CONVERGENCE

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BY WAY OF INTRODUCTION:
Community-based social justice research

This introduction is based on presentations by Chris Dixon, Cleve Higgins & Jaggi Singh, and was compiled and written by Jaggi Singh. Chris and Cleve presented on the "Community-based social justice research" panel at the Study in Action 2011 Undergraduate and Community Research Conference, while Cleve and Jaggi have together facilitated community research workshops at QPIRG Concordia.

Chris Dixon is an activist with Sudbury Against War and Occupation and author of the forthcoming book *Against and Beyond: Radical Organizers Building Another Politics in the U.S. and Canada*.

Cleve Higgins was involved with the IndyClass project at McGill and is currently an organizer with Anarchist Tech Support and the Indigenous Solidarity Committee.

Jaggi Singh a member of Solidarity Across Borders and the Justice for the Victims of Police Killings Coalition; he is also the Working Groups and Programming Coordinator at QPIRG Concordia.

"Knowledge itself doesn't make change for the better, it's people with knowledge that do."

This is the second volume of a modest but growing Montreal-based undergraduate and community research journal. It's one of the rare spaces to promote and share a "community-based social justice research" model. What is that model, and how does it differ from traditional ideas of research?

Let's first break down the term "research," which can often be intimidating and alienating to many people. Research, simply stated, is "knowledge work." It's the diverse things we do in our lives to acquire information, skills, and a deeper understanding of our society. Defined in this way, research is something everyone can engage in and produce. If you work for a wage, if you're a parent, if you're studying, if you're analyzing current events, you're doing knowledge work. Social struggles for survival, and for a better society, inherently produce some of the most vital and innovative forms of knowledge.

Unfortunately, many of the ways people undertake grassroots research, as part of their daily lives, and within their communities, is not validated or recognized as such. There are very rare instances where our research can be presented in a respectful, empowering way.

University education in particular trains us to see academics and intellectuals as the specific people who come up with important ideas and understandings about the world, while the rest of us remain spectators to their debates and

discussions. More fundamentally, the traditional research paradigm ends up serving the interests of power and privilege, and helps to maintain those very systems that we're surviving under and mobilizing against.

There are some obvious examples of research in the interests of power – when conducted or funded by the military, by business roundtables, and by right-wing think tanks. In many other cases, though, it's not so obvious. Still, the overall effect is more or less the same: traditional university-based research basically sustains the idea that ordinary people can't be trusted to control the institutions that directly affect their lives.

In opposition to "research in the interests of power," the community-based social justice research model is rooted in the idea of "research as a tool of social transformation." By empowering previously marginalized and oppressed communities and by providing support to social movements for justice and dignity, research tries to better the world, not reinforce its injustices. Community-based social justice research, like social movements at their best, offers new possibilities and alternatives.

Community-based Social Justice Research	Institutionally-based Traditional Research
Grassroots	Experts
Process-oriented, incremental	Results-oriented, final product
Subjective and rigourous	Presumed objective neutrality
Popular, useful	Corporate, profitable
Collective	Individual
Accessible to everybody	Professionalized
Holistic	Compartmentalized
Prioritizes community accountability	Prioritizes institutional and professional accountability

The values and methods underlying community-based social justice research are synonymous with the ideals that motivate non-hierarchical grassroots organizing in the first place. It's worth exploring some of those values and methods (they're outlined in the table above, contrasted with institutionally-based traditional research).

Clearly, a community-based social justice research approach places the emphasis on a collective, interactive process and making holistic links between subjects and people. It's the antithesis of the ivory tower academy.

As part of a grassroots research method, the community-based social justice research approach respects the constraints of social movements and day-to-day survival. This method validates taking the time needed to actually work with people and movements - respecting their timeframes - as part of an ongoing process. In this method, people are agents of their own knowledge, not objects to be examined, prodded, or studied.

"Subjective rigour" acknowledges that we all bring biases to the research that we do and critiques that presumption that anyone possesses overarching "objective neutrality." But, at the same time, community-based social justice research does strive for rigour, meaning research that is fact-based, informative, accessible, and reliable. Claiming "objectivity" is certainly no guarantee of accuracy, and the community-based social justice method honestly admits our biases, working within them to share knowledge.

Importantly, research is always accountable to somebody. People who study and work in universities are very accustomed to being held accountable by professional scholars. This happens through all sorts of everyday procedures, including classroom assignments and tests, qualifying exams in graduate school, tenure decisions, and academic publications.

Doing effective community-based social justice research requires an alternative, grassroots accountability, what can be called "movement-based accountability." When researchers understand ourselves as responsible to movements and people, we have to grapple with important questions: How do we determine what we research? How do we make sure that our research actually furthers social justice struggles? And how can those with whom we work in solidarity hold us accountable?

There aren't yet many well-developed mechanisms for formally elaborating this kind of accountability, although there is more and more discussion of things like "co-research," "militant research," and "movement-based research."

While there's a seemingly stark contrast between a traditional research model and the community-based social justice research model, it's worthwhile to nuance our understanding. There are definitely community-based approaches that can co-exist with the academy and universities can provide some openings for supporting alternative research methods (the Community-University Research Exchange is one such example).

