1973, Aguirre’s parents are blacklisted and exiled for their socialist activity. From the memoir’s title onward, Aguirre refers to her family and herself as being members of the

resistance, but she never names the organization or movement to which they belong. “The Return Plan” title, is the first (and possibly only) reference that guides readers to the organization, inviting them to do active interpretative work that threads the personal and the political. The historical reference, even if missed or glossed over at first, becomes evident as Aguirre’s story does not commence with being exiled, but rather upon return to active resistance in Latin America in June 1979. The section cover itself does not provide any indication of the title invoking a historical reference. But when Aguirre situates the political context — noting that “1979 had been deemed The Year of the Return” and that she then understood what her family have been doing in Lima, grasping the danger they were in given the full swing of Operation Condor (49) — she directly invokes the section title, inviting readers to retrace their steps, research the wider political contexts and consider their own relation to the events.

“The Return Plan,” Aguirre states, was an international recruitment order to former and new members of the Chilean resistance, calling them to return to active resistance in cells reinstated in Chile and its neighbouring countries (Aguirre 49). What Aguirre doesn’t share, is that “The Return Plan” (or Operación Retorno in Spanish) was in fact the title of a clandestine operation of the MIR — the *Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria* (or, The Revolutionary Left Movement in English) — which reinstated armed resistance in Chile for the first time since the 1973 coup. Operación Retorno was the MIR’s “tactical initiative aimed at strengthening the party’s military structure through return to the country of political and military boards from exile. ... [I]t was intended to put into practice offensive armed actions, carrying out armed propaganda actions and striking strategic military objectives of the dictatorship” (Donoso 346). The section’s title thus allows Aguirre to walk the line between situating the specific socio-historical contexts and protecting the safety of the community whose story is shared in the book,

while concurrently actively engaging her readers in the threading of the highly situated and intricate socio-political and historical tapestry she weaves in her testimony. Coupled with the references to Operation Condor, “The Return Plan” title invites readers to mobilize a peritext-guided reading of the memoir, a practice that invokes socially responsible criticism, or a practice of *zakhor* — finding culturally grounded points of entry, asking questions, seeking historically driven information, applying it to their reading of the text, and preserving what they have learned.

While Aguirre references the Return Plan only twice during the memoir, she repeatedly refers to Operation Condor, keeping to rather general terms: “set up by Pinochet and the surrounding dictatorships to catch revolutionaries operating anywhere in South Americas. Operation Condor was an illegal, top secret affair, officially denied by the governments in question, but foreigners in Peru were disappearing all the time” (22). Aguirre’s statement sums the gist of what Barbara Zanchetta defines as “a transnational network of organized state sponsored terrorism that targeted Communist ‘subversion’ [and] was operational in the second half of the 1970s [primarily in] Chile, Argentina, Uruguay, Bolivia, Paraguay, and Brazil” (1084). The operation, as Patrice McSherry argues in *Predatory States: Operation Condor and Covert War in Latin America* “also enjoyed organizational, intelligence, financial, and technological sustenance from the United States, acting as a secret partner and sponsor” (3). It was a clandestine strategic component of the USA’s “politicized doctrine of internal war and counterrevolution that targeted the enemy within, [and] gave the militaries a messianic mission: to remake their states and societies and eliminate ‘subversion’... Condor was a secret strike force of the military regimes, and it signified an unprecedented level of coordinated repression in Latin America” (McSherry 1-3). “The Return Plan” title thus guides readers to explore the reference,

which, when situated vis-a-vis Operation Condor, formulates an invitation to consider their implication to both contexts — the North American, and the South American ones — invoking the potential for socially responsible consumption and criticism, contending with the relationality and responsibility encompassed in the memoir's rights claims.

Aguirre's use of both visual and verbal peritext invites readers' active and critical engagement on multiple registers, both as a practice of tracing information and as a mode of sequential reading. Aguirre invokes peritext not only as initial entry points but rather as a pacing strategy that guides readers throughout the memoir. Pausing and pacing readers' engagement with the memoir, the prefacing materials to *Something Fierce* formulate a mode of sequential reading. In "Covering Pain: Pain Memoirs and Sequential Reading as an Ethical Practice" Leigh Gilmore borrows the prevalent mode of reading enacted in graphic literary genres and applies it to the visual components of memoirs' peritext, as means of addressing the ethics of reading pain memoirs. Building on Hillary Chute's contention that comics bear witness to traumatic events, Gilmore suggests that when audiences are required "to read across the verbal and visual" they are asked to attend to the tensions between the peritext and the text. This meaning-making work is produced in the gap between the verbal and the visual (known as the gutter, in comics), "a site of effort and unpredictability" where they are invited to formulate an ethical response that resists universalizing and nuances the understanding of a testimony's truth (Gilmore 106-107). As she applies the concept of the gutter to the space between cover images and the verbal narrative in pain memoir, Gilmore notes that while the gutter does not promise the production of an ethical response, its importance is in fostering participation, an active mode of reading as an "ethically charged encounter with the not-me: not through the swift action of closure, but via critical attention gained by taking note of the peritexts' claims upon us" (107, 115). I would argue, then,

that in a text like *Something Fierce* where the visual is paired with the verbal—for example, through the inner covers with images alongside titles— Gilmore’s claims can be extended, as the tensions between the peritext and the text are strategically positioned not only to pace reading, but also to properly situate it within particular historical and political frames.

In this sense, despite the *Something Fierce* title invoking an affective mode of reading, Aguirre mobilizes peritext beyond mere affective identification or voyeuristic fascination with Carmen’s coming-of-age as a member of the resistance, providing readers with material entry points that invite their active (and potentially critical) engagement with her testimony through situated literary, historical, and ideological traditions. Kate Douglas and Tully Barnett address the role of mediating actors and materials in the framing of readers ethical engagement with testimony. They interrogate the ethical responsibilities bestowed on both students and educators when engaging with testimonial accounts, shifting their roles from readers to witnesses (59). In “Teaching Traumatic Life Narratives: Affect, Witnessing, and Ethics,” Douglas and Barnett approach the role of student-readers as witnesses to trauma testimony, and discuss the ethics of engaging with reading as a practice of witnessing within the literature classroom setting (46). Within the classroom environment, Douglas and Barnett argue for the instructor’s scaffolding of both the testimonial and theoretical materials, presenting reading as an ethical encounter or as one that requires an ethical framework (57). For Douglas and Barnett, a pedagogy attuned to “the ethics of reading” (a term they note was coined by J. Hillis Miller in the 1980s) locates the student actively within the text, as a player in the construction of meaning and interpretation rather than as a passive bystander or observer of someone else’s material. This active engagement, Douglass and Barnett propose, can be grounded not in an ethics of affective recognition, but rather in a mode of critical reading anchored in theoretical perspectives which

guide the students' analysis and discussion, allowing students "to find new ways 'in' to the text" (48-49, 57).

This approach seems to suggest a similar direction to the ones proposed by Reder and Martin, and the entry-points situated by Aguirre and Halfe. Douglass and Barnett's approach is compelling, as it aims to attune students to the ways "they might locate and respond to the ethical, social, and political questions posed by a text" (57). However, it has two components, which merit further critical attention and unpacking. First, rather than address the strategies used within the text to mediate its consumption and allow testimony's situated contexts to guide the theoretical framework, Douglas and Barnett privilege the role of the instructor as a moralizing subject. They also posit trauma and life writing theory as the primary prisms, with the former formulating "a critical lens through which to read a text: to draw on the concept of testimony and methods such as witnessing and ethical response in their reading," and the latter contending with the relationality, responsibility, and vulnerability of bearing witness (as secondary witnesses to the narrated events, and to the narrator's process of witnessing itself) (47, 56). However, privileging the prisms of trauma theory or life writing — as opposed to considering them as guided through nation-based literary and intellectual traditions — would subsume an author's use of language, storytelling, spiritual, and intellectual traditions under the frameworks of primarily Western theoretical fields. In so doing, acts of interpreting *Blue Marrow*, for example, would position Cree epistemologies and identity only as other to Western (primarily psychoanalytic) models, risking misrepresentation of Halfe's claims, while concurrently othering Cree knowledge and experiences even in its own textual and geographic space. For example, through the prism of trauma studies, the dream-like scenes in *Blue Marrow* would be probably

interpreted as unconscious manifestations or fragmented representation of traumatic events, rather than as the ceremony and teachings which Halfe regards them to be (“Afterword” 82, 85).

However, the privileging of Western perspectives is also coupled with their use of Derek Attridge’s idea of “readerly hospitality” (58). Douglas and Barnett define “readerly hospitality” as an approach that “consider[s] the text as a ‘real-world’ object with a cultural resonance, which includes ... feel[ing] a sense of hospitality in relation to the ideas and positions in the texts ... [t]o conceive of the reader as a host with a role to play to a guest (the book and its subject positions) highlight[ing] the notion of the reader who is not free from responsibilities in the act of reading” (58-9). Indeed, an ethics of reading testimony necessitates an approach that grounds readers’ analysis in the modes of relationality encompassed in witnessing and their responsibilities as readers to the text and its communities. However, the power structures embedded in hospitality counter the dynamics necessary to shift from reading to witnessing. To be hospitable, readers are required to perform a generous and welcoming attitude towards a text, even if the text pushes at their cultural or political boundaries. To be hospitable also implies that readers are hosts to a testimony that functions as a “guest” in their lives. This is indeed productive as it sets a clear boundary between reader and text, one that flags the risk of empathy-driven identification. However, it concurrently encompasses its own risks based on the temporality and mastery positions that underlie this approach.

To be a host, implies that one owns (or at least claims ownership to) the space they choose (or deny) to share with others. To be a guest, means that one is given to the benevolence of a host. In this sense, “readerly hospitality,” while well intentioned, elides the positionalities of readers who do not inhabit subject positions that afford them ownership. For example, students in the class may belong to a community whose trauma and suffering is shared in the testimony,

or who simply are not afforded the cultural and political capital to take on the ownership position of a host, for they themselves are regarded as guests. In so doing, “readerly hospitality” risks replicating the power dynamics embedded in the politics of recognition. For instance, “hospitality” could mean that a benevolent host can afford the guest a recognition of their suffering, but the host is not required—or prepared—to do anything else. Reading either *Something Fierce* or *Blue Marrow* primarily through “readerly hospitality” risks excluding both Aguirre and Halfe from the Canadian imaginary and community with whom their texts engage, while concurrently ignoring Chilean or Cree students in particular (and potentially refugee, Latin American or Indigenous students in general) for whom the text may be a lived experience even within a Eurocentric education institution.

But mostly, the notion of hospitality keeps it personal; namely, the individual reader is hospitable in making space and recognizing the suffering and claim of the individual speaker and text. In so doing, “readerly hospitality” may unintentionally steer readers away from critical engagement with sovereign and institutional frameworks of dispossession and abuse and merely focus on affective response. The individuation of hospitality, alongside the set power dynamic of host and guest, further invokes a temporal issue. Positioning readers as hosts implies a limited temporality of adjustment to the guest’s presence, rather than contending with how space is divided and shared. It relies on an assumption that the subject of the testimony is either situated elsewhere or at a different time period, or rather, that they require temporary acknowledgement and relief, thus never requiring readers to contend with their complicity-in or benefit-from ongoing discriminatory structures. This is perhaps most evident in Douglas and Barnett’s closing statement, defining reading as “an act with a beginning and an end. The reader, like the author, can walk away at the end of the book” (60).

Douglas and Barnett are not the only ones who highlight the temporality of testimonial relations. In “Bearing Witness: or, the Vicissitudes of Listening,” Laub reflects on the role of the witness to trauma testimony, as a brief contract during which the listener is present to support the testifier, as if saying: “I’ll be with you all the way, as much as I can. I want to go wherever you go, and I’ll hold and protect you along this journey. Then, at the end of the journey, I shall leave you” (70). For Laub, the witness to testimony is either the psychoanalytic therapist or the interviewer recording the testimony (who Laub regards as a historical witness), but in both cases the relationship is limited because Laub’s listener is there to support the testifier in processing their trauma in a professional, yet in-person, capacity (69-71). Laub indeed indicates that bearing witness to a testifier’s trauma “leaves no hiding place intact,” encompassing long-term effects on the listening witness. However, the situation of Laub’s witness demands that the relationality — as transformative as it may be to both speaker and listener — be limited in order to keep them both safe from the deeply seeded effects of trauma (72-73). But this is not the case of audiences who bear witness to recorded or published testimony. Readers can be regarded as historical witnesses to trauma testimony, but they do not engage with survivors or their testimony directly, nor do they enter the relationship to support the survivor in processing their trauma. The testimony they encounter is one already remediated by the interviewer/ editor/ publisher, and they are not called to the work in order to support the survivor’s processing of trauma. Rather, readers are invited to bear witness to a consciously produced version of the processing, and more importantly, to the urgent socio-political claim it articulates.

4.5 Moving from Reading to Witnessing

To return to *Something Fierce*, this is precisely the knowledge that Aguirre mobilizes — the knowledge that readers engage with a consciously produced version of her testimony, rather than her experience of processing the trauma. In response, Aguirre mediates her testimony and guides its transactions, encourages readers’ movement from reading to witnessing by switching focus from individual and affect-based relationships to systemic and structural aspects of relationality by providing multiple yet situated points of entry and engagement with the story of the Chilean resistance, its failed revolution, and the right to fight for freedom from oppression. For me, as a reader, Aguirre’s mediation of her testimony through peritext and intertext invoked, yet again, a practice of *zakhor* as a mode of ethical relationality, drawing towards a process of learning, questioning, expanding, teaching, and preserving historical memory as an ongoing commitment. To fully honour the command of זָכוֹר, Simon argues, readers must engage with others’ traumatic memories as “a relation ... which claims, calls, commands, interrupts, or troubles the subject” otherwise, much like what Justice claims, “there would be no future, no hope” (20-21). In this sense, to fulfil the responsibility of reading as witnessing, readers must drive testimony’s claim home (Simon 20).

In *Something Fierce*, the potential for readers’ consideration of their implication emerges most clearly in the closing paratextual components of the book. To drive Aguirre’s rights claims home to Canada, so to speak, to make the struggles of others at other times and other places relevant to the here and now, Aguirre features several paratextual elements at the closing of the memoir — extending her experiences beyond her years in resistance. Following the memoir’s commercial success in the aftermath of *Canada Reads* 2012, *Something Fierce* was picked up by the Canadian branch of Penguin Random House, who printed a second edition that features a

new Afterword dated December 2013. Originally published by independent Canadian publishers Douglas and McIntyre in 2011, the first edition of *Something Fierce* featured a rich array of peritextual materials — from the prefacing epigraph, dedications, and map, to personal photos of Aguirre on outer and inner covers, to an extended Acknowledgements section and an Epilogue immediately following the narrative. The second edition also includes the addition of an Afterword (between the Epilogue and the Acknowledgements), which might seem insignificant at first. But when consulted, it serves to reframe the text and its public significance, shifting Aguirre’s memoir from her personal narrative to a communal one, and introducing readers as integral to her testimony and its story. With this addition, Aguirre also introduces the *Canada Reads* controversy as part of her memoir’s story, making its reception an inseparable part of her testimony. It is these paratextual components — the Epilogue, Afterword, and Acknowledgements — that directly address the stakes of responsibility and accountability to the consumption of Aguirre’s testimony.

The memoir’s opening scene takes place at the LAX terminal in 1979 when 11-year-old Carmen, en-route to Latin America with her mother and younger sister, learns that they are not going on holiday, but rather, that her mother is about to re-join the Chilean resistance and the girls are coming with her (5). Carmen’s story ends approximately a decade later at a Café in Buenos Aires, where she learns that the Chilean resistance has been dissolved and that she — now a full-pledged resistance member on her own right — must leave Argentina to avoid being caught (Aguirre 266). As Carmen steps outside the Café, the memoir ends and her Epilogue begins. Dated February 2010 — exactly twenty-one years after leaving Argentina — the opening remark of situates Carmen back in Buenos Aires, as the city “fiercely grabbed [her] by the heart,” learning that “the Chilean resistance has mythological status here” (Aguirre 267). As she

narrates her temporary return to Argentina, the opening of her Epilogue formulates a counter-part to the memoir's closing scene, while concurrently mirroring the opening section entitled "The Return Plan." In the Epilogue, Aguirre names political struggles and movements in Mexico, Argentina, Bolivia, and Chile alongside her personal life in the two decades that passed since the disillusion of the Chilean resistance. She admits that when landing in Vancouver in March 1990 she left it all behind, and "went in pursuit of another dream," the theatre (268). As the Epilogue progresses, much like the memoir itself, Aguirre shifts from the private or personal, to the collective and political. As Carmen leaves the Buenos Aires café in February 1990, she is not the only one who is defeated — the Chilean resistance has been dissolved (264). But two decades later, the failed resistance has become a mythological force fueling current movements (267), and by the end of the Epilogue Aguirre situates her memoir as a rally cry for these movements, as a testimonial record of the, now mythological, movement. In the span of eight pages, Aguirre moves from defeat to inspiring mythology, from personal experience to historical memorializing, and from truth-telling to a call for action, reciting Che Guevara's "The struggle continues. Hasta la victoria siempre. Until the final victory, always" (274).

The Epilogue thus makes apparent the legacies and resonances of the Chilean resistance — making it urgent and relevant right now (even if it was dismantled three decades ago). But it is the Afterword and Acknowledgements that bring the story here — to Canada. The original edition of *Something Fierce* featured the Acknowledgements following the Epilogue. She begins by naming fellow writers, editors, writing retreats/ programs, and friends who have supported the development of the manuscript, as well as acknowledge the support of the Canada Council for the Arts and the British Columbia Arts Council for their writing grants (285-6). In so doing, Aguirre narrates Canada as her creative home; no longer a refuge, or cover-story, or state of

exile, but rather a creative and activist community that allows her to publicly share the truth of another community, for it is “a story that must not die with the people who lived it,” people she thanks for the permission and encouragement to share their stories as part of her own (287). In the Acknowledgements, Aguirre unveils that she recently learned her grandmother (a pivotal figure in Carmen’s coming-of-age story, often portrayed as foil to her revolutionary mother) was a messenger for the resistance, that she has asked her father not to read the book, and that her siblings have agreed to be featured in the memoir (286-7). Aguirre also acknowledges that she was asked by an elder of the resistance to promise she will tell the story, that the book reveals her mother’s secrets (rather than her own), and stresses her step-father’s (Bob Everton) exemplary internationalist life as her inspirational model (286-7). Noting the involvement of other artists, former members of the resistance, and her immediate family, Aguirre positions herself as both a testifying-subject and a secondary witness who carries responsibility for the testimony of others, as both a member of the Chilean resistance and of Canada’s literary community. She interlaces the locations, temporalities, and communities, modeling for readers the urgency and efficacy of her rights’ claim and her call to action, ending in solidarity with those who still fight worldwide—from Gaza, to Mexico, India, and Bolivia (287).

