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**ICCS Research Report**

In March and April of 2022, I was finally able to travel to Canada and realize my long-planned research stay at the University of British Columbia (UBC) in Vancouver, under the mentorship of Dr Laura Moss and with the financial support from the International Council for Canadian Studies (ICCS). My stay was postponed by two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic and, in the meantime, my dissertation had progressed into its final stages. As such, the timing ultimately ended up being perfect as I came to UBC with clear goals and a well-thought-out research plan. As well I came with many questions for my mentor who not only helped me with my research but also supported me as an “academic life coach”, providing me with a much-needed guidance and tips for finishing and publishing my dissertation, looking for postdoctoral fellowships, and organizing my time efficiently. For this support, I owe her much gratitude.

The goal I set for my stay at UBC was to finish the part of my dissertation that focuses on Canada and to re-write, adjust, and edit two of its chapters into publishable articles. I am happy to conclude that I have fulfilled these goals and that one of these articles is currently under peer review in the international journal *Acta Universitatis Carolinae – Studia Territorialia*, while the other one is soon getting published by the *Oxford University Press* in the journal *ISLE: Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* after it passed through a rigorous peer review process. Being able to discuss my research with experts at UBC (some of whom are authors of my main secondary sources) and getting access to a broad range of materials from the university's library elevated my research to a higher level.

My dissertation explores contemporary Indigenous decolonial narratives from across North America, specifically Canada, Hawaii, and Mexico. Using frameworks and concepts from Ecofeminism, Indigenous and Decolonial studies, Indigenous feminism and Queer Studies, Critical

Animal Studies, and Critical Plant Studies, it primarily focuses on the representation of the interconnected nature of colonial gender violence against Indigenous women, land, and nature, in particular against nonhuman animals. Representations of human–animal relations in North American culture and literature have been shaped by colonization that has disrupted harmonious interspecies coexistence on the continent. Anthropocentrism and speciesism that have been forced onto Indigenous peoples as assimilative colonial logics contrast with Indigenous non-hierarchical cosmologies and epistemologies of interconnectedness that perceive nonhuman animals as subjects with agency and their own life trajectories, subjectivities, and kinships.

Billy-Ray Belcourt (Driftpile Cree), the writer, scholar, and currently a faculty member at UBC, emphasizes that colonization is an interspecies issue and proposes what he calls “decolonial animal ethic” as both a theoretical and practical framework through which nonhuman animals are seen as “colonial subjects” and partners in decolonization alongside Indigenous peoples. My dissertation aims to show how Belcourt's decolonial animal ethic is represented in selected contemporary works by Indigenous writers who give voice to other animals. By connecting their intergenerational traumas and ongoing oppression in the settler-colonial context to the position of Indigenous peoples, they do not speak for but rather *with* nonhuman animals. Nonhuman animal characters feature as active agents in the production of human identities and cultures and interspecies relationships function as a form of anti-colonial resistance.

By portraying harmonious and loving kinships between human and nonhuman animals across diverse species (from ravens to musk oxen to dogs), Indigenous literatures contest the Western speciesist logic that divides other animals into binary categories of “wild”/“domesticated” or “pests”/“pets”. This classification not only hierarchizes other animals depending on their human-assigned status but it also artificially constructs interspecies relationships by limiting human interaction with/to certain animals and imposing a normative model of human relationships with other animals depending on their species. By re-imagining alterNative horizontal harmonious

kinship relations with other animals and by positing meaningful interspecies connections as a form of decolonial healing, Indigenous literatures assume an active role in decolonization of both human and nonhuman animals.

The contextual and cultural part of my dissertation (and the first mentioned article) explains how animal colonialism has enabled colonization of Indigenous peoples in North America and facilitated exploitation of Indigenous women, as well as altered human-animal relationships with the forced imposition of the Western ideology and carnist diet. I first trace the history of displacement of Indigenous populations due to animal farming which also caused mass extinction of many free-living animals as well as environmental degradation. In Canada, the fur trade altered interspecies relationships between people and nonhuman animals who started to be viewed as mere resources and/or facilitators of further conquest and financial gain. Eventually, colonizers transported enough domesticated animals from Europe to start making profit from animal agriculture and to continue in the colonization of more lands with the pretext of “cultivating” and thus “civilizing” it and its peoples.