Within this volume we highlight, in part, university-based research from undergraduates. On one level, this encourages newer students to see themselves as

researchers who can be engaged with the community. Moreover, undergraduate research does not have to be perceived as a precursor to eventual graduate work and entry into the academy, but rather something valuable in-and-of-itself as a way of engaging our community in diverse ways.

We are sharing research in this volume in the form of writing and art. This is also a reflection of the diverse ways we can communicate our research, through oral history, skill sharing, popular gatherings, multiple forms of media, and much more.

Ultimately, what distinguishes community-based social justice research is that it is about building capacities – it's about nurturing and strengthening the knowledge and analysis of people engaged in struggle.

The community-based social justice model of learning and research is not something that is new; different communities and cultures worldwide have applied it in diverse ways, for generations. One of the inspiring books that outlines this model in practice is Paolo Friere's *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed*.

Fortunately, we have some local models that attempt to put the values of community-based social justice research into action. This journal, sharing the research and expression of artists, activists, undergrads, and community organizers, is one such effort. The Community-University Research Exchange (CURE) and the annual Study In Action Undergraduate and Community Research conference, from which we've selected just a few submissions for the content of this year's *Convergence*, is another. This triad of projects, affiliated with Quebec Public Interest Research Groups (QPIRG) at Concordia and McGill, is one modest but very important local contribution to the building of an alternative research model and a growing community of researchers, broadly defined, who together *converge* to transform the world.
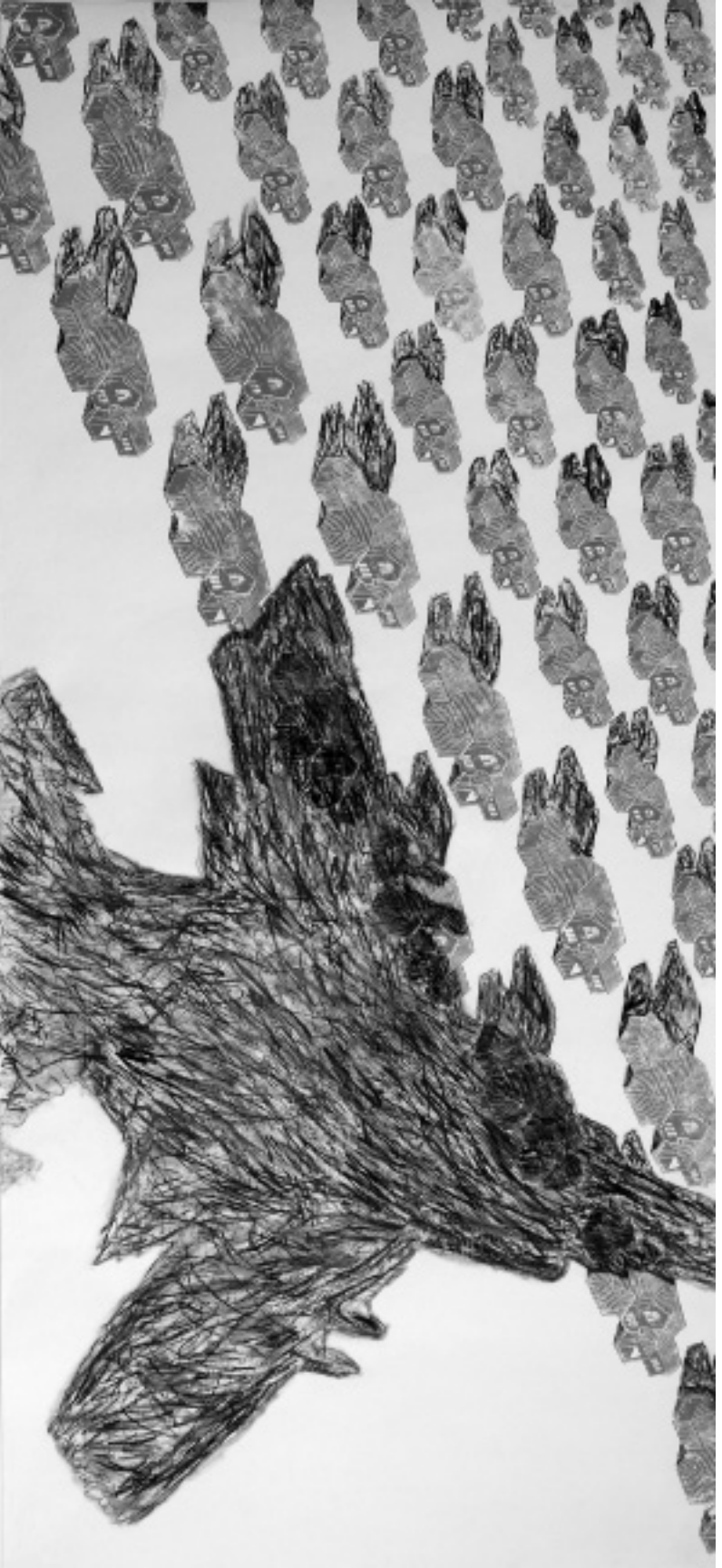
Security
Charcoal, pencil, pencil crayon, and water-based ink on paper
Artist: Karen Boyles

Security

(Left) This project explores our complex relationship with the environment. The work investigates the cultural, political, historical, and personal aspects of our reciprocal relationship with the environment. A central theme to the work is the relationship between violence and the environment. The viewer is presented with a broadened perspective on violence in relation to the environment: environments built by violence, violence in security, violence in order, violence found in the banal. The materials employed play a fundamental role in the representation of these ideas.