In both editions, the Epilogue and Acknowledgements position the *Memoirs of a Revolutionary Daughter*, not as the personal story of a daughter of a revolutionary, but rather as narrating the story of the revolution through the voice of one of its daughters. When these sections are considered alongside the memoir’s subtitle — purporting Aguirre’s “stand in solidarity” with resistance movements across the world — the peritext of *Something Fierce* fulfills Marlene Kadar and Jean Perreault’s idea of “writing-as-resistance.” In their introduction to *Tracing the Autobiographical*, Kadar and Perreault present an approach to scholarly

interpretations of autobiographical acts through consideration of “the context of the life being written,” a context that “requires the reader to listen for the memory and the ethics of the text” (3-5). Within such modes of autobiographical expression and interpretation, Kadar and Perreault note, texts formulate “a complex of literary and political practices, in which the explicit presence of the subjected person exposes and challenges oppression, trauma, and cultural norms” (5). They invoke an approach of socially responsible literary criticism, grounded in attention to the relationalities of authors and readers to the lives attested to. “Writing-as-resistance,” then, addresses both a mode of production and a strategy of consumption which frame the socio-political efficacies of the autobiographical act. Kadar and Perreault suggest *testimonio* as a particular autobiographical mode that requires a socially responsible reading approach.

Testimonio, as defined by John Beverley, is a mode of testimony developed in close relation to movements of national liberation, especially in Latin America of the 1960-80s (93-94). Where *testimonio* becomes relevant for Kadar and Perreault— and where it becomes most pertinent for a socially responsible reading of *Something Fierce* — is that it narrates a communal voice whose axis of difference isn’t the private and public, or singular vs. plural, as much as it moves along a community of “we” (i.e. revolutionaries) in struggle against “them” (i.e. global capitalist colonial governments) (4-5).

In *Américanas, Autocracy, and Autobiographical Innovation: Overwriting the Dictator* Lisa Ortiz-Vilarelle suggest that while *testimonio* provides a productive framework, women’s writing in or about Latin American dictatorships requires attention to gendered formations of oppression and the nation-specific modes of autobiographical resistance reflected in women’s writing as a mode of common struggle against oppression (1). When she discusses Chilean women’s autobiographies and memoirs (in particular the writings of Isabel Allende), Ortiz-

Vilarelle notes that under Pinochet's regime "women were indoctrinated as public mothers... who would ensure that each family functioned as a perfect microcosm of the nation" (10). This indoctrination was applied through manuals and systems of self-surveillance instituted by The National Secretariat for Women, and all other forms of womanhood were criminalized by the police-state and brutally punished (Ortiz-Vilarelle 129-132). In this sense, the Chilean form of "impossible autobiography" that Ortiz-Vilarelle presents, corresponds with Kadar and Perreault's theorization of "writing-as-resistance," asserting a communal voice that speaks of "us" (Chilean women) vs. "them" (Pinochet's dictatorship and its policed models of womanhood). The tradition of Chilean women's "writing-as-resistance," then, subverts these imposed roles, narrating "women as self-aware, resisting subjects," formulating a counter manual to "asceticism espoused by the NSW manual" (Ortiz-Vilarelle 119). This resisting-subject is the one that Aguirre narrates throughout her memoir, but more importantly it is this subject she makes evident and urgent in the peritext. Positioning her narrative as a call to solidarity in the Epilogue, and admitting the book tells her mother's secrets and shares her grandmother's aid in the Acknowledgement, allow Aguirre to position her memoir as a Chilean "writing-as-resistance," as a revolutionary act that makes the personal and private into a political and collective account, deeply rooted in a tradition of Chilean revolutionary women.

The act of "writing-as-resistance" embedded in literary and political traditions, asserting agency, subverting power structures, and sharing a communal experience of civic resistance vs. oppressive governments, shift tenor with the inclusion of an Afterword. Nestled between the Epilogue and Acknowledgements in the second edition, the Afterword brings the work of solidarity and continued resistance to Canada and Canadians. While the Afterword does not change the collective voice or us vs. them logic, it does shift the scope of inclusion in each

category, narrating Aguirre's experience of writing the book while fearing the act of truth telling, accompanied by the story of its reception. As she shares her choice of genres, Aguirre openly states the modes of relationality she wanted to invoke in readers, and her desire to "demystify ["revolutionary,"] a term saved for untouchable idols" as she was "compelled to write about ordinary people who made extraordinary choices" (276). But it is only when she moves to discuss the circulation and reception of the memoir, in featuring the epitext between the covers of the book, that the work of *zakhor* really comes to the foreground. Aguirre admits that despite positive reception, the book did not sell (flatlining at 1500 copies), until *Canada Reads* picked it up for its 2012 season (277). As she narrates the events surrounding *Something Fierce* in *Canada Reads* 2012, Aguirre shares the effects of her truth-telling act as well as the responses to its urgent rights claims. The first response she shares is that of Goldwater, who, on the live radio streaming on the first day of debates accused Aguirre of being "a terrorist who should have never been allowed into Canada" (278). But rather than focus on Goldwater's response, Aguirre shares her own:

I went numb. Cold sweat covered my body. The years of paranoia I had felt while I was writing came back to haunt me: my greatest fear had been realized, only the accusation hadn't come from the Canadian or Chilean governments. It had come from a right-wing celebrity lawyer, and the insult was hurled on the public broadcasting network. My mind raced. I thought of repercussions, of the price to pay for telling this story at this particular time in North America, when the word 'terrorist' is not an abstraction but carries the wright of two towers toppling; a label that is not easily erased, that can and does destroy lives. (278)

Aguirre's response to Goldwater stresses the high stakes of truth telling acts, and contours the limits civil public debate about citizenship, inclusion, and Canada's multicultural myth. As Fuller and Rak suggest in "'True Stories,' Real Lives," Goldwater's remarks, and panelists responses to them, mobilize reading experiences not to focus on the stories, but rather what the books tell readers about "what it means to *be* a Canadian citizen" (33). As Aguirre narrates her own reaction to Goldwater's accusation, as well as the very-real public backlash (resulting in a CBC-assigned security detail escorting Aguirre for the week of the debates), she suggests that the stakes of truth telling thus lie not with governments but with readers and their engagement with memoir's claims (278-280).

Those readers were primarily Canadians. As Aguirre admits, thanks to the heated debates on *Canada Reads* the memoir became a "#1 national bestseller. Mainstream Canada read it in droves, which is all [she] had ever wanted: for this secret story, which is the story of many people who call this country home, to enter public consciousness" (280). Sharing the book's journey since the memoir won *Canada Reads*, Aguirre introduces readers as part of the community of her testimony, and as carrying forth its truth. In a sense, the Afterword draws attention to readers' role not merely as "the most important character in a book" (276), but more so, to their crucial role in mobilizing testimony; for as Whitlock points out, "in the absence of its witness testimony fails; the sound of one hand clapping" (*Postcolonial Life Narratives* 68). In this section, Aguirre suggests that while the sound of two hands clapping is the aim of a testifying subject, the silence of one hand clapping is not because they were unable to construe the right witness in their text. In other words, the Afterword highlights that it is not the testifier's responsibility to be heard, but rather, the responsibility of readers — including the agents of circulation and consumption — to learn to listen.

Telling the story of the memoir's circulation and reception through the events surrounding *Canada Reads*, Aguirre introduces the ways that memoir is mobilized as a "soft weapon." In *Soft Weapons: Autobiography in Transit*, Gillian Whitlock notes that autobiographical accounts

can personalize and humanize categories of people whose experiences are frequently unseen and unheard... to make powerful interventions in debates about social justice, sovereignty, and human rights. Life narrative can do these things. But it is a 'soft' weapon because it is easily co-opted into propaganda. In modern democratic societies propaganda is frequently not the violent and coercive imposition of ideas but a careful manipulation of opinion and emotion in the public sphere and a management of information in the engineering of consent. Life narrative can be complicit in these processes (3).

The Afterword attests to the intricate routes that tread the line between weaponizing testimony for change or propaganda — to the ways that readers learn and listen to testimony. Alongside Goldwater's remarks and the events on *Canada Reads*, Aguirre tells of sharing her story with clubs of "CEOs of mining companies with large holdings all over Latin America," and readers in prisons, or Indigenous activists in Chief Teresa Spence's camp in Ottawa in January 2013 (282-3). As she draws the contours of readers' responses to her testimony — their affective registers, critical or informative questions, their expressions of solidarity, critique, or comradeship — Aguirre, as a testifying subject, reclaims control of her testimony. She does so, not in self-defence, nor in an attempt to reframe her claims, or even critique readers' responses; rather, she shares the story of the book to confront readers with the conversations that the text invokes — whether deliberately or not — and their own implication in these conversations.

The *Canada Reads* debates and their focus on models of ethical citizenship and espoused national values, reflect the ways that the memoir circulates as a soft weapon, mostly because Aguirre's secret story, is no longer as hushed conversations among Chileans in Canada, but rather as a part of the "broader Canadian mythology" (284). As part of the national mythology, the memoir is positioned vis-à-vis foundational myths of multiculturalism and peacemaking. And it is here that Aguirre's use of paratext drives considerations of implication home. Integrating the conversations surrounding her book as an integral part of testimony, Aguirre encourages readers to consider how her testimony both challenges and affirms these myths, what political structures these myths serve, and readers' own implication in sustaining those structures through the stories they tell themselves of shared national values.

Aguirre's "broader Canadian mythology" comment may initially seem as affirmation of her text as one that celebrates ethnic diversity in Canada within the confines of what Stanley Fish defines as "boutique multiculturalism" - an "appreciation/ recognition of legitimacy of the traditions of other cultures as long as these do not offend the canons of civilized decency as they have been declared/ assumed" (69). It is a mode of multiculturalism that, in *The Dark Side of the Nation*, Himani Bannerji argues perpetuates "selective modes of ethnicization..." and serves as mere re-branding of the mosaic policy "[as] the Anglo-Canadian core tolerat[es] other cultures/ ethnicities" (78). But as Goldwater's remarks and the debates that follow indicate, Aguirre's testimony requires readers to question what should be regarded as civilized decency and confront the limits of their own tolerance. In so doing, Aguirre's Afterword suggests that readers will have to contend with Canada's peacemaker narrative — both in terms of the state's complicity-in or benefit-from the oppressive regimes Aguirre fights to dismantle, as well as in terms of Aguirre, sharing a story of armed resistance as a Canadian citizen. Paulette Regan

defines Canada's peacemaker image as a strategic myth that promotes the idea that Canadians and the Crown established and sustained relations with Indigenous peoples in peaceful ways (11). This image, now a national archetype, Regan argues, "became even more firmly entrenched in the Canadian psyche as Canada took on an active role in the international peacekeeping arena in countries wrecked by civil war and ethnic violence" (107), and is now also reincarnated as a humanitarian myth, welcoming refugees in moments of global crises. This is precisely the myth that Goldwater invokes, both as the grounds for welcoming Aguirre to Canada as a refugee, and for the claims to her exclusion as a terrorist.

But Aguirre doesn't merely invoke mythology as an invitation to consider implication. From the prefacing to the concluding paratext, Aguirre provides Canadian readers with a model that challenges the automated perceptions of the multicultural and humanitarian myths. Aguirre dedicates the memoir to her son and her deceased step-father — Bob Everton. While the dedication does not provide any information about Everton, apart from his name and the years of his birth and passing (1949-2004), Aguirre tells Everton's story as early as the opening scene of the memoir. Situated at the terminal of LAX, in June 1979, eating a McDonalds happy-meal, 11-year old Carmen learns that her mother, sister and herself are not traveling on holiday, but in fact are re-joining Bob and will be living under the guise of a middle-class Canadian family of Peruvian origin, while in fact being active members of the Chilean resistance (Aguirre 5). This is where Aguirre introduces readers to her childhood journey and to Everton — a Canadian national who has traveled to Chile to support Salvador Allende's socialist elected government, and who was one of three Canadians to be detained for two weeks at the Santiago National Stadium, which became a concentration camp as General Augusto Pinochet's military coup took

place in September 1973 (6). Upon his release, Everton organized a sit-in in Ottawa, to pressure the Canadian government to offer asylum to Chilean refugees such as Aguirre and her family (6).

As she narrates Everton's story, Aguirre interlaces the personal and the political, which are inseparable throughout her testimony. Bob's character — the only Canadian character — accompanies Carmen's coming of age in the resistance, both providing cover for their family's façade and embodying the image of a global, revolutionary citizen. The dedication, despite being the very first component between the book's covers, is often easily glossed over. But on the very last page of the book, near the closing of a lengthy acknowledgement section, Aguirre returns to Everton. She notes that he urged her to write the book and has been a guiding figure for her (286). Rather than position him as a personal father figure, Aguirre invokes Everton's life-long social activism as embodying what many readers will identify as Canadian values — committed to justice, peace, and radical multiculturalism. With this reference, Aguirre sends readers back to the start of her book, to question, re-read, re-consider, and listen to her testimony through the lens of implication, to practice *zakhor*.

4.6 Reading as Witnessing

To move beyond reading for empathy and other “ethical strategies of disengagement,” both scholarly and general readerships need practices of socially responsible engagement with testimonial accounts. Such models, like the practice of *זכור*, afford readers tangible strategies to bear witness to testimony by accounting for its urgency, truth, and rights claims, alongside their own implication in the structures that sustain and benefit from oppression. To perform such acts of reading, I contend that we should take our cues from the producers of testimony, and attend to the thresholds that strategically guide us through their accounts — providing readers with

multiple entry points, pacing our consumption, and directing us to revisit, question, rethink, and rebuild our relation to testimony on its own terms. The fringes do not deny affect, but they do demand more, they demand accountability and sustained relationality, drawing readers' attention away from the individual and towards the structural. Reading through paratextual entry-points encourages readers to enact their responsibilities to testimony — it allows the testifier to define the terms of engagement, and affords readers tangible strategies to educate themselves, thus opening the potential to unsettling the power dynamics of testimonial transactions, and move towards ethical relationality with testimony — moving from reading to witnessing, towards making relations right.

The Lives and Afterlives of Testimony

the best exchanges oblige a gift, a handmade drum in exchange for cheryl's sonorous presence. a drum that peter has made, interweaving of deer and elk, seemingly irreconcilable skins stitched together to create the echoing boom of witnessing. the drum is witness. to. this. moment. peter has made eight drums in total. all witnesses. a gift to cheryl for presenting her voice, adding her work to the collective and community knowledge. performance begins with acknowledgement. performance always begins with acknowledgement. eight drums made to be witnesses. made to be time portals. made to record ayumi and peter's performance. the drum beats are writing. the drum beats are writing. the drum beats are living witnesses. living memory. writing a glimmer of the performance on their skins.

(Ayumi Goto and Peter Morin, "Hair," 176)

These are the words of Tahltan artist Peter Morin and Ayumi Goto, a Canadian artist of Japanese origin, narrating the story of their collaborative performance *Hair*, developed at the "Reconsidering Reconciliation" residency at Thompson Rivers University on August 14th, 2013. In a studio space, the two artists stand in front of approximately twenty audience members, with Cree-Métis singer-songwriter Cheryl L'Hirondelle sitting to the side of the room, facing the left of the stage area. On the back wall there is a drawing of hairs which Morin created over his thirty-day residency, meditating and "making rapid gestures to try to capture the feeling of the hair of indigenous children, and body memory connection, indigenous children stolen from their families and forced to attend the residential schools" (Goto and Morin 174). Several sheets of

canvas are laid on the floor and eight ceremonial drums, created by Morin during the residency, are lined up in the back, alongside wooden boxes which will be used by Goto during their performance.

A ceremonial process conjoining mourning practices from Tahltan and Japanese cultures, *Hair: the performance* interweaves Indigenous and diasporic perspectives on Canada's residential schools. As Goto and Morin testify to their familial histories of dispossession by sharing personal objects and traditional ceremonies, the entanglements of their movements allow them to take responsibility for the other's history, create a shared space for mourning, and enact a reciprocity of care, echoed in L'Hirondelle's song-lines. To testify, Morin and Goto rely on the other's care and labour as both collaborator and witness, while also depending on the "sonorous presence" of other witnesses in the room — from L'Hirondelle to audience members — whose drumming records Goto and Morin's creative form of testimony on the skin of the living witnesses, the drums. At the outset of the event, Morin defines the drums as witness, gifting drums to six audience members and stating that in order to activate the drums as witnesses the chosen individuals need to hold the drum and play it in order to make sound when they feel motivated (*Hair: the performance* min. 11:24-12:30). Thus, the audience is bestowed with a significant role in the event, for, if they are not motivated to participate and to become a part of the artistic community by playing the drums, the artists will not be able fulfill the transformative aims of their testimony.

But the artists' testimony in *Hair: the performance* isn't merely written on the drums' "seemingly irreconcilable skins stitched together to create the echoing boom of witnessing" (Goto and Morin, "Hair," 176). The epigraph at the opening of this chapter, excerpted from a chapter co-authored by Goto and Morin in *The Land We Are* and entitled "Hair," formulates yet

another record of their testimony, as does a video recording of their performance available online, and the inclusion of a drum and the video recording in the artists' *how do you carry the land?* exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery in 2018, curated by Tarah Hogue. I have encountered Hair and engaged with the performance via the online video, the book chapter, and subsequently the exhibit. I did not attend the residency and thus did not watch the live performance; and, as I was watching the recording of *Hair* on my computer at home in the fall of 2013, I was limited by the camera angle, which offers a wide shot of the stage area and almost entirely excludes the audience and L'Hirondelle, whom I can only hear. My access to the performance was thus guided by the camera's angle and occasional zoom-ins or zoom-outs as the performance unfolded, unable to choose what I wish to focus in the room. Concurrently, as the camera controlled what I saw, watching the video at home also provided me with power and agency over the progression of the performance — as I was able to pause, fast forward, rewind, replay — allowing my affective responses (like discomfort, boredom, curiosity, fascination, etc.) to manage my engagement with the event. But whether I was being guided by the camera, or I was the one who navigated the recording, watching *Hair* while sitting at home, situated me as a spectator — seeing Goto and Morin's testimony and hearing the drumming of the audience as they bear witness to it.