The relocation of Indigenous peoples from their traditional territories not only severed relationships to the land but also disallowed traditional management practices and forced the colonial assimilationist food system onto Indigenous peoples. This transition from traditional predominantly plant-based Indigenous foodways to the Western carnist diet deepened their dependency on the settler state, caused many health problems, and intensified violence committed against nonhuman animals and the land. As a protest to the violent industrial animal farming practices that involve torture and slaughter of nonhuman animals but also exploitation of human workers, some Indigenous peoples propose Indigenous veganism as an act of decolonial resistance. Such return to pre-colonial foodways that did not involve large-scale human and animal exploitation contributes to decolonization as it also involves the rejection of the Western speciesist and hierarchical ideology and ultimately alleviates environmental destruction.

Eden Robinson, the Haisla/Heiltsuk writer, reflects the debate about consumption of other animals in her latest work *The Trickster Trilogy* (2017, 2018, 2021) in which she disrupts anthropocentric narratives by giving agency to nonhuman characters and by underscoring the importance of food decolonization for both Indigenous peoples and nonhuman animals. In my article published in *ISLE* under the title “‘Decolonize your Diet’: Politics of Consumption and Indigenous Veganism in Eden Robinson’s *The Trickster Trilogy*”, I show how the work underscores the role of politics of consumption in the context of settler-colonial society and discusses the potential of Indigenous veganism as a form of decolonial resistance. Furthermore, using Carol J. Adams' feminist-vegetarian critical theory, I analyse how *The Trilogy* posits meat as a symbol of patriarchal colonization and connects colonial gender violence against Indigenous women with violence against nonhuman animals.

Most women characters in *The Trilogy* are involved in decolonial politics and they each also follow either a fully vegan diet or a predominantly plant-based diet. The main character Jared also goes through a fundamental transformation in the novel that is accompanied by changes in his dietary habits. While he is an oblivious meat-eater in the first novel, Jared is inspired by his girlfriend Sarah, his academic aunt and her friend Justice in the subsequent books and starts to make more conscious choices. He first becomes a consumer of predominantly Indigenous foods before he loses the need to *consume* at all, contesting the consumption-centered capitalism. So what exactly is a decolonized diet? *The Trilogy* ponders several options and while it resolutely condemns the capitalist animal farming practices, it leaves open the discussion about the ethics of traditional hunting and fishing. Robinson introduces Indigenous veganism as a potential form of decolonial diet but she stresses the importance of its rootedness in locality. As such, *The Trilogy* constitutes an original and important decolonial narrative that challenges the traditional colonial anthropocentric worldview and Western diet.

In the second, yet unpublished, part of my analysis of *The Trilogy* that will form part of my dissertation, I show how Robinson reflects Belcourt's decolonial animal ethic in her work. She unmasks how colonization has affected nonhuman animals by linking their suffering to the loss of habitat as a result of expansive colonialism and the colonizers' thirst for profit, power, and status. Robinson links colonization of nonhuman animals to the colonization of Indigenous peoples by introducing other-than-human characters whose activism and response to injustice can be paralleled to some Indigenous resistance movements. Robinson dresses several of her nonhuman characters into human skin in order to unmask human weaknesses and highlight other animals' much more developed senses and unique abilities that are unavailable to humans. Creating characters who cannot be easily categorized further allows Robinson to contest the Western simplistic binaries such as “natural/real“ with “supernatural/unreal”. As the readers follow the protagonist's transformation, their traditional assumptions and binary ways of thinking are being challenged.

Indigenous epistemologies are full of warnings against human destructiveness and Eden Robinson's newest work constitutes an important addition to a growing number of Indigenous-authored provocative Anthropocene stories that question the centrality of humans in the world. *The Trickster Trilogy* is a politically and socially important but also highly engaging and aesthetic work of art that I have started to share with my students and will continue to incorporate in my classes. With this analysis, I have completed the part of my dissertation that focuses on Canada, and my stay at UBC was thus very productive and beneficial. Hence, I would like to express deep gratitude to the ICCS for financially supporting and thus enabling this fulfilling research stay, to Dr Laura Moss for kindly accepting and mentoring me at UBC, and to my dissertation supervisor Martina Horáková for her unending guidance and support.

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