Artist: Karen Boyles
Karen Boyles is a third-year Studio Arts Major at Concordia University, a community activist, gardener, and woodworker. Her interest in history, social and environmental justice, and the arts drives her to articulate her concerns through a visual language. Specifically, she employs a combination of relief printmaking techniques and traditional drawing materials to create visual environments that reflect the conflicts found within our own.

WHAT SPACES EXIST FOR QUEER YOUTH?
On institutional discourses and regulatory imaginations

By Julia de Montigny,
Undergraduate student in Human Environment at Concordia University and member of the Prisoner Correspondence Project at QPIRG Concordia

Introduction

A queer youth geography has yet to be developed; queer youth's spatially constituted identities and experiences have remained in uncharted territories. Space for queer youth has largely been ignored, undermined, and not been made. Queer youth are rarely brought into focus by queer theorists, geographers, and others with adult power. Youth in particular exist in shifting institutional worlds; their experiences may most often be dictated by the rules of school, organized recreational activities, family, and the state; as such their experiences may be directly shaped according to the pressures, perspectives, and practices of these institutions. My research seeks to undermine the narrow visions of queer youth produced by and through institutional practices and discourses and propose new practices and strategies that function in the interest of queer youth. The questions that I hope to explore in my research are: what are the institutional visions of queer youth produced by those inside and how do the contours of the language and the imagination of these institutions limit or open up spatial possibilities for queer youth?

Purpose

The purpose of my research is varied and ranges from a desire to explore and investigate how queer identities and geographies are understood and controlled by institutional bodies, to challenging the ways that heterosexuality is normalized in adolescent development. By highlighting the ways that everyday public spaces are produced as straight and even homophobic spaces, I want to call attention to the

need and politics of the struggle for queer space. I also try to open up the positive potential for social equity and liberation by asserting queer identities in youth cultures. It is my hope that this article contributes to the greater project of destabilizing hegemonic ideas about youth's sexualities that are used to limit possibilities, standardize desires, and restrict access to space.

Methodology and process

Experiences and questions afforded to me through community work I do in Montreal with youth (queer and otherwise) have allowed me to reflect on the ways that queer youth are excluded and the ways that their presence in schools, urban spaces, and other institutional locations is made invisible. These insights have allowed me to see the ways that in social interaction queer youth are silenced, their identities are discounted, and they are too often presumed to be straight. These insights and the questions that arose offered the framework of this project's initial intent, which was to study how queer youth, aged 14-18 find, define, and create space for themselves in Montreal by looking at the role that Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans and Queer (LGBTQ) youth organizations, and high schools more generally, have in the making of spaces for youth. Through qualitative interviews, I wanted to examine how queer youth identities were articulated in general and in high school spaces and community organizations specifically, while considering existing social, economic, and cultural distinctions within the queer communities I was to study. The aim of this project was to draw on experiential knowledge and promote youth's voices, ideas, and perspectives.

The process of obtaining ethical approval from the Office of Research's Ethics Board at Concordia University in order to work with queer youth under the age of 18, a "vulnerable population," provided me with an opportunity to shift my focus. As the process extended through time I realized that I would not be likely to obtain ethical approval and so I began to informally question and examine the concerns and the process of ethical approval. The formal process was organized by the demand that I produce several revised forms, return emails and phone calls, and attend meetings with my supervisors. It began in November 2010 and was only approved in April 2011, but not without a surprising caveat: that the motivation for identifying queer youth as vulnerable (and thus impossible to interview) was that the ethics board understood queer youth as also being street youth. This process and the resulting conversations and implicit assumptions provided me with a solid basis from which to pursue a critical analysis of the institutional discourses on which the members of the ethics board relied. This new project provided critical insights into the powers that shape and influence queer experience, specifically among youth.

To work around the lack of access to queer youth's own experiences I used two alternative methods to analyze the spaces of queer youth: telephone interviews with public high schools and a discourse analysis of the process to obtain ethical approval. The absence of space to do the research I had originally planned inspired me to develop a new research project. Thus my focus emerges both through my own identity and politics and through a process that provided me with the conditions for meaning-making through research.

Through the use of critical discourse analysis I investigated, and by so doing intervened, into the ways that spaces are both imagined and made to function as sites of social production and personal development for queer youth. I studied the ways that high schools and universities define and regulate queer youth's identities, spaces, and voices while exploring the assumptions that guided the perspectives and decisions made by those with power inside of institutional bodies.

Discourses are those representations and practices that structure thoughts, make meanings, constitute identities, produce subjects, and make social relations legible (Gregory et al. 2009). In other words, discourses make the world as we understand it; they are those groups of ideas that structure the way a thing is thought, and the way people act on the basis of that thinking. Rose (2007) argues that the power of a discourse lies in their claims of truth. As she puts it:

> knowledge and power are imbricated one in the other, not only because all knowledge is discursive and all discourse is saturated with power, but because the most powerful discourses, in terms of the productiveness of their social effects, depend on assumptions and claims that their knowledge is true (Rose 2007: 144).

As such, discourses have the power to limit and restrict alternative ways of imagining the world and the social realities of its subjects.