As Morin and Goto framed their testimony at the outset of the performance and immediately following it, they directly outlined the terms of engagement between the three artists, their relation to the work itself and what they aimed to achieve, as well as the roles of the audience in the room. But neither Morin, nor Goto or L'Hirondelle ever acknowledged or addressed the recording or other potential audiences, which made me wonder whether the audience to the recording is invited or even able to bear witness to their testimony, or whether it

is merely afforded spectatorship? Watching *Hair* as a secondary audience, I was confronted with the framing of the audience's role in facilitating Morin, Goto and L'Hirondelle's shift from performance to testimony. It made me question how the mediums and mediations of art-based testimony define the scope and contour the limits of audiences' ethical relationality to testimonial public art, to consider how audiences are invited to or denied the move from spectatorship to witnessing, and the ways their responsibilities to testimony beyond the creative event are invoked in the transactions of testimonial art.

To explore these questions, this chapter brings together interactive public-art installations and performances that testify to settler-colonial histories and realities in Canada beyond the limits of state-sanctioned relational discourses and frameworks, contending with the ways these projects call audiences to bear witness through affect while refusing the consumption of trauma and pain, resisting the risks of identification, and encompassing a potential to mobilize such responses beyond an ethics of empathic recognition. As this chapter expands the scope of testimonial mediums, acts, and practices explored in this project, it continues to approach testimony through its paratextual and intertextual thresholds as situated entry-points, and argues that by presenting different modes of audience engagement, testimonial public-art projects encompass the potential to mobilize affect towards considerations of implication, by shifting focus from passive empathy to acts of care, and from individual to collective—or rather communal—relation and responsibility. In other words, in this chapter, I claim that public-art testimonies like *Hair: the performance* suggest the framework of Indigenous and feminist approaches to care ethics as the counterpart to implication, as both are necessary for fostering ethical relationalities that can honour the responsibilities of bearing witness.

Inviting audiences to care, I argue, is facilitated, in part, by the interactive aspects which shape and mediate public-art testimony. The projects discussed in this chapter are all community-driven, initiated, formulated and executed by artists not for profit but for communal commemoration, healing, and change. My choice of projects is grounded in an understanding of public art as “a form of collective community expression,” created for the general public, often with public funding or in relation to public initiatives, and inviting the consultation or participation of any and all members of the public, responding to or calling for public debate, and frequently formulating an act of celebration or resistance (“What is Public Art?”; “Art Term: Public Art”). Though not all projects are open to the general public, and while some are entirely volunteer-based with no official funding structures, others are supported by federal government and other public funds, but all emerge from a community claim and perspective, produced by members of the community, and designed for the benefit of the communities involved. In this sense, the focus on public (rather than private/for-profit) art allows considering the production, circulation, and consumption of creative forms of testimony across media as acts of making relations within and between communities, invoking audiences’ engagement with testimony’s ethical imperatives through relationalities grounded in an ethics and praxis of care.

My turn to and engagement with care ethics is informed by the practices fostered and modeled in the creative testimonies discussed in this chapter. The projects enact feminist, Indigenous, and materialist approaches to care, which centre relationality and responsibility within as well as “beyond human worlds,” interlacing affect and labour as driven by ethics and mobilized for politics, while directly contending with the asymmetrical power dynamics inherent in care, and asserting that good care “is never neutral,” nor is it necessarily good (Puig de la Bellacasa 3-4, 6-7). These approaches to care ethics require “recognizing and learning from

one's place in a web of diverse relationships and being drawn by the responsibilities that are embedded in such relationships" (Whyte and Cuomo 240), and in so doing, directly respond to testimony's call for "recognition, advocacy, responsibility, and accountability" (Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives* 8).

To examine how interactive public-art testimonies mediate audience engagement and mobilize audience responses towards ethical and political responses grounded in care, this chapter begins with an exploration of the ethical relationality models invoked when art-based testimony is framed and mediated as ceremony — with particular attention to communal commemoration, transnational conciliation, and the tensions that arise between the former and the latter. The chapter then continues to demonstrate how ceremonial frameworks formulate what Denise Ferreira da Silva defines as sites of confrontation, thus fostering a mode of ethical relationality that Roger Simon terms as practices of inheritance. In so doing, the chapter turns to explore the modes of call and response enacted in art-based testimony as promoting a relational ethics of care rather than recognition, and considers the complexities and tensions of such practices. Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion of the projects' subsequent publications and iterations — from video recordings, later-date exhibitions, exhibit catalogues, and book publications — building on Marlene Kadar's work on autobiographical traces, thinking through the modes of belated or extended engagement invoked in the paratextual objects, and thus accounting for the ethics of witnessing encompassed in the lives and afterlives of art-based testimony.

A shift from literary to art-based testimony requires a shift from reading to watching, introducing the matter of bearing witness visually, i.e. the matter of spectatorship, which often carries the burden of visual representations of violence and trauma. Discussions of visual-art

testimony and the ethics of spectatorship as witnessing are extensive (Kozol 211). From Roger Simon's attention to the colonial legacies and cultural pedagogy aims of museum installations and exhibits, to Jill Bennett's discussion of the work of empathy in spectatorship of contemporary art, Carolyn Lenette's work on visual representations of asylum seekers and refugee camps via tropes of humanitarian crises and the ethics of spectatorship, as well as Judith Butler and Susan Sontag's works on the ethical and political efficacies of war-photography — scholars have been exploring the mediums, sites, and mediations of art-based testimony in attempts to address the ways it mobilizes spectators' ethical engagement to reconsider political positions and/or act for political change. And much like considerations of the dangers embedded in reading creative testimonies as acts of witnessing (Whitlock, Jolly, Kaplan, Chun, Gilmore and Marshall), scholars who explore art-based testimony warn against the risks of spectators' identification, disgust, empathy, and shame (Hesford, Amber Dean, Lenette, da Silva, and Garneau). Attuned to the cultural politics of visual witnessing, Carolyn Dean notes that the most prevalent recipients of survivor testimony in the West can be defined as "humanitarian witnesses" — from general-public audiences, to documentarists, archivists, journalists, or aid workers (629). When confronted with the problem of witnessing, i.e. the problem of what to do when encountering human suffering through second or third-party witnessing, humanitarian witnesses understand their responsibility as a "mandate to heal suffering the world over in the name of alleviating trauma," to the extent of embodying human conscience and claiming the role of the witness in the survivor's place (Kozol 632-633).

However, neither the audiences nor the producers of creative testimonies like *Hair: the performance* can be neatly situated within the categories of survivor or humanitarian witness, as they invoke more complex and interconnected models of call and response. During their

performance, Goto and Morin do not share the specifics of their personal and familial histories of state-sanctioned abuse, nor do they indicate how those histories situate them in relation to the other's trauma, thus avoiding being subsumed under either the survivor or humanitarian markers during the performance. While in "Ravens Flying Upside and Other Stories" Morin does acknowledge intergenerational survival of residential schools as part of his personal story (89), during *Hair*, Goto and Morin situate themselves in nation-based terms and leave the work of inference to their audience (who may or may not situate Morin as an intergenerational survivor and or mistaken Goto as a humanitarian witness to Morin's testimony). More so, the audiences themselves — whether those present in the room, those watching the video-recording, those reading the "Hair" essay in *The Land We Are*, or those attending Goto & Morin's retrospective exhibit at the Vancouver Art Gallery — may be implicated in the dynamics between survivor and humanitarian positions in a myriad of ways, as their relationship to the perpetrator and survivor communities are shaped by the roots and routes that have brought them to this land.

Creative testimonies like Goto and Morin's, then, are not satisfied with neither spectatorship nor empathy; they demand audiences' coming to care. Alongside *Hair: the performance*, projects such as *(official denial) trade value in progress* which is co-created by settler artist and scholar Leah Decter and Jamie Isaac, an artist and member of Sagkeeng First Nation; the participatory game-based performance *Apology Dice*, co-created by Métis artist David Garneau and Clement Yeh, who identifies as Canadian of Chinese ancestry; and the collective-based commemorative art installation *Walking with Our Sisters* initiated by Métis artist Christi Belcourt—all mobilize visual modes of testimony in ways that invite a consideration of whether and how art moves audiences to action that can make good relations. To understand what creative testimonies like *Hair* demand as a mode of "ethical relationality"

(Donald, “Indigenous Métissage” 535) requires an exploration of the terms of engagement through which artists frame their work. Such exploration merits consideration of how the artists define an ethical response to their testimony, as well as how they foster practices and sites witnessing, namely, what strategies they employ to mobilize audiences’ presence in ways that invoke the socio-political response-ability and accountability they wish to call on their witnesses. Individually and collectively, these projects attest to colonial violence, trauma, and injustice by formulating creative sites that disrupt passive consumption and demand audiences’ active learning, implication, and response. In so doing, the projects thus invoke audiences’ ethical engagement as an ethics of care, enacted through the interconnectedness of affect, thought, *and* labour which “are held together” despite tensions and contradictions (Puig de la Bellacasa 5).

5.1 From Spectator to Witness: Testimony as Ceremony

5.1.1 Making Relations

To appeal to audiences’ responsibility and accountability as witnesses, pushing them beyond empathy and away from humanitarian “saviour” positions, projects like *Hair: the performance* and *Walking With Our Sisters* foster layered practices of bearing witness which emerge from and are grounded in ceremony, thus invoking nation-based knowledge systems, clearly defined practices of call *and* response, as well as notions of community, relationality, implication, and care. Though the former is a collaborative single performance between three artists and the latter is a collective-based memorial installation that has travelled across Canada for seven years, both projects formulate testimonial sites that refuse or resist being co-opted into state-sanctioned discourses of recognition, reconciliation, and redress, and encourage witnessing

in ways that are guided by Indigenous-led ceremonial protocols as well as invite audiences to become witnesses by responding with acts of care.

At the outset of *Hair: the performance*, Morin directly defines the framework and aims of the artists' testimonial event, who and what are witnesses, as well as the ethics of being a witness to this testimony, or, what qualifies as a desired response. Morin leads the event in defining the collaborative performance as decolonizing work; work that engages with difficult histories, contends with the idea of reconciliation, and seeks to heal from residential school trauma by enacting artists' role in "changing pathways on the land" (*Hair: the performance* min. 7:30-8:23, 4:45-5:20, and 5:50-5:52). He further notes that their responsibility, as artists, is to honour the work and history of "pioneering, powerful, and meaningful" artists who are Aboriginal and people of colour, artists who have created spaces that continue to foster communities (*Hair: the performance* min. 9:05 - 10:13). With these words, Morin concurrently detangles decolonizing and reconciliatory work from state-sanctioned protocols and meanings, as well as from human-rights discourses of recognition, rights, and redress, reclaiming it as work by community for community.

In his introduction to the performance, Morin refers to reconciliation and healing from residential school trauma, and while the artists' practices seek to foster a praxis of care as means of moving towards a shared future for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, they by no means settle or resolve the matter. From the outset of the performance, Morin invokes notions of community and relationality as defining the artists' creative and decolonizing praxis. He refers to his collaborators as his sisters, as kin, and acknowledges L'Hirondelle as one of the pioneering artists whose influence has been transformative in his and Goto's artistic communities. To acknowledge the work, she had done for the artistic community, Morin begins the performance

by gifting L'Hirondelle with one of the drums he created for the event (*Hair: the performance* min. 10:14-11:11). Thus, while mentioning reconciliation, Morin's prefacing statement and gifting situate the traditions, histories and knowledges of Indigenous and people-of-colour artists as the ones shaping and powering the space and work of their performance, without ever addressing colonial practices, protocols, or gaze.

Simultaneously, however, the public structures that create the conditions of the performance are implicated in such colonial spaces, histories, and realities, in layered ways. *Hair: the performance* is a one-time event, presented in an art studio at the campus of Thompson Rivers University, which is a publicly funded Canadian institution that is grounded in and promotes western traditions of knowledge. More specifically, the performance was developed as part of a one-month residency in August 2013 entitled "Reconsidering Reconciliation," and directly responding-to the TRC and Canada's discourse of reconciliation. The residency was hosted by the Centre of innovation Culture and the Arts in Canada (CiCAC), headed by scholar and artist Ashok Mathur and funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of the Canadian federal government, which awarded Mathur a Canada Research Chair position in Cultural and Artistic Inquiry in 2005 for the purpose of forming the centre. CiCAC, headed by Mathur, designed a residency that brought together six Indigenous and six non-Indigenous artists and scholars to create original and collaborative projects that would reflect upon concepts of reconciliation, provide an opportunity to foster potential alliances between artists and scholars, carve space for a new form of dialogue, and reconsider their place in, or rather, *in relation to* Canada. "Reconsidering Reconciliation," then, was a critical space that allowed interrogating polemic concepts within a framework that, while operating within and being funded by the governing bodies promoting the colonial reconciliation discourse, offers an alternative space for

exploration and representation, as it resists being contained or coopted by “the sanctioned performance of Reconciliation [which] is foundationally distorted” (Garneau 23).

The physical, rather than institutional, location of the campus is on the “Tk'emlups te Secwepemc territory... in the southern interior of British Columbia within the unceded traditional lands of the Secwepemc Nation,” also known as the town of Kamloops in British Columbia (“Guide to Acknowledging First Peoples & Traditional Territory”). Morin’s opening statement acknowledges the artists’ relation to this physical place, noting that he and Goto are grateful guests of the territory. But his acknowledgement of the land is not perfunctory, as their performance is grounded in land-based practices and aims, formulating a creative act in which the artists take on their responsibility to “changing pathways on the land” (*Hair: the performance* min. 8:15-8:23). The performance begins with L’Hirondelle playing the drum gifted to her by Morin while she sings songlines. In “Songlines, Stories, and Community Engagement,” L’Hirondelle defines songlines as a vocal mapping method, and Chris Bose (Secwepemc and N’laka pamux) adds that they have “become an agreed-upon term that many Aboriginal musicians are using to investigate and implement sonic mapping practices here in this land now known as Canada” (95-96). L’Hirondelle’s vocal mapping grounds their performance in its physical location, and as Morin notes in his prefacing statements, the drumming opens “portals into the past, a direct line,” invoking the communities’ ancestors and recording their testimony on the skin of the living witnesses, the drums (*Hair: the performance* min. 6:00-6:04). In this way, Morin’s prefacing statement situates L’Hirondelle as modeling the role of a witness to his and Goto’s testimony. As she is moved to act for her community, L’Hirondelle mobilizes her affective reaction in ways that are grounded in Indigenous knowledge (non-colonial knowledge) of land, relationality, and memory.

Accompanied by L'Hirondelle's "sonorous presence," Goto and Morin begin tying twenty-eight rocks to Morin's body. The rocks, "collected, gathered outward in, [are] land repurposed to help tell the story" ("Hair" 176). In their essay version of the performance, the artists define the rocks as

a weight. meant to remind us all of the trauma caused by the residential school... twenty-eight weights knotted onto peter's body... so much as to cut off his connection to the land, excise assemblages from one part of the body to the other, remove our own relationships to our and their bodies, estrangements between self and other... the rocks are tied. the weight is felt. these rocks are the ground... each rock is a grandmother, a grandfather. each rock is a weight. a punishment. a protection. (Goto and Morin, "Hair" 176)

The weight of the rocks, the sound of the drums, and the mapping of line-songs, facilitate the artists' testimony alongside their conceptualization of witnesses and witnessing. In their introduction to a special issue of *West Coast Line*, entitled "Reconcile This!," Goto and Jonathan Dewar note that creative practices such as songlines offer an "expanded conceptualization of reconciliation" — namely, non-colonial conciliatory creative actions — and as such draw attention to who is called to bear witness to conciliation, how, and "what becomes of this experience?" (10). Songlines, Dewar and Goto argue, situates witnessing as "the willful act of paying respectful attention to the lives of others" rather than a bystander or observer position (10). Songlines, as well as drumming, model witnessing as "a socially engaged activity, [that] incites creative collaboration" (Dewar and Goto 10). As the creative collaboration extends beyond the three artists to the audience in the room, as it extends beyond the temporality of the residency or the TRC to call upon ancestral relations and imagine shared futures, as it maps

pathways that extend beyond the university campus or the nation-state, Goto, Morin, and L'Hirondelle enact a mode of testifying and witnessing that is grounded in community, reciprocity, and continuity.

But the stones, drumming and signing contend to do even more. Morin's description of the drums' role and how to activate them, alongside his act of gifting a drum to L'Hirondelle at the outset of the event, both invoke ceremonial protocols. Once the stones are tied to Morin's body, L'Hirondelle's singing and drumming stops. Morin then begins to perform the act and moment of cutting (*Hair: the performance* min. 6:38-7:20). As he turns to the drawing, Morin presses his face and torso against the drawing on the wall, his raw flesh cutting through the carefully drawn representations of children's hair:

the hair is a link to the ground. in this moment peter is here to collect the spiritual pain. to gather it up inside his body. to travel back in time and remove some of that fear from the children. the rocks hold him here. hold his spirit present in this moment. in this reality. rocks. ground. hair. our ground. in the moment that peter becomes the scissors, and the scissors make contact with the hair, the most provocative spaces are invoked. (Goto and Morin, "Hair," p. 179)

As Morin embodies the role of the scissors, the only sound in the room are his cries. He takes upon himself the role of perpetrator, of the cutter, while his body is heavied down by the ancestral spirits, the keepers of the past. His body, then, performs two concurrent yet opposing roles, the oppressor and the oppressed, the scissors and the hair. His offering, both testifies to the moment of loss and formulates a witness-response to the testimonies of the children who survived residential schools.

Bearing witness to Morin's testimony, to his embodiment of the scissors and hair cutting, Goto prepares her own witness response, a ceremony. She cuts her own hair, "an act of spiritual gifting, an expression of abidance to recover respectful relations... ayumi offers solace. she offers witnessing. she offers her ancestors. they stand together to see this grievous act. they stand together to watch canada cut the hair off of the indigenous children for a nation building enterprise" (Goto and Morin, "Hair" 180). Goto's action is a spiritual gift deeply rooted in cultural ceremony, a tradition passed orally in "response to egregious acts committed against one's spouse or community" (Goto and Morin, "Hair" 180). Goto ties her hair in five bundles, cuts each bundle, washes it, dries it, and places the bundles in a black wooden box, then wrapping the box in delicate washi paper, red ribbon and a gold seal. As she performs this ceremony, Goto joins L'Hirondelle in singing, "serenely hum[ming] lullabies that her Mother had sung to her in her youth... she is walking with her ancestors... she is mindful that whatever is emoted and experienced will become steeped into the gift itself. sorrow renders sorrow, composure bestows composure" (Goto and Morin, "Hair" 180). As Morin rests on the canvas, Goto gifts him with her bundled hair. In their coda statements immediately following performance and included in the recording, Goto notes that the hair she gifted Morin comes from a strong line of powerful women on her mother's side and is blessed using the ashes of Ashok Mathur's mother, gifting Morin the maternal protection of both their family lines (*Hair: the performance* min. 64:24-65:13).

With this protective gifting and surrounded by the sounds of drumming, Goto concludes her ceremony, and the final part of *Hair: the performance* unfolds. As Morin unwraps the gift, stroking his face and body with the hair, Goto turns to relieve him of the weight of the stones, cutting them off his body. They wrap the hair around two of the stones, and L'Hirondelle starts

singing again just as they turn the stones with hair into make-shift brushes, dipping them in a wooden bowl and drawing on the canvas, playfully creating a shared abstract image (*Hair: the performance* min. 48:00-59:00). As they come together through witnessing, with L’Hirondelle’s songlines and the drums dispersed in the room “watching, listening, reacting. the rolling thunder of witnessing vibrat[ing] skin to skin. beat to beat,” Goto and Morin turn to “contribute their voices to the transformation of history, stories forward. restructuring futures. and in witness to the land” (Goto and Morin, “Hair” 182, 184). Before concluding the event, before concluding their contribution to “changing the pathways of the land,” the artists return to the wider community, passing through the audience, blessing each member of the audience with the stone, hair, and ashes in their hands, an act of recognition on behalf of both parties, a moment of coming together, of fostering community (*Hair: the performance* min. 7:30-8:23 and 59:30-62:30).

In *Hair: the performance*, Goto and Morin thus create a site of testimony that models the role of the witness and the act of bearing witness as active engagement through ceremony. With L’Hirondelle and Goto bearing witness to Morin’s testimony, they model the responsibility, reciprocity, and care demanded of witnesses through ceremonial practices and protocols. In effect, *Hair: the performance* fulfills both indigenous and Western notions of testimony. It invokes Dori Laub’s witnessing as the relationship created between witnesses, one established during “the experience itself of *living through* testimony, of giving testimony,” an experience he articulates as a site of utterance, performing (and hence making) reciprocal relations (70). More so, L’Hirondelle, Morin, and Goto’s acts of care embody what Cree-Métis writer and poet Samantha Nock defines as “being a witness,” namely the responsibilities bestowed on those called to witness — a demand to be present not only physically (i.e. not only in listening) “but

emotionally and spiritually, to hold this story in our hearts. Because, to witness someone's story... [means to carry] a part of that person with you now" (Rabble.com).

5.1.2 Commemorating Lives and Loss

The artists of *Hair: the performance* formulate both witnessing and testimony through means other than narrative, the display of violence or trauma, or the relegation of Indigenous children to victims. Instead, the artists' testimonial practices and the witnessing protocols they set up for one another and the in-studio audience, refuse to co-opt their testimony into official state-sanctioned protocols, and create a new pathway, that of nation-to-nation community relations, a space that fosters communal, ceremonial acts of mourning, restoration, and care. Like *Hair: the performance*, the indigenous-lead, collective-based commemorative installation, *Walking With Our Sisters (WWOS)*, resists narrativization, victimization, and visualization of trauma. And like *Hair*, *WWOS* commemorates and mourns lives and their loss. Christi Belcourt, the Métis artist who initiated the project states in a video interview with *Muskrat Magazine* that *Walking With Our Sisters* is:

a memorial. It's a commemoration. And it is ceremony. It's ceremony from the very start to the very end of each and every display... that is what's required to properly acknowledge and honour the women's lives. We can't do it by gawking. We can't do it by seeing pictures. We can't do it by staring from an outsider's perspective. We must do it by bringing their lives, and the acknowledgement of the value of their lives, within us, and within our hearts. (min. 01:00-02:16).

To bear witness to women's lives and its loss, *WWOS* denies spectatorship, voyeurism, or even consumption of the women's stories. Instead, it mobilizes a traditional creative practice — the

making of vamps, i.e. moccasin tops — to situate the commemoration as both testimony and ceremony, and invite witness responses through acts of care.

The project originated in 2012 as a call issued by Belcourt on social media. In response to yet another poster of a missing Indigenous woman posted by the woman’s family on Facebook, Belcourt admits that she became “overwhelmed with a sense of compassion for the girl’s mother” (Anderson xxi). She then issued a call for vamps on social media, and created a Facebook group for the project, asking people to send the beaded top parts of moccasins (Belcourt, *Canadian Art*). Belcourt collected the vamps in order to create an art installation, as she wished to arrange them in a way that would allow “families, friends, allies, and community members could ‘walk with our sisters’ ... [to] offer one way to visit, honour, and commemorate the missing and murdered relations” with the “unfinished moccasins ... represent[ing] the interrupted lives of the women” (Anderson xxii). By the time the installation opened in Edmonton on October 2nd, 2013, Belcourt notes that while she first envisioned an art exhibit, it became much more: “it’s a commemoration, it’s ceremony, it’s an honouring, it’s art, it’s community taking action, it’s a way to demonstrate we care” (Belcourt xii).

WWOS testifies to the truth of colonial violence against Indigenous women, a truth that over 1,700 vamp-makers attest to through their work. But it does much more than offer a truthful account of injustice. As “community taking action,” as “a way to demonstrate we care,” the political efficacies of *WWOS* are to honour and respect the lives and loss of the women, by “keep[ing] it in the forefront of people’s minds,” by “giv[ing] people the vocabulary and empower[ing] people to begin to talk about it. Because, it is such a difficult subject to speak about” (Belcourt, “MM Interview” min. 05:11-05:40). More so, as Belcourt states in an interview with *Canadian Art*, though the project does not take an official position on the kind of

political response expected of the Canadian government, it is designed to support whatever the families want — referring to either an official inquiry or more direct forms of action. Above all, as Belcourt states, “the ultimate goal of anything that we do, is to make it stop. Our women have to stop being murdered. Period”; or, in other words, “[t]he result of inaction is more death, so, it just can’t continue like this. And Indigenous communities shouldn’t have to fight this on our own” (Belcourt, “MM Interview” min. 05:40-06:05, *Canadian Art*).

The truthful and urgent account of injustice shared in *WWOS* calls for socio-political change that is not directed at colonial governing-bodies, but rather directly engages with communities — both Indigenous and non-Indigenous ones, those suffering violence and abuse and those complicit in its ongoing progression. *WWOS* invites communities — Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike — to bear witness through acts of care-driven commemoration that honour the lives and loss of Indigenous women and girls. Nonetheless, this project, while Indigenous-led, does not leave Indigenous peoples to fight the injustice and violence alone. It is a community-based endeavor, an “entirely crowd-sourced project” (*WWOS*, “About – The Project”). The vamps were created by people who are Indigenous and those who are not, by new and established artists, as well as people with no artistic background, and sent individually or by one of the sixty-five beading groups that formed in response to Belcourt’s call. The vamps are objects of care, beaded and decorated in a variety of materials and techniques, using “painting, quillwork, beadwork, and mixed media,” with regional and nation-based styles, as well as traditional designs of “doing symmetrical imagery on each of the vamps” or rather untraditional approaches, choosing “to spread their images across both the vamps” (Belcourt *Canadian Art*).

As a communal testimonial event, bearing witness in *WWOS* — whether through the creating vamps, being involved in organization, or attending the event — is guided by such acts,

by a practice of “kindness, gentleness, patience, and love.” In fact, this is one of four principles that have guided the project from the outset, alongside protocol, humility, and volunteerism (“Grande Prairie Information Sheet”). Across twenty-six community events (almost exclusively held in Canada), *WWOS* has been organized according to these principles. The project is always Indigenous-led and follows a set of traditional protocols, while welcoming all those who wish to attend, treating everyone as equals and demanding that they come as human beings, practicing humility by leaving any and all careers and hierarchies outside the event space (“Grande Prairie Information Sheet”). The value of humility is further carried through the principle of volunteerism. *WWOS* is guided by a national organizing committee, comprised of a collective of over twenty volunteers who have worked collaboratively throughout the duration of the project, both to navigate the installation as a whole and to the support local community committees who host the installation on its tour (*WWOS*, “*WWOS* Collective”). As Belcourt notes, “no one is paid, [n]o profits are made,” all funding came from online and local fundraisers, no government or industry-based funding accepted, and any proceeds were donated to other community groups and organizations (Belcourt *Canadian Art, Keetsahnak* xiii). *WWOS*, then, formulates a testimonial site that invokes witnessing through community-based practices, caring for the community (the families and loved ones of the women) by the community (anyone who chooses to become involved and contribute labour and care to the project). But, while originally compelled by Belcourt’s open call, the *WWOS* community isn’t formed merely through shared concern or the four guiding values; rather, both the testimonial site and the witnessing community are fostered through ceremony.

Ceremony guides everything in *WWOS*, whether deliberately or organically. The installation, packing, and transferring processes are as much a part of ceremony as are the events

taking place when the bundle is shared with the public (“WWOS FAQ Sheet”). Driven by the care and respect for the women, their lives, and their families, *WWOS* is guided by elders. From the outset, the project has been guided by Métis elder Maria Campbell who has instructed protocol. It also features grandmothers and elders as members of the national collective, and includes at least two elders and two knowledge keepers on each community committee (Belcourt *Canadian Art*). Following the instructions of the elders, each space — whether a gallery or community space — is transformed into a sacred space, a lodge, where “the ceremony is held for the 10-days-to-3-weeks duration” (Belcourt, “MM Interview” min. 03:15-03:32). Knowledge keepers are responsible for the observation of protocols, and elders “oversee, provide guidance, advice, comfort, and counselling” (“Grande Prairie Information Sheet”). While the guidance of elders and knowledge keepers are consciously constructed components of the project, community members have recognized the sacred nature of the collection of vamps by referring to them as a ‘bundle’, namely “a traditional ceremonial term to describe a collection of sacred items” (Belcourt *Keetsahnak* xiii). The bundle is cared for by elders and knowledge keepers, who tend to it from the moment it is entrusted in their hands by the previous hosts, up to the moment they place it for the care of the next hosts, often requiring them to drive hundreds of miles (Belcourt *Keetsahnak* xvii). The bundle is smudged, as is the hosting space, and either sage or cedar is laid under the red cloth on top of which the vamps are placed in pairs. Tobacco is offered to the elders guiding the event, visitors are asked to take off their shoes (in indoor spaces), invited to smudge with sage before entering the space, and there are protocols involving the participation of vulnerable people (“WWOS FAQ Sheet”).

The care for the commemorated lives, traditional protocols, the surviving families, project facilitators and visitors, formulates a ceremonial site that testifies without being relegated

to discourses of political recognition, reconciliation, or redress. In setting testimony as—and through—ceremony, *Hair: the performance* and *Walking With Our Sisters* invoke particular modes of audience engagement that resist mere spectatorship and demand active response. The projects' reliance on ceremonial protocols and practices as expressions of witnessing that honour the lives lost to colonial violence, formulates what scholar Denise Ferreira da Silva defines as sites of confrontation, where the political efficacies of art are mobilized by “making visible without making public.” In “Reading Art as Confrontation,” da Silva explores performance art that testifies to colonial violence without displaying any images of that violence, formulating “a presentation that refuses representation.” Such events, da Silva argues, formulate sites of confrontation, refusing “to give the audience access to anything ... that could become pieces of evidence, that could introduce the position of a spectator... to manifest the violence of spectatorship” (da Silva). “Making visible without making public” then, invokes witnessing by confronting audiences with testimony that refuses representation, guiding audiences to bear witness in ways that unsettle their expectations of spectatorship. Creative sites of confrontation thus generate audiences' self-reflexivity regarding their role as viewers as well as their relationship to the events attested to. Though they deny spectatorship, sites of confrontation do rely on the mobilization of affect but are not content with affect-based recognition alone. Rather, they demand self-reflection by invoking complex and layered affective responses; or, in other words, “making visible without making public... when rendered in the aesthetic form, operates at the level of feelings, both physical and emotional” (da Silva).

Both *Hair: the performance* and *Walking With Our Sisters* create sites of confrontation, inviting audiences to bear witness through ceremony, denying spectatorship by situating audiences as participants rather than bystanders, implicating them in the testimony taking place

and inviting them to mobilize their affective responses through acts of care. Entering the studio, the audience enters Goto, Morin, and L'Hirondelle's testimonial space, but they are still passive spectators. It is the circulation of the drums that transforms six of the audience members to participants who share in the responsibility for the success of the ceremony. *Hair: the performance*, thus confronts the six potential drummers, making them active participants who are tasked with pushing beyond their affective response to partake in the artists' ceremony.

Meanwhile, even before entering the space that hosts the bundle of vamps, all visitors to *WWOS* are welcomed by local organizing members who introduce them to the specific protocols followed in the memorial installation. With this move, audiences are purposefully stopped by volunteers, inviting those who identify as women to wear long skirts, guiding all visitors to take off their shoes and walk clockwise through the space, encouraging people to take tobacco ties (a small amount of tobacco wrapped in cloth), instructing audiences not to touch, step over or photograph the vamps, and informing them that elders are available for support in a separate space. This physical pausing, then, serves to guide visitors' presence and movement in the space, confronting visitors with protocols that contour their rights and responsibilities as respectful guests. In so doing, the introduction of protocol shifts visitors' focus away from passive spectatorship and towards participation in ceremony, from consumption to action, from their individual affective reactions to tangible practices that honour the bundle, space and community of *WWOS*. Alongside protocol, the project's guiding principles of kindness, humility, and volunteerism—welcoming everyone with kindness, respect, and generosity while asking all to leave careers and hierarchies out the door—further serve to frame a site of confrontation. Once entering the space, visitors walk alongside the women, alongside “a floor installation made up of beaded vamps arranged in a winding path formation on fabric and includes cedar boughs”

(*WWOS*, “About – The Project”). “Making visible without making public,” *WWOS* and *Hair: the performance* refuse spectatorship, and instead, take up Indigenous-led ceremonial tools and protocols, using their mediation to visiting publics as sites of confrontation, shifting audiences’ attention towards participation, both framing and modeling the kinds of witnessing they seek to foster.

5.2 Confronting the Tensions of Testimony as Ceremony

But formulating creative testimony as ceremony and thus forming sites of confrontation does not guarantee a move from spectatorship to witnessing, nor is it without its complexities. As *WWOS* and *Hair: the performance* are grounded-in and guided-by ceremonial protocols while refusing the consumption of trauma, the question of knowledge and its mediation to audiences arises. By refusing visual representation of trauma and setting varied participatory ceremonial protocols, the projects confront audiences with their relation to the ceremonial and testimonial event, invoking relationality, implication, and accountability in ways that refuse centring colonial or state-based practices and discourses. In fact, Indigenous-led, and guided by long-term collaborative relationships, *WWOS* and *Hair: the performance*, offer examples of Garneau’s conciliatory relations as they foster continuous, non-colonial, collaborative creative practices. Conciliatory spaces, Garneau argues, foster “an ongoing process, a seeking rather than a restoration of an imagined agreement,” “a continuous relationship” (31). In “Imaginary Spaces of Conciliation and Reconciliation: Art, Curation, and Healing,” Garneau differentiates conciliatory spaces and relations from reconciliatory ones, noting that the term reconciliation:

imposes the fiction that equanimity was the status quo between Indigenous people and Canada... The problem with the choice of the word ‘reconciliation’ over ‘conciliation’ is that it presses into our minds a false understanding of our past and constricts our

collective sense of the future... The first line of the TRC's 'Our Mandate' web page reads: 'There is an emerging and compelling desire to put the events of the past behind us so that we can work towards a stronger and healthier future.' The text does not explain whose desire it is. If read as colonial desire, then Reconciliation is a continuation of the settlement narrative..." (30-31)

To refuse, or resist, colonial logic and desire, Garneau posits that "the contemporary dialogue between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people" should be reframed as a conciliatory one, fostered by cultural workers and promoted via non-colonial art practices (namely, practices that are not reactive to colonialism, but rather separate from it, seeking to recover and perpetuate pre-contact cultures) (23-24). In this sense, both *Hair: the performance* and *WWOS* formulate conciliatory spaces in terms of the relationalities that produce them, the spaces they inhabit, and the reciprocity they demand. *Hair: the performance* is part of Goto and Morin's long-term and ongoing collaborative relationship, and *WWOS* sets up a traveling installation, hosted through voluntary yet continuous community-based consultation and collaboration that brings together Indigenous and non-indigenous members. The projects are thus grounded in ongoing Indigenous-led collaborations which they bring into the event spaces — be they a university art studio, a community centre, a convention centre, or a historical site on the land — transforming the spaces through ceremony protocols, and inviting audiences into a shared community of Indigenous and non-indigenous people, where, among other things, settlers become "aware of their inheritance and implication in the colonial matrix... comprehend their unearned privileges and seek ways past racism" (Garneau, "Imaginary Spaces" pp. 28-29). These collaborative processes and practices are transformative because non-Indigenous collective members, volunteers, and artists

are no longer simply settlers, as they begin to engage with and account for their implication (Garneau, “Imaginary Spaces” pp. 28-29).

In so doing, conciliatory spaces, like the ones created in *Hair: the performance* and *WWOS*, formulate sites of confrontation — confronting audiences with knowledge and experience while denying momentary colonial consumption and inviting visitors’ continuous reflective relation to their role as addressees, and the communities, histories, and realities attested to in testimony. The perpetual process of conciliation, then, “is not for the Indigenous alone;” rather, “environments of perpetual conciliation” demand “non-Indigenous people [to] struggle with their inheritance of privilege, unlearn the colonial attitude, and work toward non-colonial practices” (Garneau 24). Yet, while neither one of the projects leaves Indigenous people to fight the injustice of colonial violence on their own, and though, by “making visible without making public” they refuse colonial spectatorship of Indigenous trauma and pain, both the representation and mediation of Indigenous trauma come up against — or rather in tension with — the mobilization of traditional knowledge and ceremonial protocols. In other words, while testimony as ceremony refuses colonial spectatorship by “making visible without making public” and formulates Indigenous-led modes of ethical relationality to confront both participants and audiences with testimony’s justice claims, the projects’ use of ceremony and traditional knowledge is not without its complexities or debates.

Hair: the performance interlaces ceremonial practices that are framed by Goto and Morin as Indigenous (rather than specifically Tahltan), Japanese, or creative. Ceremony shapes the project from the outset, as early as the design and preparations for the event, with Morin’s creation of the drums, meditative drawing of hairs, and his and Goto’s collection of the rocks. In his prefacing statements, Morin frames the shift from spectatorship to witnessing through actions

— the actions that the artists take during the performance, and the audience’s drumming, explaining both traditional and performative uses of the drums as living records, as witnesses. Immediately following the performance, in their coda statements, Goto mediates her own actions, sharing the familial and Japanese traditions that shape her ceremonial actions, and Morin explains how their individual ceremonies conjoin with those of L’Hirondelle and the audience to a creative form of ceremony that bears witness to lives and their loss. The artists, then, are the ones fostering the conciliatory space as well as the ones deciding the limits of what traditional, national, and personal knowledge is shared, how, and when. But, perhaps even more important, is the matter of who is invited to ceremony and how that shapes the tension between the conciliatory practices, the knowledge shared, and their testimony as a site of confrontation.