Results and Discussion

Throughout my research I tried to reveal the spatialized contours of heteronormativity that queer youth navigate in these institutions. I also identified many significant discourses and discursive practices. First of all, I found that institutional policies discursively limit queer youths' identities. The university imagined queer youth to be victims and vulnerable to further victimization. The possibility that this story (if relevant), not to mention other, more complex stories might be told through my interviews was thus stopped. On the other hand, the discourses that were produced by high school staff I consulted were more varied. Individuals in these institutions seemed interested in opening up diverse ways for queer youth identities to be accepted and articulated. However, some staff members

continued to echo heteronormative discourses and the identities of queer youth were limited.

Secondly, I found that ambivalence and uncertainty surrounds queer youth, ultimately making their voices silent and their experiences invisible. For example, I found that the attitude of the ethics board was largely incongruent with the perspectives articulated by the participants at the high schools that I consulted. Overall, high schools did not create space for queer youth because youth were not seen to be at risk, contradicting the vision held by the ethics board. I realize that this position is a little tricky to break down and may encompass contradictory attitudes, but let me attempt to expose the complicated reality that unfolded through my research.

On the one hand, I argued that the ethics board was perpetuating a silencing fear over queer youth by describing them as being vulnerable, at risk, and in danger. On the other hand, I pointed out the ways that it appears that queer youth experiences, as people who may face systemic discrimination are not being taken serious. Ultimately, I maintain both positions because the results of these assumptions in practice are similar; institutions, for a variety of motivations, make little or no space for queer youth. The discourses that were used by the high schools and the ethics board produce limited identities and regulate possibilities for change.

Thirdly, I tried to demonstrate how the spaces and institutions queer youth rely on are by and large created by adults. This process makes it so that queer youth's needs cannot readily be addressed. Throughout the interview process with high school staff I found myself wondering to what extent my questions even corresponded with the concerns that queer youth might have. I still do not know what queer youth might have wanted to speak about, but the process and discourses produced by these institutions made it so that I could not find out. It is worth noting that none of the high school staff spoke with me about plans to consult youth about their desires or having done that already. The university prevented me from interviewing youth and asking them first-hand what their thoughts and experiences were about how queer space is made or not. In a way, the fact that space was not made for queer youth by high schools made it so that the staff could not really reveal what the perspectives of queer youth were because they had no reference point.

Fourthly, and finally, these institutional processes contribute to the difficulty queers already face in challenging spatial heteronormativity and make it so that space is not made for queer youth. Many queer geographers have argued that heteronomativity is embedded in the landscape of the city (Davis 1995); throughout this essay I tried to

expand on that by showing how heteronormativity may also exist in institutional spaces, in the social practices which they constitute, and in the processes that regulate knowledge production. Some have suggested that it might be interrupted and undermined through struggles for queer visibility, so I propose that future studies could work with queer youth and promote their voices and experiences and make space for them.

As Rofes put it over two decades ago:

> Gay and lesbian youth attend schools throughout the nation, and they have existed quietly throughout the history of (…) education. These students — from every ethnic and racial background, in urban, suburban, and rural schools — have sat passively through years of public school education where their identities as gay and lesbian people have been ignored and denied (1989, 445).

The need to hear queer youth voices is real and this may just be a beginning.

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Mayr, Andrea. (2008). Language and power: An introduction to institutional discourse. Continuum: London, UK.

Rofes, Eric. (1989). Opening up the classroom closet: Responding to the educational needs of gay and lesbian youth. Harvard Educational Review, 59(4):444-453.

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Divine Interventions and the Geography of Loss

Research, Experimental Documentary, and Slow-motion Video in Action

At **Study In Action** this year, Kerri Flannigan and I each presented performative slideshow lectures; Using a digital projector, ambient soundtrack, and live narration, Kerri presented on the use of images of god in art as sites for appropriation or resistance, and I presented on concepts of death and loss, looking at gentrification, lost cemetaries, memorial and migration. These visual essays proposed a different way of presenting academic, activist, and arts-based knowledge, asking: What is the role of art in community movements, learning, research, and archive? How does art generate and reflect knowledge within an academic and community context? In what ways do art and art-making contribute to our understanding and knowledge bases of popular history, political theory, and social movements?

I have tried to rework this slideshow lecture for the printed page, attempting to translate a performative work (with the glowing light of the projector, the tone of my voice, the somber slowed-down hymn soundtrack, and the slowly animated images) towards the thin paper pages of a printed journal (pages you'll hold in your hands, flip through, and fold and bend, start reading and stop.) This proves a difficult transposition, so rather than attempt this by presenting you the whole text with inserted images in an effort to recreate the performance, I am presenting just a few of the hundred images that make up the slide-show, along with selected notes from the text in a scrapbook format. With dates and place names and notes, like my oma would have done.

[The reworked excerpts on the following pages are from the performative slideshow lecture titled **Death: The Architecture of Dying and the Geography of Loss**, (2011, 18'00, digital projection, sound, narration). It was presented as part of **Study In Action** on March 12, 2011, alongside Kerri Flannigan's **Divine Interventions: Depicting, Resisting, Queering, and Appropriating 'God' in Art**.]

Kandis Friesen

Death: The Architecture of Dying and the Geography of Loss
(excerpts and notes)

This is a question; about what death and dying mean. This is a
family album; an archive, an accumulation of documents, research
on researching. This is a stockpile, a mass of detritus, a
rumination on eradication and what they call 'the eternal rest'.

Marquette, Manitoba; the farmhouse where my
mother grew up. I think I love this photograph
because I never got to go there before it was
torn down. I wish for things I can't have.

The Mennonite Settlements in South and Central America: Paraguay,
Uruguay, Brazil, Belize, Mexico. They crossed the world to escape
compromises that seemed uncompromisable. I've been told that when
they arrived, they were given a map to their plot in the jungle.
Less than half of them survived.
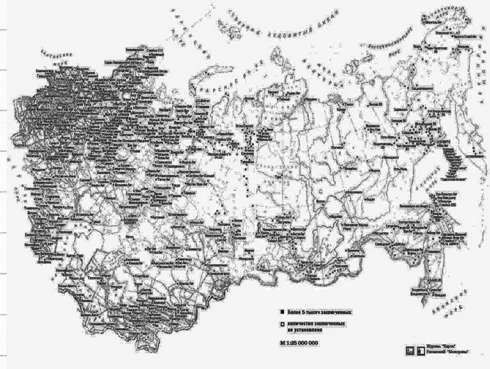
I read One Day In The Life Of Ivan Denisovich in Grade 10.
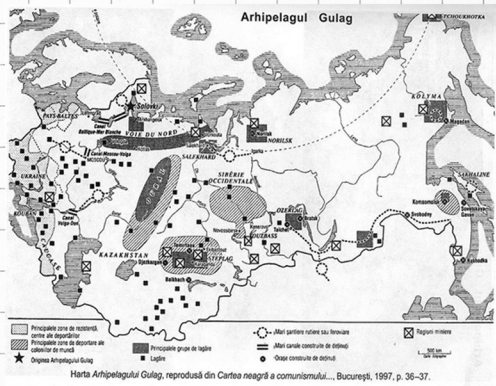
Harta *Arhipelagului Gulag*, reprodusă din *Cartea neagră a comunismului...*, București, 1997, p. 36–37.

My great aunts internally deported to the mining camps in Kazakhstan.
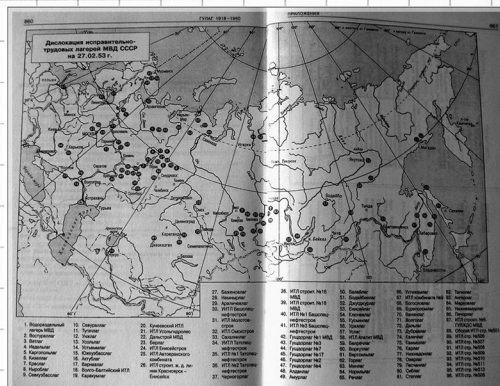
How do you map the size of death? How much can you mark down? Memorials on paper or memorials in stone?

I found this photo in an archive
online, a cemetary at the gulag
in Butugychag. The gravestones
marked with sticks, the most
they could do.

It reminded me of the family
cemeteries in front of the big old
white estate houses in the Eastern
Townships. The small unmarked rocks
at the feet of the graves were not,
as I naively guessed, for family
pets, but markers for the graves
of black slaves. A deathly
colonial architecture.

Refugee camps. Death can be something other than an end; an
impending condition, a constant forecast, a loss of
everything you know and love.
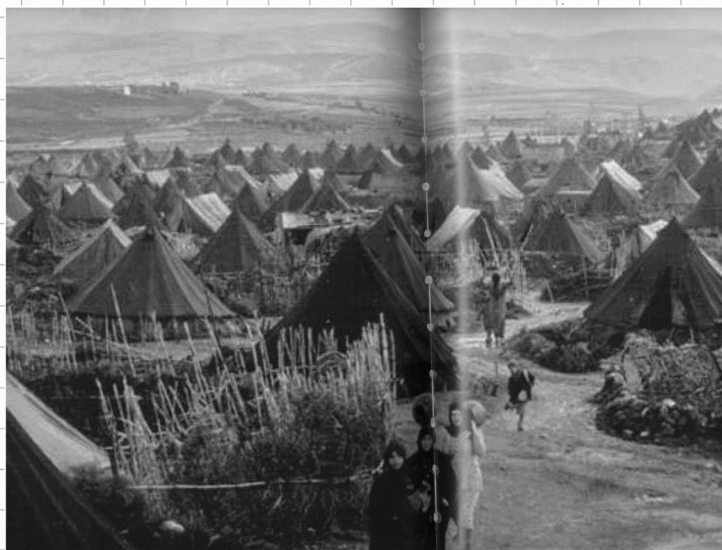
1948

Stalin was an orchestrator, his compositions
looked like this. Sifting gravel for grains of
wheat, I remember my grandmother's stories.

1967

Africville, Nova Scotia. The city of Halifax vacated
this small black community in 1967, razing it to the
ground after moving the residents out in garbage trucks.

JACQUELINE SMITH'S PROTEST. THE LAST
TENANT OF THE LORRAINE MOTEL-DAY-N

3647

WHAT JACQUELINE SMITH
Believes is that the
Lorraine Motel should
be put to better use such
as housing, Job training,
Free College, Clinic or Other
Service for the Poor. She
also believes that the
area surrounding the Lorraine
should be rejuvenated and
made decent and kept
affordable and not gentrified
with expensive condomiums
that price the people out
of their community.