Those invited into ceremony are the artists themselves alongside other participants in the residency or other audience members attending the event. As such, both the conciliatory space fostered, as well as the framed and mediated ceremonial knowledge, are grounded in long-term collaborative relations. The performance of *Hair* was not the first or only time that Morin, Goto, and L’Hirondelle collaborate; in fact, it was but one event in a long-established and continuous collaborative relationship (as evident in the artists’ exhibit *How Do We Carry The Land*, featuring Goto and Morin’s individual and collaborative project spanning for almost a decade). The audience, comprised in great part of residency participants (both Indigenous and non), has benefited from the physical and intellectual conditions that allow developing the trust and reciprocity needed for ceremony and for the sharing of traditional and personal sacred knowledge. However, as those who attend the performance enter into ceremony, and while the practices of care extend to audience drumming, the participation in ceremony and move from spectatorship to witnessing are not extended to other audiences of the performance’s re-

mediation. In this sense, while the residency and the performance formulate public art projects whose scope has extended beyond its original participants and single-month duration through the formation of a MOOC (massive open online course), the video recording of *Hair: the performance* invites wider audiences to watch the ceremony, but does not allow them to move from spectatorship to witnessing, nor extend the conciliatory space. In other words, though the artists' prefacing and coda statements are included in the recording, still framing and strategically guiding the performance, they merely model witnessing through ceremony, yet deny the ability to respond with care.

This does not mean that the recording circulated to wider audiences is deprived of value; featuring the preface and coda statements, while situated within the Reconciliation MOOC site, the recording of *Hair: the performance* still articulates a site of confrontation, inviting considerations of individual, communal, and institutional implication. However, it is both the form of recording and its wider circulation that formulate a tension between the relationality and reciprocity encompassed in testimony as ceremony and knowledge that should perhaps be neither visible nor public beyond the ceremony itself. As the performance fosters witnessing through ceremony, it opens a conversation and shares knowledge and protocols that can arguably be trusted within nation-based communities (Indigenous or Japanese), or even extended to conciliatory spaces, but should perhaps be made neither visible nor public beyond them, remaining out of the domain of wider circulation. As the conciliatory space fostered in *Hair: the performance* is merely modeled rather than afforded to the wider audiences, the remediations of the performance allow audiences to access the knowledge and care shared in the conciliatory space without extending to them neither the responsibility nor reciprocity that both testimony and ceremony demand.

The tensions embedded within testimony as ceremony, however, are not limited only to what ceremonial knowledge is shared with which audiences and under what conditions, but also address the very protocols set up and how audiences are invited to participate. *Hair: the performance* was a singular event with a set audience, and the knowledge and terms of engagement shared by Morin and Goto are not contested by participants. The community-led framework of *WWOS* opens more room for intra and inter-community discussion. Before entering the *WWOS* ceremonial space, visitors are invited to smudge and to wear a skirt (if they identify as a woman). These practices are explained by volunteers who welcome audiences to the installation as well as explained through Frequently Asked Questions handouts (FAQ), or pamphlet and information sheets (like the one shared with visitors of *WWOS* in Grande Prairie). These documents mediate knowledge to audiences, both welcoming everyone by removing basic knowledge barriers, and setting the terms of respectful and ethical engagement. While not all protocols are explained (for example, the practices involving the attendance of vulnerable individuals e.g. pregnant women, young children, or terminally ill individuals), the choice of which protocols to explain and how, as well as the decision to formulate and follow protocol as traditional or spiritual customs of Indigenous peoples (rather than naming nation-specific practices) shape the circulation and reception of these protocols and their place in the ceremonial testimony. In other words, the explanatory materials — which I regard as some of the peritextual materials that envelope the project — set the scope and terms of audience engagement, framing how audiences enter the site of testimony.

The explanatory materials carefully navigate which protocols are explained thus limiting the extent of colonial knowledge consumption or mining, and the information shared as reasoning for and framing of specific protocols provides merely the tip of the iceberg in terms of

knowledge. However, because these prefacing explanations formulate thresholds of participation, these entry points also encompass the potential of becoming sites of contention. A glimpse into the ways such tensions can manifest within a community is reflected in a debate not about *WWOS*, but rather regarding the colonial, religious, and gendered politics of skirts in ceremony, a debate that is led in varied publications by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) and Erica Violet Lee (nēhiyaw), among others. In fact, in an essay entitled “Centering Resurgence,” Simpson reflects on her relationship with skirt protocols in ceremony, interlacing her personal experiences with teachings she has learned from elders and the project of Indigenous national resurgence (229). The essay is not published in one of her manuscripts, but rather as a chapter in *Keetsannak: Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters*, a collection of single and co-authored essays which emerges in direct relation to *WWOS* and contends with gendered violence from Indigenous perspectives. Perhaps the predominant epitextual component of *WWOS*, *Keetsannak* is co-edited by Kim Anderson, Maria Campbell and Christi Belcourt. In addition to Simpson’s essay, it also features “Skirting the Issues,” an essay by Alex Wilson (Opaskwayak Cree Nation) who shares personal experiences, Swampy Cree traditional law, and a historicizing of colonial oppression of Indigenous women, two-spirit and trans people, to assert the “importance of body sovereignty and gender self-determination and expression” (162). Including these discussions in collection, the editors thus situate the tensions revolving ceremonial protocols as an integral part of the formation of formulation of *WWOS* as a site of testimony through ceremony. In this sense, *WWOS*’s mobilization of ceremonial protocols to frame audiences’ terms of engagement with the testimonial event, may confront not only Western audiences but Indigenous ones as well, shaping the terms of engagement, speaking

differently to different audiences and making space for both inner and inter modes of ethical engagement and contention.

Walking With Our Sisters and *Hair: the performance*, then, are by no means settled sites of creative testimony. They are complex, layered, and dynamic projects that mobilize testimonial objects, practices, and traditions to foster conciliatory sites that bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous survivors, family-members, artists, scholars, community-members, and volunteers, situating all those involved in the projects as witnesses to testimony as ceremony. Creating and framing these testimonial sites as, or through, ceremony, the artists and facilitators of *Walking With Our Sisters* and *Hair: the performance* formulate an avenue of mobilizing affective responses beyond affect-based recognition, an avenue in which audiences become witnesses by coming to care.

5.3 Coming to Care: Witnessing as Inheriting

Inviting audiences into ceremony, both the design and mediation of *WWOS* and *Hair: the performance* formulate sites of confrontation that foster conciliatory spaces, and promote engagement-with and response-to testimony in a way “that intertwines thought and affect” (Simon, *A Pedagogy of Witnessing*, 215). In “The Terrible Gift: Museums and the Possibility of Hope Without Consolation,” Roger Simon defines this mode of engagement — intertwining a felt and thought sense of experience and response to testimony — as inheriting the terrible gift of testament:

While testament refers to the creation and assemblage of the texts, images and objects that are consigned to those who live beyond one’s death, inheritance is constituted within the physical and cultural processes that pass on a testament... The transitive character of testamentary material names us as heirs; it indicates that this material is rightfully ours to

claim as our own... [and] implicates [us] in the necessity of a response (even if that response is ultimately to ignore or destroy the bequest). (“The Terrible Gift” 194-195)

Simon’s inheritance, then, defines the ethical relationality of witnessing, echoing Whitlock, Gaertner, and Nock — who conceive of testimony as bestowing a responsibility and reciprocity on its recipients beyond mere listening or spectatorship, in ways that intertwine affect and critical thinking. But what Simon’s inheritance adds to the discussion is attention to tangible curatorial practices that can transform a theoretical premise of witnessing into a public remembrance praxis, conceiving of an exhibit as

a space of civic learning, a prelude to conversation and debate about how one makes a relation to the past. It is the very possibility of such learning, which opens the work of inheritance required by a democratic social. It is a moment in which learning is not simply the acquisition of new information, but an acceptance of another’s testamentary address as a possible inheritance, a difficult “gift.” This difficult gift, demanding non-indifference, may open questions, interrupt conventions, and through dialogue and debate set thought the task of transforming the inadequate character of the terms on which I grasp myself and my world. (“The Terrible Gift” 196)

As a mode of witnessing, Simon’s inheritance evokes a praxis of *Zakhor* as it demands an ongoing process of engaged learning, learning to be responsible-for and account for being implicated-in “events beyond one’s memory,” being “called to be responsible to that which has never been my fault of deed” (“The Terrible Gift” 203).

In *A Pedagogy of Witnessing: Curatorial Practice and the Pursuit of Social Justice*, Simon further explores how curation of museum exhibits that address histories and realities of violence and suffering can engage audiences. For Simon, it is precisely through interlacing

“thought and affect” that exhibits can initiate the task of inheritance as they “confront visitors with an insistence that they do what is necessary in order to inherit what they have just seen or heard within an exhibition’s mise-en-scène,” namely that they “engage in a form of work that requires critical thought and judgement” about the ways in which present realities are shaped by the ongoing presence of past events (*A Pedagogy of Witnessing* 208). Like da Silva, Simon’s insistence on confrontation isn’t about triggering strong affective reactions through the use of evocative images; rather, as sites of confrontation, exhibitions (for Simon) and performances (for da Silva) serve to unsettle audiences’ expectations of creative testimony and invoke more critical and complex modes of engagement that deny audiences the pleasures of focusing on their emotional response as fulfilling their moral obligation, and command their focus to testimony’s claims and aims. And while he notes that no practices can guarantee inheritance as an ethical practice of public remembrance, Simon suggests several approaches that can encourage it — from situating specific histories and knowledge systems as guiding the exhibit while leaving room for inconsistencies and contradictions, to prioritizing visuals that are “not easily reduced to illustrations of a given narrative” and instead provoke confrontation, and layering image, text, and audio to engage audiences on varied registers and invite active meaning making work, or sharing visitor responses and encouraging audience members to add their “own views to a dialogue spawned by the exhibit” (*A Pedagogy of Witnessing* 215-216).

Both *Hair: the performance* and *WWOS* certainly form sites of confrontation that push audiences to engage with the inheritance of testimony, confronting visitors with non-colonial knowledge, traditions, and practices, with Indigenous ways of being, honouring, and memorializing, thus demanding visitors’ critical self-reflection on their role as witnesses, and the potential of affect to change pathways on the land when intertwined with situated knowledge.

For Simon, the transformative capacity — changing pathways on the land — is the heart of inheritance, crucial not merely as a mode of ethical relationality in creative testimony, but as mobilizing the transformative potential and political efficacies of exhibits as practices of public memory that foster hopeful futurities. Like Justice’s argument about literature in *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Simon argues that the importance of historical testament artifacts, creative forms of testimony, and their deliberate framing and mediation in exhibitions lies in formulating a “sphere of remembrance” that ties together the past to the present and future, because “what is at stake in this responsibility is my future. More boldly stated, there is no futurity (no break from the endless repetition of a violent past) without memories that are not your own but nevertheless claim you to a responsible memorial kinship and the corresponding thought such a problematic inheritance evokes” (“The Terrible Gift” 203). In this sense, both da Silva’s confrontation and Garneau’s conciliation formulate modes of inheritance.

All three are attuned both to the relational ethics and the transformative capacities that lie at the heart of art-based testimonial events. Their practices for the design and mediation of creative testimonial events evoke relationalities that require audiences to contend with their direct relation to the parties who testify beyond empathic recognition. It is a relationality that demands non-Indigenous audiences to deal with what Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson defines as “intergenerational irresponsibility” (62). Building on Garneau’s notion of conciliation, Robinson’s shift of language from the often invoked ‘responsibility’ to ‘irresponsibility’ requires settler Canadians to contend with their intergenerational inheritance, carrying the burden of inaction and hence invoking their complicity in integrational perpetration of colonial violence (62-63). As da Silva’s confrontation of “making visible without making public” resists spectatorship or engagement that centres identification, shame, or guilt — all of whom Simon

critiques as flawed curatorial frameworks for testimonial work — art as confrontation interlaces affect and thought to account for implication and enter a site of making relations. Garneau’s praxis of inheritance demands even more. Conciliatory spaces confront audiences by framing and navigating the creative event through non-colonial epistemologies, histories, experiences, spirituality, and scholarship that are shared on their own terms, denying audiences complete or settled consumption, yet invoking inheritance by demanding an act of response.

These modes of inheritance are practiced by the artists in *Hair: the performance* and extended to all parties involved in *Walking With Our Sisters*. Both projects testify to colonial violence beyond the constraints of state recognition and redress, they clearly articulate the work of witnessing and witnesses in non-colonial ways, and thus invoke critical engagement without denying nor privileging affect, both modeling and fostering ongoing relationship-making through ceremony. They do so by providing audiences with tangible actions to be performed during the event, practices that honour the testimony and the lives to which they testified, thus acting upon their role as witnesses beyond expressions of empathy, by acting in and through care.

The genealogy of feminist care ethics originates in Carol Gilligan’s *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*, in which she theorizes care through literary analysis that demonstrates the gendered biases in approaches to morality. Gilligan’s work positions care as an ethical approach grounded in relationships and responsibilities, requiring reciprocity between “care giving” and “care receiving”, and mandating accountability to situated contexts (16-17, 21). In my thinking of care ethics as theory and praxis mobilized in art-based testimony, I turn to the work of María Puig de la Bellacasa’s who approaches care ethics through an intersection of material, Marxist, and feminist perspectives. Building on the work of Joan Tronto in *Moral Boundaries* to define care as a web of relationalities and responsibilities

involving “more than human worlds” (3-4, 1), in her introduction to *Matters of Care: Speculative Ethics in More than Human Worlds*, Puig de la Bellacasa argues for care as concrete work of maintenance, shaped by the interconnectedness of “labor/work, affect/affections, [and] ethics/politics” which “are held together” despite tensions and contradictions (5). Configuring care as interlacing labour, affect and ethics/politics is precisely the mode relationality and reciprocity invoked in *WWOS* and *Hair: the performance*, demanding continuous and unsettled engagement, one that is grounded in more than feeling, attuned to both the ethics and politics of the power structures embedded in relationalities within and beyond “human worlds.” In other words, Puig de la Bellacasa’s defines care ethics as a mode of ethical relationality, the kind hoped for in Simon’s inheritance, and evoked in the creative practices of confrontation and conciliation. I suggest that an ethics of care, as a relational web of “labor/work, affect/affections, ethics/politics,” then, is a crucial component of the testimony and witnessing practiced and fostered in *Hair: the performance* and *WWOS*.

In *Hair: the performance*, Goto and L’Hirondelle respond to Morin’s testimony by participating in ceremony — drumming, singing, and gifting. They bear witness by mobilizing their affective responses through the use of traditional knowledge, offering acts of care that situate them as participants rather than bystanders, participants who contend with their relation to the events attested to, as a way of making relations in “more than human worlds.” Goto and L’Hirondelle’s modes of witnessing confront all those in the room with the stakes and responsibility demanded of witnesses, committed to active and care-based participation in making relations, both care-giving and care-receiving. The drummers in the audience are afforded with an opportunity to enact this model, as they are moved to act with care by recording the testimony on the skin of the living witnesses, the drums — transforming their affective response to

witnessing through the politically charged material action of drumming. It is the audiences' affective experience, then, that can activate or fail the ethical dimension of Morin and Goto's testimony, recording it and thus changing pathways on the land, or leaving its call unanswered, its ceremony incomplete.

This combination of ethics, affect, and action is also where care and inheritance meet, within and beyond "human worlds." In *Remembering Vancouver's Disappeared Women: Settler Colonialism and the Difficulty of Inheritance* Amber Dean extends Simon's notion of inheritance beyond the scope of exhibits, to focus on the relationality embedded in inheritance and connections between and to different epistemological traditions. For Dean, while inheritance is future oriented, it demands, as Simon argues, a "reckoning with the past-as-present," not securing it "squarely in the past" but rather contending with its "endless repetition" in the present (73, 151). For such a reckoning to take place, Dean relies on the work of Cree- Métis scholar Deanna Reder, who argues that spaces "where the existence of the spiritual alongside physical dimensions can do the work of reclamation using our [i.e. Indigenous] epistemologies as sources" (61), or, in other words, what I refer to earlier in this chapter as Garneau's notion of conciliatory spaces. Such conciliatory spaces — grounded in and guided by non-colonial epistemologies, practices, histories, and scholarship — can alter "one's ways of being with others" thus honouring the inheritance of the "terrible gifts" of testimony (A. Dean 146-147).

The opportunity to act in/through care and so alter "one's ways of being with others" is afforded to a select few in *Hair: the performance*, but *WWOS* offers this transformative potential to all visitors, as all are confronted with participation in ceremony. Alongside the protocols that guide visitors' presence and movement in the sacred space that hosts the bundle, *WWOS* allows visitors particular practices that mobilize their affective responses to ceremonial actions. On the

left side of the entrance space, where visitors are paused to be guided and smudged, there's "a cedar bentwood box that's been beaded and made by people in Haida Gwaii" and sent to the *WWOS* collective. The box contains tobacco ties prepared by the local committee with knowledge keepers and elders. Visitors are invited to "take the tobacco and walk around, put their prayers into the tobacco, much the same way that you would put prayers into tobacco around a sacred fire... and at the end of the path there is another box to be able to place the tobacco. At the end of the exhibit the elders are advising the keepers of the vamps on what to do with everybody's tobacco" (Belcourt, "MM Interview," min. 00:12-00:59). At the Grande Prairie event, for example, "the tobacco [was] offered to the sacred fire at the end of each day" ("WWOS FAQ Sheet"). In this way, *WWOS* invites visitors to reflect on their experience while honouring the bundle and the women, moving through the space while actively reflecting on their role in this event, their affective reactions, and these women's lives — entrusting all into the tobacco tie in their hand, and offering it as an act of care that partakes in the ceremony. Coming to care in *WWOS* means being moved — ethically, affectively, and intellectually — by testimony as ceremony and thus transforming participatory response to a relational action of care.