1998

Memphis, Tennessee. Before the Civil Rights Museum
was built at the Lorraine Motel, it was a rooming
house, where Jacqueline Smith, and many others, lived
and built a community. After the forced eviction, she
took up residence on the sidewalk across the street,
and has lived there for the last 23 years, counting
the days and protesting gentrification in the name of
civil rights.
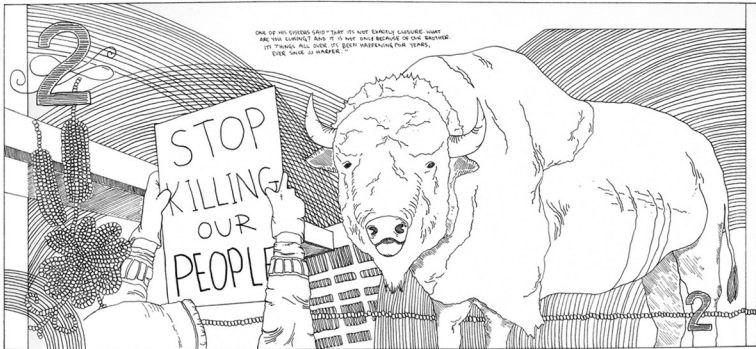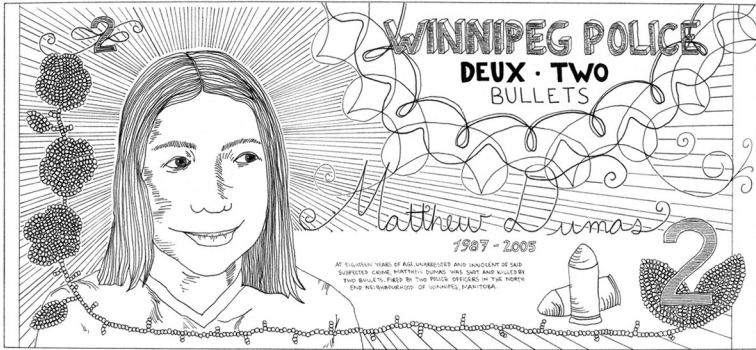
Matthew Dumas was killed, shot in the back, by two Winnipeg
cops in 2005. I was thinking about memorial, currency, and
national narratives as I drew this two dollar bill.

In 2008, I spent the summer in Winnipeg, the same summer that
Fredy Villanueva was killed by the cops in Montreal. Within a
week of his death, Craig McDougal and Michael Langan, both
unarmed and both aboriginal, were shot and killed by cops in
Winnipeg; Montreal North burned amid riots and Winnipeg
silently mourned.

This was the memorial at the place where Fredy died at Parc
Henri Bourassa. It remains today, the ground covered with
wax-coated rocks, like blood.

The protests and vigils don't end because the deaths don't
end. Quilem Registre, Anas Bennis, JJ Harper, I erected
memorials of my own. Under the cover of night, with working
girls on guard, we plastered the city. Police partout,
justice nulle part.

WE REMEMBER

JJ HARPER
FREDDY ALBERTO VILLANUEVA
MATTHEW DUMAS
SEAN BELL
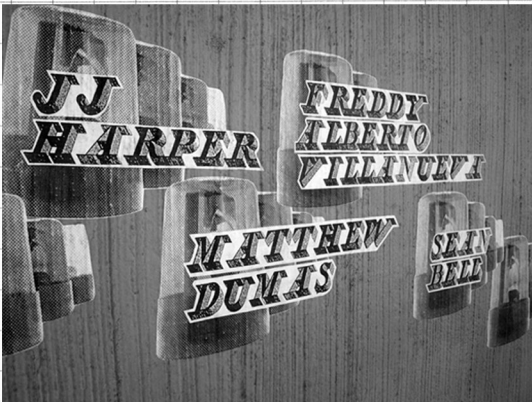
We remember.

COLLECTIVE AND COMMUNITY GARDENING
a contextualized analysis of urban agriculture in Montreal

By Angharad Wylie,
Undergraduate student in the Department of Geography, Planning and Environment at Concordia University

Introduction

In the past few years, the questions of where our food comes from and how it is produced have emerged as key issues in the urban sutainability debate. These questions have fed a resurgence of urban gardening as an answer to urban food security issues and concerns with the globally commercialized system of industrial agricultural production that dominates the urban palate. In North America, Montreal is well known as being home to a strong urban agriculture movement; between community, backyard, rooftop, balcony, collective, and guerrilla gardens, 1.5% of Montreal's population is involved in urban food production.[1] The purpose of this paper is to dissect the differences between Montreal's community and collective gardens – and the reasons for citizens' involvement with them – in order to better understand the roles urban agriculture currently serves here and the direction in which it is evolving.

Urban Agriculture in Montreal: A Historical Perspective

Although there have been various movements of urban agriculture in Canada throughout the country's history, in the 1970s there was a fundamental change in direction. Prior to the 1970s, urban agriculture was primarily a response to increased demand during war periods and the Great Depression. In 1973, increased fuel costs caused by the OPEC energy crisis were reflected in food prices, which created awareness of the limitations of fossil fuel-based food production, causing the concept of food security to enter the urban Canadian consciousness. By this time, urban gardening was already being practiced in Montreal by Italian and Portuguese immigrants who maintained traditional kitchen

gardens on both private and unoccupied public land. In fact, it was the City of Montreal's attempts to regulate the immigrants' guerrilla gardening that initiated the preliminary systems of permit distribution and plot allocation which eventually transformed into the organization of community gardens and opened urban food production to a broader demographic. Soon after the first permits were distributed to community garden plots in Montreal, the project was taken out of the city's hands by the Montreal Botanical Gardens, and by 1985 was made official through a city review of the program which laid out a set of guidelines and marked the creation the Montreal Community Gardening Program.[2] Once the program had become official, the gardens (forty-one of which were established already by 1981, with numbers continuing to grow fast throughout the 1980s and 1990s) were supported economically by the city government and local organizations, who provided the gardens with physical resources such as tools and seeds as well as hired horticultural specialists who were available on a rotating basis to give advice to gardeners on organic growing techniques.[3] These services have prevailed and the numerous community gardens that now exist across Montreal are still greatly supported by the city. The space provided does not meet the needs of the population for space to garden, however, resulting in wait-lists for garden plots being years long in some cases.[4]

Current Trends in Montreal's Urban Agriculture Movement

Community Gardens:

Montreal is well-recognized as home to Canada's and possibly North America's most successful city-level network of community gardens and is the only Canadian city to have hosted the annual American Community Gardening Association (ACGA) meeting (in 2006).[5] In 2002 the Montreal Community Garden Program was reorganized, and now the eighteen boroughs in Montreal involved with urban agriculture are responsible for their local networks.[6] Across the city, the program totaled ninety-eight gardens (8459 plots) in 2008, each containing between twenty-five and 255 individual plots,[7] managed overall by an elected team of volunteers and overseen by the six horticultural specialists, rotating between the gardens, who are available to answer questions and give guidance to new gardeners (though by all accounts, more of the knowledge sharing happens between gardeners themselves).[8] As of 2006, around 75% of the gardens were protected, either under special Community Garden zoning or as parkland,[9] and the city also continues to uphold a policy of giving tax breaks to owners of vacant lots who are willing to lease the space to community members for the creation of new gardens on five-year leases.[10] The fact that zoning officials were able to permanently remove the spaces from the development market indicates a decided willingness on the part of the city government to support such projects as part of their vision for Montreal's future as a green city.

Involving an estimated 13,000 participants,[11] the gardens primarily attract older citizens, with more than half of the Community Garden participants being over the age of forty-five, and less than 2% under the age of twenty-four.[12] Though the age diversity of the gardens is not representative of the city's population, the ethnic and wealth diversity seems more equally represented in the gardens; in 2001, eight gardens had a majority of allophone members (their first language being neither English nor French).[13] In 2009, between 27% and 61% of the gardeners were from low-income families (below $20,000 income annually), with greater representation in gardens in districts with higher poverty rates, indicating that the Community Garden Program is, in general, a socially-inclusive organization.[14] A 2006 survey conducted by the City of Montreal indicated that the primary motivations for involvement in the community gardens project are equally recreation and food production.[15]

As of 2009, the Community Garden plots achieved a high intensity of production, averaging between 27 kg and 87 kg of food annualy (adult consumption averages around 40kg annually).[16] This production has a significant impact on the population's well-being both socially and economically, and has a high value in a city with the highest rates of poverty in all of Canada.[17]

Despite the city's interest in providing gardening space to its citizens, the community gardens in Montreal have an annual 25% oversubscription and a low annual dropout rate of 10%, a clear indication that the demand for space vastly outweighs the supply.[18] Energy and food prices as well as demand for gardening space continue to rise, but the network has come to a standstill and with the delayed relocation of several gardens closed due to soil contamination[19] it seems unlikely that the city will make the effort required to provide much more space for urban agriculture than currently exists.

Collective Gardens:

While most of Montreal's urban agriculture fame is due to the city's community garden program, there is also a multitude of not-for-profit organizations that run an alternative network of urban agriculture projects. The collective garden movement has grown significantly in the second half of the 2000s as the connection has been forged between environmentalism and social justice concerns, and food security-focused organizations such as Action Communiterre have established themselves in Montreal. The political side of the movement is led largely by university organizations such as Food Systems Projects at McGill and Concordia, and the collective gardens associated with these institutions often provide more of a technical educational role than one of active community development.[20] On the other hand, the gardens opened by independent

Map of Collective & Community Gardens in Montreal

Gardens

1 villeray collective rooftop garden (Patro Le Prevost)
2 entre mamans garden
3 champ des possibles ●
4 cégep du vieux montréal terrace
5 Claire Moriselle rooftop garden (CRAPAUD)
6 Jardins d'Arnel, clandestins & l'arche des sciences @ UQAM
7 Jardin du Roulant (Santropol)
8 Concordia greenhouse
9 Griffintown garden (Ottawa + dalhousie) ●
10 Phoenix garden (victory)
11 Canteloupe garden (victory)
12 Racine de paix (victory)
13 Thyme garden (victory)
14 Rosemary garden (victory)
15 RealiTEA + People's Potato (concordia)
16 Jardin EgaliTerre (Provert)

Compost

I st michel Environmental complex
II centre de compostage Tourne-Sol
III salle de lombriculture

Organizations

a Equiterre
b Regroupement du Jardins collectifs du Québec
c Santropol Roulant
d Éco-quartier Jeanne-Mance
e CRAPAUD
f Alternatives (rooftop garden project)
g centre d'écologie urbain
h concordia greenhouse; verttaville
i Éco-quartier NDG
j aliments d'ici
k coop la maison vert
l action comuniterre (victory gardens network)
m Provert

iggiwylie • 2011 • concordia greenhouse • http://tinyurl.com/collectivegardens

What's That?