Acting with/through care can thus lead to a practice of inheritance, involving epistemological and traditional reclamation, confrontation, and implication, in an attempt to enact bearing witness as making good relations. This approach to shaping "ways of being with others" as making good relations is also what Kyle Powys Whyte (Citizen of the Potawatomi Nation) and Chris Cuomo define as Indigenous and feminist care ethics, framing an ethics of care as "recognizing and learning from one's place in a web of diverse relationships and being drawn by the responsibilities that are embedded in such relationships" (240). In "Ethics of

Caring in Environmental Ethics: Indigenous and Feminist Philosophies,” Whyte and Cuomo discuss how conceptions of care inform and shape environmental advocacy and policy led by Indigenous and feminist activists and ethicists, indicating that these perspectives on care “express anticolonial ethics and epistemologies based on the wisdom of relation-centred traditions and practices,” and grounded in Indigenous sovereignty and stewardship practices, “conceiv[ing] of political autonomy as involving the protection of the responsibility to serve as stewards of lands” (235, 236). Stewardship is the driving force, Whyte and Cuomo note, as “it refers to acknowledgment of one’s place in a web of interdependent relationships that create moral responsibilities, and it recognizes that there are methods and forms of expertise involved in carrying out such responsibilities” — which has been informing environmental advocacy and policy through a variety of practices, from treaties that “were from an indigenous perspective intended to protect caretaking,” to declarations on “the responsibility to care for the land and the waters” (238-239). Care ethics, then, offers a framework and praxis that directly responds to testimony’s call for “recognition, advocacy, responsibility, and accountability” (Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives* 8).

Invoking the call-and-response dynamics of testimony and bearing witness, coming to care means enacting a practice of inheritance. In *WWOS*, the care and labour invested in vamp-making are not only reflected in the objects originally contributed to the bundle, but are evident in the ongoing contributions of vamps to the bundle collection, offering a mode of organized witness response, a practice of inheritance by joining the testimonial account. When the installation opened in fall 2013, it was comprised of 1,725 pairs of vamps. And while the collective did not ask for more pairs to be added, a year later, the bundle had grown to 1,763 pairs, “because 38 pairs have been added by family members” in the five locations where

WWOS was hosted that year. During that time, in May 2014, when the installation was hosted at Algoma University, the site of the former Shingwauk Residential School, 108 children's vamps were added to the collection. In preparation for the event at the site of the former school, working in collaboration with the local hosting groups — the Shingwauk Residential Schools Centre and Shingwauk Kinoomaage Gaming — the collective issued a special call “for children who had never made it home from residential school” (Belcourt *Canadian Art*). The 108 vamps created in response to the special call have been traveling with the *WWOS* bundle and will be housed in a special permanent installation at the site of the old school once *WWOS* closes. As the project concluded in 2019, “there were over 2,000 women's pairs and 300 children's” (Anderson xxii).

Others respond to the witnessing call invoked in *WWOS* beyond the memorial event, through local initiatives for creative community actions. One such example is the formation of beading groups where communities create their own memorial objects and install them in a community space frequented by locals. In Winnipeg, for instance, community members “beaded squares, and then they sewed them into a quilt.” As Belcourt notes, “It's a chance to make it a citywide or town-wide type of thing. These events are really up to the community, and they're not tied to the gallery or the space” (*Canadian Art*). All those involved with the project — from the vamp-makers, to the members of the national-collective, community organizers, event volunteers, and community members who organize and partake in creative responses — choose to devote their time, labour, and care to honour the women, “to acknowledge the grief and torment families of these women continue to suffer; and to raise awareness of this issue and create opportunity for broad community-based dialogue on the issue” (*WWOS*, “About – The

Project”). They were all compelled by Belcourt’s call to act in care as bearing witness to the lives of the women and their loss.

Framing and mediating the projects as sites that encourage inheritance — through confrontation, conciliation, and ceremony — the testimonies of *Hair: the performance*, and *WWOS* promote a call and response dynamic grounded in meaningful, transformative ethics of care. And they are not alone. As *WWOS* and *Hair: the performance* mobilize ceremonial protocols, projects such as *Apology Dice* and “official denial” activate dynamics of call and response to evoke practices of inheritance. Like community members and artists who were compelled by Belcourt’s call, Garneau and Yeh have created *Apology Dice*—a participatory game-based performance— in response to Goto’s witnessing of Morin’s testimony in *Hair: the performance* (Garneau and Yeh 73). While concerned with the ways “this sort of performance might be consumed as emotional spectacle,” and highly suspect of mainstream reconciliation discourse, Garneau and Yeh are moved by Goto and Morin’s partnership, the ways it “disrupts the Indigenous/Settler binary,” and how “[t]his wordless dialogue... occurs in the margins of the colonial script” and creates a space where the artists’ “empathize, console, counsel, and collaborate with each other beneath empire” (75-76). Garneau and Yeh’s creative response to *Hair: the performance* formulates its own independent project, as the audiences of their project are not necessarily familiar with Morin and Goto’s performance. As its own project, *Apology Dice* seeks to explore the possibilities of forming conciliatory relationships between Indigenous and newcomers to Canada, “folks for whom IRS and Canadian colonialism is a recently adopted burden rather than something that directly entangled their ancestors” (75).

Apology Dice formulates a collaborative conversational space, where participants are invited to cast a die using three dice on a large blanket, formulating a sentence that responds to

the idea of apology. “The letter of the first die begins with a capital letter. The second die has no punctuation. The word or words of the third die end in a period. ‘I am/ so/ sorry.’ ‘We are/ not/ sorry.’ ‘They are/ very tired/ of this.’” Participants are asked to read the cast statement aloud and respond to it, describing how it makes them feel (Garneau and Yeh 78). The artists devised the project both as a response and as “a conversation starter,” “a proposition, a provisional answer to the question: given Canada’s horrific legacy of IRS, is reconciliation at all possible? More importantly, what is reconciliation and what form might it take?” (Garneau and Yeh 73).

Garneau and Yeh devise a project that does not testify, but rather one that directly responds to the testimonies shared in *Hair: the performance* and within the framework of the TRC, alongside the state’s official responses of apology and redress. Nonetheless, *Apology Dice* does formulate a creative site of confrontation that interlaces an affective and critical response which audiences are asked to formulate and express in public. As the artists note, for this confrontation to be successful, “*Apology Dice* are only to be rolled in an environment of contemplation and conversation. Participants must be willing to share and discuss their thoughts and feelings” (Garneau and Yeh, “Apology Dice” 78). Casting a die, then, becomes an act of inviting audiences to bear witness to the testimonies of IRS survivors and the practice of apology beyond scripted empathic recognition. In utilizing a direct speech-act mode of call and response (casting the die and responding to the statement), in unsettling expected or given positions and roles (as the formulated phrase shifts the parties spoken of), and by offering and demanding responses to IRS testimonies without allowing the consumption of violence or trauma (simply by invoking the apology in the context of the IRS), *Apology Dice* evokes witnessing through confrontation, responds to the colonial narrative but refuses to be conscripted by it, and requires

an immediate response that, while potentially manifested in haphazard statements, also encompasses the potential of extended engagement.

Garneau and Yeh's project, then, does more than create a site of confrontation, as it formulates a reckoning that models and provides tools for inheritance. Even as it can be enacted as a mockery of reconciliation statements void of action rather than a practice of inheritance, *Apology Dice* serves to disrupt colonial scripts of roles of Indigenous and settler people, and the relationship between them. As it creates a site of "public display of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people working through their parallel construction under colonialism," *Apology Dice* "creates an intellectual and empathetic dissonance that cannot be dissolved by argument" (Garneau and Yeh 76-77). Driven by their own witness response to *Hair: the performance*, Garneau and Yeh confront audiences with direct speech-acts of call and response, formulating *Apology Dice* as a site that mobilizes the affective power of creative testimony and threads it with the self-reflection and critical thinking needed to formulate a response to the casted die, thus pushing beyond symbolic gestures.

Much like *Apology Dice*, *(official denial) trade value in progress* — co-created by settler artist and scholar Leah Decter and Jamie Isaac, an artist and member of Sagkeeng First Nation — offers yet another model of confrontation via direct speech-acts. *(official denial)* responds directly to former Canadian Prime Minister's Stephen Harper's public statement at the G20 Summit in September 2009, claiming that Canada has "no history of colonialism." In their creative response to this statement, Decter and Isaac machine-sew Harper's words on "a 12' x 15' textile object made from reconfigured Hudson's Bay Company (HBC) Point Blankets" (97). Sewn together, the HBC blankets are no longer merely a transactional commodity, nor just a trace of the imperial trading-post economy; rather, the textile object becomes a living document.

The blanket travels across Canada, invited and sponsored by communities who host sewing events during which participants either journal their responses to Harper's statement, or, choose a response recorded in the journal and sew it on the blanket (97). The project was initiated by Decter in 2009 and Isaac joined it in 2010 as "part of the exhibition component of the inaugural Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) event held in Winnipeg in June of 2010" (97). *(official denial)* traveled across Canada for six years (2010-2016) and was hosted by "art galleries, high schools, conferences, inner city community organizations, friendship centres, universities, colleges, First Nations communities, research centres, and private homes from Vancouver Island to Halifax," all of which organized "sewing actions" (Decter and Isaac 97).

Like *WWOS*, *(official denial)* traveled the country, hosted by communities who put in the care and labour of organizing and facilitating the event. More so, like *WWOS* and *Hair: the performance*, Decter and Isaac's project creates a site of confrontation that testifies to colonial violence, "making visible without making public" (da Silva). And like *Apology Dice*, it invites engagement via specific protocols of direct speech-acts of call and response. It seems, then, that with its community-based engagement, direct protocols of participation, and use of visual representation that denies consumption of trauma and violence, *(official denial)* honours the relationality, and demands the accountability and responsibility, embedded in bearing witness to creative testimony. For all audiences, *(official denial)* offers the opportunity to respond, and encourages practices of inheritance as it interlaces affect, self-reflexivity, and critical thinking. For those who chose to sew a response onto the blanket, it even fosters a practice of care, taking the time to choose a phrase from the journal, sew it (and potentially contend with its meaning and relevance), and perhaps even engage in the conversation among the participants sitting around the sewing table.

Relational practices of care, then, invite inheritance and can mobilize witnessing as both an ethics and a politics. But it is not without its own risks. For example, as (*official denial*) invites participants to record their own responses or sew those of others, it provides all participants anonymity. This anonymity can serve to both liberate participants from the need to perform virtue signaling, but at the same time can allow them to avoid accountability or engagement with implication. In “Models of Care and Women’s Writing/ Modèles du care et écriture des femmes,” Dominique Héту addresses the acute and often risky political efficacies of a turn to care, situating her discussion of feminist approaches to care within the ethical turn of literary studies in Canada, and demonstrating how acts of care, like acts of political recognition, can be superfluous or merely performative, virtue signaling, and devoid of actual inheritance. As she encourages further attention to the intersections of care ethics and literary studies (151-152), Héту draws on the works of Quebecois scholars Catherine Mavrikakis and Martine Delvaux, alongside that of Smaro Kamboureli, to suggest how “the ethics of care, as a manifestation of this new ethical criticism,” can disrupt the risks embedded in morality-driven ethics and politics which have been serving (and continue) to perpetuate the same hegemonic structures they seemingly critique (147-148). This is perhaps clearest, in Héту’s attention to Amelia DeFalco’s work on “the central, yet contested position of care within national cultural discourse,” as she “encourage[es] readers to approach the myth of Canadian care with caution” (qtd. in Héту 149). The myth of Canadian care, as situated by DeFalco and Héту is an extension of Canada’s peacekeeping or humanitarian myths, and reading Canadian Literature through care can unveil the ongoing preservation of these myths, as well as disrupt harmful conceptions and practices of care.

As (*official denial*) confronts audiences with Canadian myths, its call-and-response dynamic invokes the potential for inheritance through care, but also encompasses the risk of harm through care as merely a performative response that in effect perpetuates the same myths the project aims to disrupt. Whereas *Hair: the performance* and *WWOS* foster non-colonial spaces of confrontation and practices of engagements, (*official denial*) invites engagement but does not present any protocols or practices that can draw audiences beyond (or perhaps even deny) empathy-centred modes of recognition. When journaling or sewing, audiences can sum up their engagement with statements like “this is so terrible” or “I’m so sorry,” without ever being tasked to carry forth the more complex implications of the denial. This is caused, in part, because (*official denial*) does not disrupt the colonial rules of engagement because it meets non-Indigenous audiences on their terms, so to speak, thus risking audiences’ replicating the mode of recognition that Wakeham describes as “the cunning of reconciliation,” and perhaps even the very denial that Harper’s statement makes. It could be argued that the game-like design of *Apology Dice* does not foster a non-colonial space either; but the phrases created when the die is cast, as opposed to the acts of journaling and sewing, confront participants with their own complicity and relationality to the event and demand a response that does not allow the cloak of anonymity. For non-Indigenous participants, the statements created by the cast dice confront them with their intergenerational irresponsibility, which (*official denial*) does not demand, especially since its response to Harper’s statement only confronts audiences with a historical, rather than ongoing, recognition of colonialism.

As I consider what it means to become a witness to creative testimony and how to mobilize it as means of fostering good relations, I rely on Indigenous and feminist approaches to care ethics that offer a mode to contend with the potentialities of witnessing, without eliding its

risks. This is perhaps where Hétu's work most directly relates to mine. The tenuous balance between care ethics as shaping and reflecting right relations or harming them, positions the ethics of care as a disruptive approach that can change pathways on the land only if audiences are willing to be disrupted by testimony, to contend with their complicity and respond through the very practice of care that will unsettle their collective founding myths. In a wider context, Puig de la Bellacasa's definition of care articulates this precise tension—as she notes that care “intrinsicall[ly] involve[s] an ethical and political intervention,” and good care “is never neutral,” nor is it necessarily good, or settled (6). In other words, care ethics offers a productive framework for coming to witnessing because “[c]are is not only ontologically but politically ambivalent,” and “it is not a notion to embrace innocently” (Puig de la Bellacasa 6-7). The potential for right relations is encompassed in care ethics, partly because an ethics of care does not shy away from the risks of relations, but rather demands engagement with and consideration of the potential for harm as integral to making and sustaining right relations. Citing feminist ethicists of care from health to political and cultural studies, Puig de la Bellacasa demonstrates how the discourse of care can and is being instrumentalized as means of entrenching colonial and neo-liberal political structures both locally and globally (9). DeFalco and Hétu's critique of these very dynamics in Canada's literary field allow a consideration of the ethics of care as a response to CanLit's current moment of reckoning, a moment defined by the stakes of “relationships, community, responsibility” (@aaronpaquette) and offering a way to answer Tuscarora writer Alicia Elliott's call to action “to sit down, assess the criticism and do the work to fix the problems” (97).

Thinking about care as “never neutral” uncovers yet another—perhaps more prevalent—risk of harm encompassed in colonial (and now neo-colonial) ethics and practices of care.

Discussing the relational dynamics between life writers and their subjects, Thomas G. Couser turns to the ethics of care as perceived in the fields of bioethics and anthropology (14). Asking what it means for a life writer to be in good relations with their subjects, Couser's *Vulnerable Subjects: Ethics and Life Writing* draws an analogy between the writer-subject relation and the fiduciary relationship between a physician and their patient, or a researcher and their subjects (17, 27, 30). Couser's turn to ethics in biomedicine and in ethnography, is driven, in part, by the power dynamics embedded in these institutionally formed relationship — as the physician, researcher, and life writer all hold a responsibility to care for subjects' safety, but also have the power to profit from the ways they mediate subjects' lives to wider audiences. This relationality draws Couser to an ethics of care as defining the moral relationships between the parties, driven by the need to protect the vulnerable subjects of life writing. He approaches care as framed by biomedical ethics, as an ethics that “features responsibilities and forms of empathy that a rights-based account may ignore in the attempt to protect persons from invasion by others” (Beauchamp and Childress qtd. in Couser 28-29). In other words, his attention to care ethics is driven by the risk of harm to the vulnerable subjects of life writing (28-29).

Indeed, both the medium and the relationship that Couser addresses are different than the ones I am discussing here, but the harms he is concerned with are the same — namely, the potential of harm caused to the subjects of life writing, or to the communities whose lives are divulged in a life narrative, once the story is shared with audiences. However, care ethics, as taken up by Couser (and formulated by Beauchamp and Childress), also demonstrate how care is not an inherently good or settled approach, that “it is not a notion to embrace innocently” (Puig de la Bellacasa 6-7). Though attuned to institutional power, responsibilities, and harm, their approach to care others the subjects of life writing in multiple ways. First, while they rightly

critique rights discourse, they invoke empathy as an inherently desired and ethical response — which Hartman, Maracle, and Pedwell elaborately problematize. But more importantly, their approach (perhaps unintentionally yet certainly uncritically) perpetuates the very harmful practices of biomedicine and anthropology, because these fields have long and tenuous histories and ongoing realities of harming individuals and communities positioned as objects (rather than subjects) of study, as informants whose knowledge and experience can be mined. In so doing, their approach devoids the “vulnerable subjects” of agency and control over their narratives, even before these are communicated to wider audiences. And, perhaps most acutely to a consideration of testimony, while their framing of relationality does address responsibility it never invokes implication, situating the physician, researcher, writer (and by extension their reader) as benevolent saviours who are asked to mobilize their power for good, but never consider the very harms embedded in their own power.

The feminist and indigenous approaches to care, as presented by Puig de la Bellacasa, Héту, DeFalco, and Whyte and Cuomo, demonstrate how an ethics of care “rooted in [a] broader ethical and political project of unveiling the caring hypocrisies of governing forces” (Héту 148), those othered by anthropology and biomedical ethics. This is also where I see an important convergence between the aims of testimony and certain iterations of feminist and indigenous ethics of care, as they can issue an anti-colonial call and demand a mode of response that disrupts the very structures it protests. As the ethics of recognition privileges affect alone, and while empathy is considered inherently good yet serves to elide power structures, an ethics *and* practice of care has the potential to foster good relations and practices of inheritance and witnessing without eliding risks or harms.

The modes of witness engagement fostered in art-based forms of testimony are complex, layered, and most often rather messy. But as Garneau notes, “art moves us but does not necessarily move us into action... and yet some of us do feel changed, and we continue to make and enjoy art as *if* it mattered, as *if* it made a difference” (“Apology Dice” 76, emphasis in original). Creative testimonies like *Hair: the performance*, *Walking With Our Sisters*, *Apology Dice*, and *(official denial): trade value in progress* push beyond symbolic gestures to model and offer practices of inheritance that can honour, carefully, the response-ability of bearing witness. Invoking either ceremonial protocols (in the case of the former) or direct speech-acts of call and response (for the latter) as participatory practices that honour the work of witnessing, these projects thus formulate conciliatory interventions in which art, as Garneau notes about the work of *Apology Dice*, “can be a site of symbolic dissonance where hegemonies are revealed and challenged in fragments. In our case [i.e. *Apology Dice*], creative conciliations are not answers but displays of possibility” (77). As displays of possibility the projects invoke witnessing in terms of active participation in community-making and care, inviting audiences to inherit not only the truth of their testimony but also the relational ethics they foster. As such, they also perform the work of creative testimony beyond memorializing, as they enact non-colonial, communal modes of public engagement and cultural pedagogy. But, as both art and testimony that confront their audiences with practices of inheritance, I ask if the projects themselves can be inherited in some form, whether they are afforded an afterlife.

5.4 The Afterlives of Testimony — Traces and Tracing

Garneau’s statement about art mobilizing action opens *The Land We Are*, a collection of essays by artists and writers who seek to “unsettle the politics of reconciliation.” *The Land We Are*, published in 2015 by ARP Books, is co-edited by Métis artist Gabrielle L’Hirondelle Hill

and settler scholar Sophie McCall. In this collection, L'Hirondelle Hill and McCall curate threads of an ongoing creative and critical conversation, a conversation in which artists and writers collaboratively explore “what can and does art *do* to bring about the necessary process of decolonizing the mind that intellectuals and anti-colonial struggles across generations and continents have invoked?” (2-3, italics in original) Among its essays, *The Land We Are* curates narrative reflections of *Hair*, *Apology Dice*, (*official denial*) and *WWOS*, written by the artists or facilitators of the projects, offering narrative remainders of the testimonial events.

Such remainders, I argue, can afford creative testimonies an afterlife, potentially extending their cycle. As Whitlock notes, due to their urgency, testimonies (creative and non) have life cycles, they are temporary structures associated with specific campaigns and era, finite flourishes ‘that *last* in time, but only for *some* time’, that exhaust their potential” (Moretti qtd. in Whitlock, *Postcolonial Life Narratives* 5). Subsequent publications and projects expose creative testimony to wider audiences, throughout a longer duration of time, and in mediums other than the original production, thus encompassing the potential to extend the urgency of creative testimony and its capacity for change. *The Land We Are* is certainly one subsequent project that aims to do so, but the four projects have been reformulated in a myriad of mediums and projects — from a video recording of *Hair: the performance* accessible on the residency’s massive open online course (MOOC) website and on *YouTube*, to a retrospective exhibit of Morin and Goto’s collaborations at the Vancouver Art Gallery featuring the video as well as drums and other objects from the performance, and a co-authored book of essays historicizing and contextualizing *WWOS*. With the shift in mediums and mediation, with reach to audiences other than those originally intended, a question arises — how can subsequent productions, i.e. re-mediations of creative testimony, invoke witnessing that pushes beyond empathy, to promote modes of

engagement that honour the responsibility, accountability, and relationality modeled and practiced in the original productions? In other words, what modes of engagement can subsequent productions foster in order to afford testimony an afterlife?

All four projects invoke witnessing through participation, but their re-mediations in text, video, or museum exhibit cannot necessarily maintain this practice. However, that does not mean the re-mediated versions cannot invite active engagement in meaning making, and they can certainly reflect and model the community work and acts of care enacted in the projects themselves. In this sense, re-mediations of creative testimony can be more than mere remainders, as they can convey traces of the original event, invoking testimonial practices, sites, and protocols, modeling ways in which art can call on audiences and readers to bear witness, by inviting engaged meaning-making and relation-building work. Marlene Kadar defines “autobiographical traces” as historical documents, personal or official archival materials, oral histories, or creative practices that record fragments of life which stand-in for life stories and auto/biographical practices (224). Emerging from her search for testimonial accounts of the *Porrajmos* — meaning, the Devouring, the term used by the Roma people to describe their persecution and genocide during the Holocaust — Kadar turns to “autobiographical traces” as “legitimate hermeneutical source[s]... replete with stories about lives lost when finished stories do not exist” (224, 226). For Kadar, traces provide more than bodies of evidence; they are “traces of memories” that “reference verifiable historical information, but... express more than what happened” (228, 243). Traces, as Kadar suggests, record an experience rather than tell the whole story of an event, they are palimpsests that record a haunting rather than evidence, affording writers and artists both objects and a method that “allow a belated witnessing” (227), one that resists passive or voyeuristic consumption of trauma. Rather, as fragments that do not

tell the whole story of an event, traces draw attention to the modes of engagement demanded in reading as witnessing.

As palimpsests, traces can be sites of confrontation that carry forth inheritance, the ‘terrible gift’ of testimony. Kadar finds her traces in archival materials and oral histories that testify to historical events, but, building on da Silva’s work, I would like to suggest that traces can be extended to consider the creative testimony (e.g. *Hair* and *WWOS*) or creative witness-responses (like *Apology Dice* and (*official denial*)) as the recorded event, traced in subsequent productions that attempt to carry forth both the modes of witnessing and the historical truths attested to. In so doing, the concept of traces invites engagement with the historical events, creative forms of testimony, and the ways they invoke witnessing — thus tracing not only the traumatic history and its ongoing legacies, but also, and perhaps more importantly, attesting to the ways in which communities seek to process, cope, rebuild, remember, promote political change, and even heal in the aftermath. *The Land We Are*, the video recording of *Hair: The Performance*, *How Do We Carry the Land?* VAG exhibit and catalogue, and *Keetsahnak: Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women*, formulate such traces — as both objects and method — devising varied strategies that attempt to foster, model, and indeed demand accountable modes of consumption, invoking practices of inheritance of the historical event and the creative response.

In many ways, this is what the essays in *The Land We Are* attempt, as the book is grounded in lived experiences that testify to Canada’s violent colonial legacies and realities. Throughout the collection, writers and artists situate themselves and their audiences as testifying and bearing witness, while the essays derive their authority from what Leigh Gilmore defines in *Autobiographics* as “the cultural power of truth telling,” namely the politics and power dynamics

that shape and police “a specific culture’s notion of what truth is, who may tell it and who is authorized to judge it” (3, 107). Bringing together creative sites of truth-telling, *The Land We Are* speaks directly to discourses of political recognition, apology, and reconciliation actively disrupting and resisting narratives of unified ‘moving on’ or ‘healing’ through art (12-13). As L’Hirondelle Hill and McCall note, it does do by offering records of literary and art-based projects, many of which were collaboratively produced by Indigenous and non-Indigenous artists and scholars, some are part of long-term collaborative relations, and all of whom are set directly vis-à-vis Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

This framework situates the creative projects and the essays that record within specific and conscripting protocols and discourses of testimony. However, as traces of testimonial creative conciliations, the projects and essays defy such limitations, and become engaging sites of confrontation and reckoning. As traces of creative testimonies, the essays in *The Land We Are* carry-forth the truth of these projects as they resist or outright refuse co-optation into official state-sanctioned protocols of reconciliation, reject being coded into the language-of and consumed-as human-rights claims, and deny readers the consumption of trauma, loss, or even the artistic testimony itself. As fragments, they confront readers with the limits of consumption and deny whole or settled knowledge, “making visible without making public,” inviting readers to practice modes of reading that demand labour and struggle as a form of ethical response, inviting them to join the conversation, by labouring to read.

From its title onward, *The Land We Are* curates a polyphonic conversational volume in both thematic and structural terms. L’Hirondelle Hill and McCall open the collection with textual epigraphs by *Métis* artist and scholar David Garneau and Yellowknives-Dene scholar Glen Coulthard, followed by an image of Anishinaabekwe artist Rebecca Belmore’s *Ayum-ee-aawach*

Oomama-mowan: Speaking to their Mother. Individually and collectively, these textual and visual epigraphs open the collection's main thread — exploring the political efficacies of art. Belmore's work responds to “the 78-day standoff between the Mohawks of Kanehsata:ke and the Canadian Armed Forces” in the summer of 1990, and offers a model of art-based political activism that “asserts a role for art and artists at sites of dissent” (L'Hirondelle Hill and McCall 1). The epigraph citing Garneau refers to his statement that “art moves us but does not necessarily move us to action,” reflecting on the kinds of changes that creative testimony mobilizes beyond the artistic event. As Garneau's words draw the potentialities embedded in Belmore's creative-activism, when coupled with Coulthard's challenge to the politics of recognition as “promis[ing] to reproduce the very configurations of colonial power that Indigenous peoples' demand for recognition have historically sought to transcend,” the epigraphs both complement and challenge one another (L'Hirondelle Hill and McCall ix). The visual and textual epigraphs, then, set the threshold of *The Land We Are*, drawing attention to the truth-value of art, the potentialities and limitations of art-based political action, the power and responsibilities of audiences, and the dangers embedded in discourses of recognition. While each of the epigraphs stands on its own right, none of them allow readers to consume the artist's or scholar's whole work and it is only by threading them together that the intersections and tensions at the heart of the book arise. These very thresholds bring me to suggest the concept of traces, as both objects and method of call and response in art and its study.

As traces, individual essays do not tell the whole story of historical trauma, nor narrativize the art projects, but record the experience of bearing witness through art. In so doing, the essays featured in this volume do not merely offer a creative testimony, or a record of one; rather, they are traces of both the traumatic events and the artistic response. Jonathan Dewar's

essay, for example, reflects on the experience of co-hosting *Walking with Our Sisters* in Sault Ste. Marie, at the Algoma University Campus, at the site of the former Shingwauk Residential School. Dewar's essay does not discuss the vamps, nor share the stories of the women whose lives are commemorated. Rather, his essay traces a witness response, reflecting on the experience of co-hosting and co-facilitating the installation, accounting to the relationality, reciprocity, and responsibility of working collaboratively with a community of survivors, and what it means to do so within the intuitional setting of a western academic space that inhabits the same physical structures where abuse was perpetrated. Rather than mine the stories of the women, consume the families' responses, or muse on his own affective recognition, Dewar's essay models a witness response invested in the care and relationality that are framed by the ceremonial practices of *WWOS*, and are not limited to affect nor recognition.

When considering trace objects as palimpsests, then the essays also offer a recording of the ways in which the artistic testimonies themselves are formed as traces and tracing. The vamps are traces of the women's lives and their loss, the community venue that hosts the installation is a trace of colonial violence, and tobacco ties are traces of visitor's care. In *Hair: the performance*, the locks of Goto's hair, the wooden box which Goto gifts to Morin (holding her hair), the meditative drawing of children's hair, the ceremonial drums — they are all traces, palimpsests that record the moment and experience of loss, as well as an act of conciliation, the care-work of making relation. But traces aren't merely the physical objects. The drumming, L'Hirondelle's song-lines, the studio that hosted the thirty-day meditative drawing and the performance itself, as well as the video recording and still images of the event, are all traces of the testimonial event, of bearing witness to loss, mourning, and acts of care.

“Hair,” the written version of *Hair: the performance*, records these traces while also carrying forth the artists’ mode of engagement with one another, in their attention to community, reciprocity, and care. In *Hair: the performance* Morin bears witness to the moment of loss, while both Goto and L’Hirondelle bear witness to his testimony. Neither one of them is an eye witness to the actual event, but all have experienced its effects, and more importantly, the three artists take-on the embodied responsibilities of being witnesses, “holding the story with [their] heart” (Nock). Audience members in the room, chosen to play the drums, are also invited to this mode of witnessing, as their drumming serves to keep a record of the testimony on the skin of the drums (178). *Hair: The Performance* was created as a live event, one that invites its audience to ceremony, encompassing the manifold ways in which the objects used for ceremony and the people who partake in it bear witness and trace the testimony through acts of care. But when extended beyond the live event, the re-productions are no longer part of ceremony, and the dangers of spectatorship — rather than witnessing — may arise.

The video of the performance seemingly offers the most direct record of the live testimonial event, filming the performance including the prefacing and coda statements, offering an eye-witness account for those not present at the residency, and directing the focus of spectatorship to the artists’ ceremonial testimony and witness response. The essay version of the performance, featured in *The Land We Are*, presents a similar approach to tracing *Hair: the performance*. Though signed by Goto and Morin, the essay is narrated from the perspective of an audience member who bears witness to their creative testimony. The audience perspective, rather than an artist statement, allows describing as well as offering a critical reflection of the artists actions and interactions, without providing a full narrative or explanation. In this way, the essay not only traces the experience of bearing witness to testimony, reflecting the labour and care

enacted in the event, but also sets the limits of knowledge communicated to audiences who did not partake in the original testimony at the residency.

So, where, then, do the risks of spectatorship arise? In the mediums of both traces. The performance articulates testimony and witnessing through ceremony, but neither video nor the textual record can (or should) carry-forth testimony as ceremony. And if ceremony is not carried forth, can new audiences — those reading the essay or watching the video — become witnesses, and if so how? The video trace provides what is arguably the most direct and accurate recording of the event. But that is all the video can do — record — as it situates audiences in a spectator (rather than participant) position, thus fostering a rather passive mode of consumption. While the video version does not extend the witnessing afforded in the performance, in “Hair,” the essay, the same choice of recording the performance from the position of a witness in the audience allows the artists to carry forth the trace as a site of confrontation and conciliation. In other words, in the essay, this same perspective affords the artists “making visible without making public” (da Silva) both the trauma and the creative testimony, maintains the performance’s models of creative testimony and witness response through ceremony, and carries-on their reliance on non-colonial epistemologies and ongoing care-based community relations as the guiding principles of the event. While they cannot control the consumption of the essay — i.e. readers can always skip forward, skim, quit reading, etc. — the production of the essay as an integral part of *The Land We Are* and the use of the narrating voice guide readers through the witness reflection. In this sense, the essay affords the performance an afterlife that honours its modes of creative testimony and witness response.

The visual manifestation of “Hair” (the essay) features images of the performance alongside a prose narrative that while co-authored is narrated in a singular voice. Its multi-vocal

aspect is only reflected via occasional changes in font colour from black to red or yellow – flagging the interruption or addition of notes or perspective to the main narrative. Other co-authored essays, like the ones by Yeh and Garneau or Decter and Isaac, take a different approach, with each contributor writing and signing a different section of the essay, offering their individual perspectives on the projects from their design to their unfolding and effects. In “Reflections on Unsettling Narratives of Denial,” Decter and Isaac share the familial histories, intellectual discussions, and artistic endeavours that have brought them to create (*official denial*). Their reflections become a trace of the project itself, addressing the object of the HBC blanket and its role in histories of denial, the statement the project responds to, and the aim of calling participants to bear witness to denial beyond passive empathy and through creative action (journaling and sewing) (113). In the project, Decter and Isaac use historical documents, statements, and objects to formulate a creative site of speaking back to the state; in a sense, their project utilizes physical and official traces of colonial violence, i.e. the HBC blanket and Harper’s statement of denial. During the project, the sewn object becomes a palimpsest not only of the violence and denial, but of the myriad of responses and the communal care that aim to rebuke Harper’s words and make visible the violence the blanket is drenched in. In the book, the artists thread the official and creative traces as visual and textual epigraphs alongside their own creative and critical reflections, extending the project’s method of tracing and conversational ethics to the essay, while making transparent the communal care and labour that were invested in the venture as a whole.

But traces can do even more than draw the potentialities and limitations of knowing and experiencing testimony; perhaps the most important role of traces as method is their ability to demand audiences to contend with their own complicity. The essay version of “Apology Dice:

Collaboration in Progress,” offers Garneau and Yeh’s individual perspectives on what brought them to create the project, pondering the effects of art-based political action, as much as reflecting on the success and failure of this attempt. What carries through both the project and the essay is the artists’ demand of audiences to contend with their complicity in Canada’s colonial realities and legacies, mobilizing the very politics of recognition and apology that the project critiques. In this way, “Apology Dice” invokes Robinson’s notion of “intergenerational responsibility,” or rather “a phrase that names the continued ignorance of Indigenous histories and lack of civic responsibility for what it is: intergenerational perpetration” (62-63). Robinson’s call certainly describes the mode of engagement fostered in Decter and Isaac’s (*official denial*) *trade value in progress*, encouraging intergenerational settlers as well as new-comers to partake in the project. But I would argue that Robinson’s call is also reflected in the dynamics of “Apology Dice,” as it draws attention to personal alongside institutional responsibility, and inaction as perpetration, invoking an unsettling praxis of inheritance.

When a project like *The Land We Are* is read as a collection of palimpsests, recording layers upon layers of truth-acts and calls to action the collection’s conversational ethics emerges, not just as a thematic thread, but as the demand it makes of its readers. From the opening epigraphs by Belmore, Garneau, and Coulthard, to the varied modes of production that gesture transparency and collaboration (interviewing, episodic or conversational co-authorship, and editing), the frequent paratextual practices (still images, epigraphs), and the attention to intertextuality between the chapters, *The Land We Are* uses tracing as a production and consumption practice. In this sense, the co-edited collection suggests a model of tracing that fosters a reading method, inviting readers to bear witness without privileging an affect-based ethics of recognition. The collection encourages readers to practice modes of reading that

demand labour and struggle as a form of ethical response, joining the conversation by re-learning how to read.

Reading through the prism testimonial traces — as objects and method of creative work and its study — demands active meaning-making through paratextual thresholds, intertextual webs, and situated contextual routes. Traces are messy and difficult, they demand work, resist passive consumption, and deny audiences' settled knowledge or interpretation. Palimpsests of creative projects, traces reflect on experiences of testifying and bearing witness, voicing the calls of these projects, and calling on audiences to consider their roles, responsibilities, and response, offering extended sites of “belated witnessing,” one that carries forward the truth-value of testimony and the affective, critical, and reciprocal modes of engagement demanded of witnesses. As I come to the end of this work, Garneau's epigraph haunts me – “art moves us but does not necessarily move us to action.” As I think through modes of mediating testimony and models of ethical responses to creative testimony, Kadar's traces afford it an afterlife.

Conclusion: Becoming A Witness

As I was completing this project on the relationality and ethics of bearing witness to creative testimony, I found myself, in many ways, right where I started. In July 2019 I was in Batoche, Saskatchewan, attending the closing ceremony of *Walking With Our Sisters*. This commemorative installation, which opened six years earlier in Edmonton, was the very event that triggered my foray into my work on witnessing.

6.1 October 2013

I have arrived in Canada as an international graduate student a few weeks before visiting *Walking With Our Sisters*. The installation is at the atrium of the University of Alberta's Telus Centre, and it has confronted me more forcefully than I could ever have imagined. It had been only a couple of weeks since I began learning about the institution of Indian residential schools in a graduate seminar led by Dr. Keavy Martin; and the installation, recommended by Martin, was my first encounter with another profound reality of ongoing colonial violence in Canada. This was the first time I entered an Indigenous space (or rather a conciliatory space as Garneau would describe it), and the first time I was introduced to Indigenous ceremonial protocols. This knowledge was new to me, but what gripped me were the elements that felt so intimately familiar. Walking beside the red cloth covered in pairs of moccasin-tops triggers lived and intellectualized knowledge I have not thought of for well over a decade. I found myself confronted with the understanding that I have entered a testimonial space, and that I am being called to bear witness to the lives and loss of Indigenous women and girls.

The installation's mode of commemoration and protest, reclaiming public sites, testifying not only to a personal account but as a public practice and collective praxis, defied the

conventions that I have come to expect in sites of creative testimony. As I realized that I had entered not only a site of ceremony, but a space of testimony, the installation lingered with me. I had been challenged both by sites of commemoration and testimonial spaces before; and like *Walking With Our Sisters*, the testimonial spaces that I had lived with have always attended both to the lives and the losses, commemorated the uniqueness of individuals as well as the oppressors' erasure of their humanity. Yet, many of these public (and often official) testimonial spaces prominently featured, if not privileged, the trauma, the victimhood, and the graphic aspects of abuse, in the name of historic record and public memory. *Walking With Our Sisters* refused all these. As the installation mobilized a collective of traces that encompass both the care and the pain of the lives and their loss, it refused the gruesome images and resisted the display of detailed personal information. Instead, it instilled visitors with the responsibility to remember the people and how they were loved and cared for, rather than only see them as victims. As both the individual vamps and the image of the collection in its entirety confronted me, the installation made me question the ways with which audiences are invited to bear witness, to reflect on the implications of how we publicly mobilize witnessing through affective response, and to consider the potential encompassed in other, perhaps ceremonial, models of testimony.

6.2 June 2018

It has been over four years since I first visited the installation, and I have come to see the vamps for a second time. I have been working on this project for over two years now and am commencing my writing on art-based testimony and traces. My husband Avi and I drive to visit the installation at the Art Gallery of Grande Prairie, Alberta. The protocols and smudging are more familiar, and we both know so much more than we did about the histories and realities of

colonialism and dispossession on this land. The space was organized differently and I noticed different vamps, which may have also been made and contributed after the opening ceremony. I noticed, too, that the audience is different, perhaps because this is not a university campus, or since the gallery building is also the city's public library and cultural centre, and perhaps because the city is smaller and has an active friendship centre. Throughout this visit, I was confronted by the sense of community that *Walking With Our Sisters* seemed to foster in this space. I noticed people — visitors, organizers, passers-by — engaging with one another as fellow community members, sharing in the work to commemorate the lives, protest the loss, and labour to mobilize acts of care as an ongoing commitment to being in or working towards right relations. Indigenous people and settlers, newly arrived Canadians and ones whose families have been here for generations — are all here, together. I noticed people inhabit this space as one defined by community work, a space that contends with loss and protests abuse not through universalizing pain, but rather through particular, situated, and accountable remembrance.

6.3 August 2019

August 2019 was my third visit to the installation, and this time I was volunteering with the local team for the project's closing ceremony at the Back to Batoche historical site in Saskatchewan. I have been spending several hours each day greeting visitors, visiting with collective members, other volunteers, and grandmothers. In Batoche, the vamps were laid on the red cloth on a pathway nestled between trees and leading towards the South Saskatchewan river. The cloth was over 600 feet long, and at its end visitors have been invited to leave their tobacco bundles, or other gifts. I've been visiting the vamps, walking alongside them, on each of my days at the site, and they have been cared for, smudged, sung to, covered and uncovered by

volunteers, elders, grandmothers, and collective members from across Canada, the US, and Mexico.

I've been thinking a lot about community work during these few days, and how *Walking With Our Sisters* created and brought together numerous communities. But, as I was walking alongside the vamps, my thoughts turn to care, to ways of making visible without making public, and to the significance of gestures like tear bags and tobacco bundles. The vamps were laid in pairs, one pair in front of another, leading towards the water and then back to the trail. As I was walking, I began to think about how they are individual, unique traces. Each one is a trace of a different person and path, of different kinds of love and loss. I think how testimonial traces create space to honour and remember the individual, situating them as part of a community without truncating them into a collective image. And yet, there's also power in the collective image. Raising my head to look at the trail, I could not see it in its entirety as there were bends in the pathway. It was only as I reached the end that, all of a sudden, my eyes were drawn to the hill of tobacco or sage bundles left by visitors near the end of the cloth. I was struck by the ways the vamps invoke witnessing. They illuminate ways of caring for the individual without divulging any details or relinquishing any agency, being careful not to frame the women as victims or define them solely by their loss, yet concurrently highlighting the extent of colonial and misogynistic violence by the sheer number of traces (with over two-thousand pairs laid out on the pathway).

As I continued walking, I kept thinking that the work of caring for mourning and remembrance is ethical relationality work. As such, it formulates points of encounter and departure that demand learning as well as teaching, listening, processing, and changing one's ways of being with others through entering and inhabiting community. In this way, as I was

walking, I realized that *Walking With Our Sisters* has been teaching me a whole new way of coming to testimony, a new register to practice zakhor; guiding me to become a witness.

6.4 June 2020

Since my first visit to the commemorative installation, *Walking with Our Sisters* has lingered with me, and seven years later it continues to do so. As I have been completing the revision process of the project, I've been thinking a lot about the command of זָכוֹר (zakhor), wondering whether it is directed first to the remembrance of the people or the trauma, the lives or the losses? Mostly, I think about the counterpart to “never forget,” the command of “never again,” as the act of witnessing demands both — to actively remember and to work for change, through listening as well as retelling. As such, this project offers a modest contribution to the ways we honour the relationality and ethics of bearing witness to creative testimony. It articulates an urgent need to push beyond empathy and suggest entry points to practices of right relations, practices that have the potential to foster reading as witnessing, that confront our implication and act with care. Working on this project has afforded me both hopeful experiences and despairing encounters with the transactions of testimony, as my engagement with the objects explored here contours both the transformative potentialities and the risks embedded in the communication of these acts of remembrance and protest. Yet, despite of the positive tone in the analysis of these objects, I do not offer this project as celebratory work. Rather, I present it as a site for further troubling of testimony's transactions, not because we ask too much of creative testimony, but because we are asking too little of ourselves as readers. It is time we demand more, time to contend with our acts of reading as witnessing, in Canada and beyond.

Notes

1. Paquette makes this statement on Twitter on December 28th, 2016, with regards to the Joseph Bodyen controversy. The thread of Tweeter posts by Paquette reads:

“Attempts to make it about DNA are in keeping with the whole blood quantum debacle. This is about relationships, community, responsibility” ... “If Joseph Boyden had those three things covered, and not a drop of indigenous blood, there wouldn't be a conversation happening right now” ... “Relationships, Community, Responsibility. Where are you from? Who are your people? If you can't answer those, just be honest about it” ... “Honesty. It's the root of relationships, of responsibility and what ties community together. Even if the answer hurts, the trust remains” (@aaronpaquette).

2. For additional discussions of multicultural critique, beyond Himani Bannerji's *The Dark Side of the Nation*, see Arun Mukherjee's *Oppositional Aesthetics: Readings from a Hyphenated Space*, Snjea Gunew's *Haunted Nations: The Colonial Dimensions of Multiculturalism*, Smaro Kamboureli's *Scandalous Bodies: Diasporic Literature in English Canada*, Neil Bissoondath's *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, and Peter Li's “The Multicultural Debate” and *Destination Canada: Immigration Debates and Issues*.

3. In this project I address theories of recognition in political and cultural contexts. In particular, I focus on discourses of political recognition and theories of recognition in autobiographical and reading studies contexts. I do not, however, aim to historicize the theoretical scopes of this concept, nor posit a theory of recognition in either of these contexts. As a result, I do not engage with psychoanalytical perspective of recognition and do not provide an overview of the concept dating back to Hegel. For further information about a historicizing of political thought on the topic of recognition see Taylor as well as Nancy Fraser and Axel

Honneth's *Redistribution or Recognition: A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, and Simon Thompson's *The Political Theory of Recognition: A Critical Introduction*, whereas for engagement with psychoanalytical approaches to recognition in testimonial literatures see Kelly Oliver's *Witnessing: Beyond Recognition*.

4. As Fuller and Rehberg Sedo portray, research on reading as a shared social practice is grounded in the work of feminist scholars Janice Radway and Elizabeth Long (*Reading Beyond the Book* 32-33). For more information on the emergence of research regarding reading as a shared social practice, please see Radway's *Reading the Romance* and Long's "Textual Interpretation as Collective Action."

5. Over the years, *Canada Reads* has had a French-language counterpart — *Le Combat des Livres*, which first aired in 2004 on *Ici Radio Canada Première*, and with the exception of a break between 2015-2017 continues to host an annual debate with different themes and book selections than the English-speaking version. The aim and format of both editions is the same, and both occasionally feature works in translation across the two languages ("Combat National des Livres").

6. *The Encyclopedia of Life Writing* states that the term Autofiction emerges in France and is coined by Serge Doubrovsky in 1977 to describe "fiction, made from strictly real events and facts" (Gratton 86). Along with its counterpart, biofiction, autofiction relies on the inevitable overlap between autobiography and fiction, and challenges distinct divisions between the truth value of autobiography and the representation of fiction, stressing that autobiography is always a performance and never a transparent medium (Gratton 86). Both forms, deeply rooted in the creative and critical works of Doubrovsky and Barthes, rely on views of the individual "subject as a destabilized agency"; a view, which, in turn, requires "new approaches to autobiographical

performance, practices in which something like ‘fiction’ would not be automatically disqualified or figuratively concealed” (Gratton 86). In their discussion of autofiction, Smith and Watson add that “[w]hile autobiographical storytelling employs fictional tactics and genres, however, autofiction uses textual markers that signal a deliberate, often ironic, interplay between the two modes” (*Reading Autobiography* 259-260).

7. Fuller and Rehberg Sedo indicate that the type of books featured in MREs are “discussible” (*Reading Beyond the Book*, 48). Selected texts also “must never be too “difficult” to decode in terms of their formal elements” and most often include “contemporary fiction in a realist genre” (*Reading Beyond the Book*, 27). Since its debut in 2002, the show has almost exclusively featured novels (as well as one collection of short stories and the occasional book of poetry), with the exception of four seasons that integrated non-fiction texts. The 2012 series was the first, and thus far only, season dedicated entirely to non-fiction. Following the 2012 “True Stories Edition,” several seasons’ short lists have featured fiction, autofiction, and non-fiction texts alongside one another. The most prominent among those seasons have been the 2015 and 2019 series.

Between 2012 and 2018, and with the exception of 2015, the *Canada Reads* shortlist included *The Right to Be Cold* by Sheila Watt-Cloutier in 2017, and *Precious Cargo* by Craig Davidson, alongside *Forgiveness* by Mark Sakamoto in 2018, the latter of which won the season. On the second day of debates during the 2019 season, viewer Katie Gouett asked on the show’s YouTube live-stream chat “how were the books selected as the final five?” the person speaking on behalf of the CBC noted that “the panelists share their reading interests with CBC and we work together to come up with the titles they may be interested in. So, the panelists end up reading a lot of different recommendations” (“Canada Reads 2019 Day Two Chat Replay”

YouTube min. 1:07:25, 1:08:23). Nonetheless, since both publishers and general readers began nominating texts for the long list in 2011, further research is required to explore whether attention to non-fiction is a trend initiated by readers, publishers or show producers, and how both the long and short lists are then compiled.

Another interesting aspect has to do with a shift in Indigenous content on the show. Of the fifteen longlisted books for 2019, only two were written by Indigenous authors — a collection of short stories entitled *This Accident of Being Lost* by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg), and *Heart Berries: A Memoir* by Terese Marie Mailhot (Seabird Island Band). But none of them make it to the short list. 2019, then, becomes the first season since 2013 that, while featuring three works of non-fiction and one autofiction, does not have a single text authored by an Indigenous writer, and reverts exclusively to the image of Canada as a multicultural immigrant nation. This aspect has not been acknowledged in any of the live debates, but flagged by readers on Twitter, e.g. Dessa Ghost's tweet on March 26, 2019 (@YoDessa) and brought up by a reader during the post-finale Q&A ("2019 Day Four" min. 1:10:00). Since the show's inception, content by Indigenous authors has been varying in numbers and frequency. In 2004 Thomas King's *Green Grass, Running Water* was included in the short list, followed in 2006 by *Three-Day Road* by Joseph Boyden, whose claims to Indigenous heritage has been disputed following an APTN National News investigation in 2016. The next time the work of an Indigenous author is featured is seven years later, with Richard Wagamese's *Indian Horse*, followed by Boyden's *The Orenda*, which wins the 2014 season. The 2015 includes Thomas King's *The Inconvenient Indian*, Tracey Lindberg's *Birdie* is included in 2016, *The Right to Be Cold* by Sheila Watt-Cloutier and *The Break* by Katherena Vermette both make

the 2017 finalist list, and *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline in 2018. Of these nine books, only two are works of non-fiction (and the others are novels).

8. In *American Indian Literary Nationalism* Jace Weaver (Cherokee), Craig Womack (Oklahoma Creek-Cherokee), and Robert Warrior (Osage) define Indian Literary Nationalism as a critical approach to the study of Indigenous literatures, one that situates Indigenous knowledge systems and political subjectivity at the centre of critique. Indigenous literature, they argue, is made up of nation-specific canons and that Indigenous literary scholars are responsible to the communities they write about (Weaver, Womack and Warrior 15). For Weaver, Womack and Warrior, Indian Literary Nationalism is a critical practice of responsible relations within and between Indigenous communities. Tol Foster adds that Indian Literary Nationalism can practice nation-specific critique only by considering a regional frame, a “cosmopolitan tribal identity... shaped not only by a nuanced and realist understanding of one’s own group, but of the many relations it has with groups outside of it” (278). His approach to Indian literary nationalism, then, reads from a nation-specific position, for the well-being of the national-community, while in relation to both the Indigenous and settler communities that surround it. In Canada, this approach has been promoted by Indigenous literary scholars like Kristina Fagan [now Bidwell] (NunatuKavut) and Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee), alongside political scientists Glen Coulthard’s (Yellowknives Dene) and Audra Simpson (Mohawk).

9. Indeed, McKegney’s ethical strategies demand engagement that far exceeds text-based reading, and he is far from alone in this demand, as Fagan and Justice are merely two of the numerous Indigenous and settler scholars who call researchers for active engagement, and building sustainable relations with the communities whose works researchers study. The impetus and demand for community engagement are crucial for scholars’ ethical engagement in research

and pedagogy. My argument joins their endeavours as it further develops reading approaches that promote interconnected and specific ethical engagement with testimony, not as a replacement of community engagement but as a crucial first step that fosters responsible relational practices. As the addressees of testimony, readers' primary ethical responsibility is to the text and the claims articulated in it. Testifiers labour painfully and carefully to share their testimonial account with audiences. As such, our first and foremost responsibility — as Halfe demands — is to listen to their testimony, not merely in terms of content but through the ways it communicates its claims. My focus on text-based engagement is grounded, in part, in my attention to a wider scope of readers (both scholarly and non) rather than addressing only scholars within a particular field who have access to a certain framework of knowledge, resources, and methods.

Further, my attention to text-based ethics of reading and interpreting testimony also reflects a concern with the risks of harm to both communities and researchers, given the nature of testimonial transactions as well as current structures of academic research and training. As we consider the ethical imperatives of academic research—when we ask “who profits”—we must also consider its counterparts, addressing “with whose labour” and “at whose expense?” This is particularly crucial when research engages with historical and ongoing communal traumas, when the risk isn't merely epistemological or ontological gaps in approaches that may serve to perpetuate neo-colonial perspectives rather than promote de-colonizing ones, but also further encompass the danger of harming individuals' and communities' physical and mental well-being. For example, author interviews have often been purported as an ethical mode of community engagement in literary research, but such practices encompass their own dangers – not only because the scholar holds power in navigating and interpreting the conversation, or because consent is both culturally and venue dependent, but rather, because testimony often encompasses

authors' engagement with their (or their community's) trauma. So, how can the scholarly interviewer be accountable in terms of triggering or responsibly discussing and responding to traumatic experiences? And what does the community benefit from the publication of an interview in a scholarly journal or a dissertation? Interviews can be re-traumatizing, they can be mis-representative, they can simply fall flat. Mostly, even if they are successful, interviews most often simply return the bones of interpretation and translation to the author as representative of their community, essentially re-positioning them as informants, and asking testifiers and communities to put-in the additional labour of explaining their own testimony and its claims.

But the risks to communities cannot merely be solved a matter of rethinking research training in interdisciplinary and collaborative ways, driven by community needs and traditional knowledge while keeping academic perspectives in mind. Rather, the risks to communities are also a result of time and resources afforded to scholars. Building responsible, or ethical, relationships requires not only good intention and proper training, but mostly time. However, more and more scholars — especially given the current state of the academic job market and the growing casualization of academic labour — do not stay in the same position, institution, or location for long, and are rarely supported by their institution for work that isn't expediently and directly funneled into the classroom or publications. Though this may be frustrating and unsustainable for the scholars themselves, what does this temporality and lack of support mean for communities who become invested in a relationship with a researcher and their project? These limitations are even further complicated when considering that the discussion around access and resources often assume scholars are Western white subjects. But what of — emerging as well as established scholars — who aren't afforded these social, racial, political, or institutional privileges? What about scholars who are not based in proximity to the communities

whose works they want to study, or ones who have limited travel opportunities due to nationalities and international borders — just think about artists or student from Palestine, Latin America, or Africa who wish to work with communities on Turtle Island. What do time, funding, and travel restrictions mean both for the communities and for these scholars? And what does work with communities experiencing colonial trauma mean for the physical and mental well-being of scholars who are themselves experiencing the realities and legacies of these very structures in different locations or ways?

A growing body of research attends to these questions — including “Reclaiming Early Ethnography Through Contemporary Inuit Cultural Production” by scholar Shaina Humble, who advocates and practices “responsibly incorporate[ing] methodologies—when appropriate—from disciplines that are anchored in working with people and communities” while attuned to many of the risks and limitations of such approaches to both scholars and communities (32-33). Though my project does not propose a community-based approach, I most certainly do not suggest that researchers disengage with communities, their knowledge or needs. On the contrary, I agree with McKegney who argues that scholarly readers cannot practice ethical research only with traditional literary practices like close reading, nor use disengagement as an excuse to continue privileging Western perspectives and methods (63). In response, while my project certainly does not deny community or suggest that we remain focused exclusively on the text, I propose that we approach reading as a process of fostering ethical relationality, moving from consuming testimony to bearing witness to it. I propose we do by mobilizing the material components of literary testimony to provide readers with tangible interconnected and specific strategies that honour the labour and knowledge that individuals and communities have taken great pains to

share, thus allowing both general and scholarly readers to push beyond passive empathy or strategies of disengagement and learn to “listen to the bones” (Halfe 19).

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