● Collective Gardens
● Unofficial Gardens
■ Compost Sites
★ Organizations

water
green space
cemetary
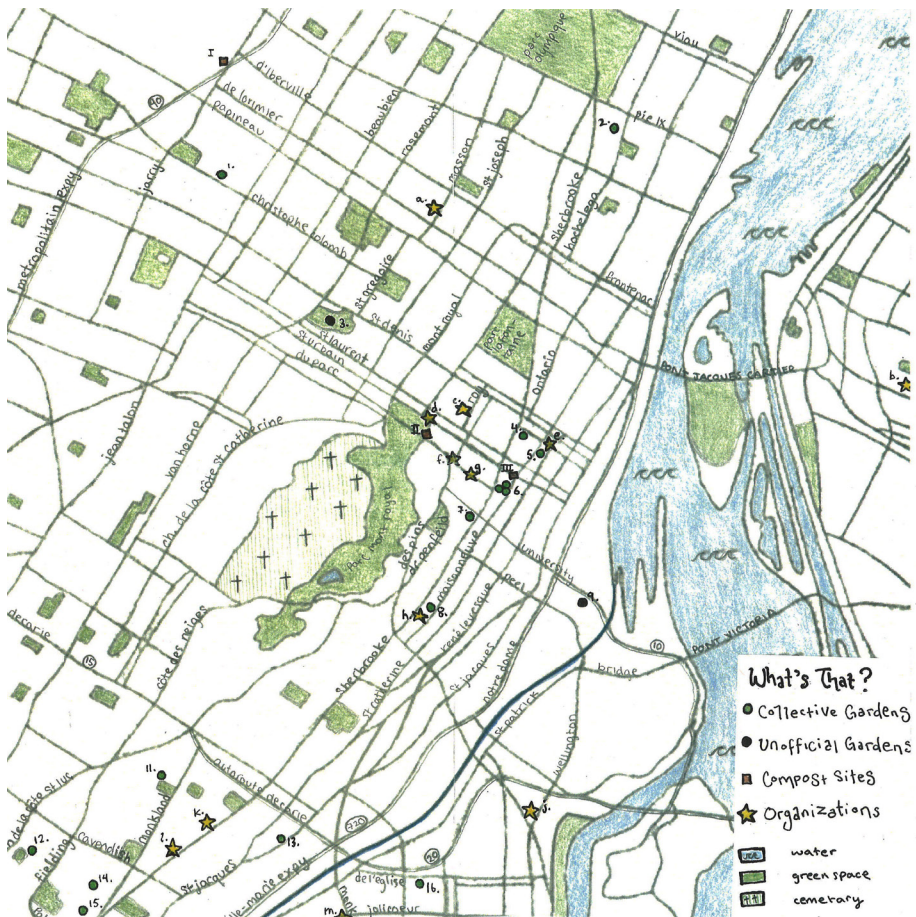
organizations operating in various Montreal neighbourhoods have a more specific focus on place-based community development and social relationships rather than politics. The demographic implicated in each of these two categories are somewhat dichotomized with the university-centred programs attracting younger, more middle-class participants, and the community organizations representing a more balanced, but still not entirely inclusive mixture of social classes (between 20% and 61% of gardeners receiving incomes below $20,000 annually).[21]

The primary difference between collective and community gardens, other than the organizations that oversee them, is the way in which they are structurally organized. Collective gardens, rather than being comprised of many small plots cared for independently by individuals or families, are closer to the Victory Garden model (practiced during WWII) of a single larger plot cultivated collaboratively by a team of volunteers. Montreal has seen the development of numerous creative solutions for making use of unused urban space for gardening by means of container gardening, balcony cultivation, vertical gardens, and so on.[22] Differences also lie in the reasons for their creation – while the community garden network was created and grew due to demand from apartment or other small residence-dwelling citizens who simply wanted something to replace the back yard space that they did not have, the collective gardens grew from a more politically-conscious motivation to promote public awareness around food security issues.[23] Reflecting the social consciousness basis on which many of the collective gardens were created, many of them have a specific mandate to produce food for community kitchens and food banks: for example, in the case of the Victory Garden Network (an Action CommuniTerre project in NDG consisting of five collective gardens and several backyard plots), one third of the food produced was donated to the NDG food depot and other community organizations.[24] Though the actual productivity of Montreal's collective gardens is lower than that of the community gardens per square metre (averaging 16kg per person for the season),[25] the social and educational aspects of collective gardening should be taken into consideration when judging the value of these operations: on a practical level, collective gardens tend to each have a facilitator who provides technical knowledge and guidance to the volunteers while encouraging self-directed learning and a sense of ownership over the project. On a social level, the collaborative working environment – having been created around food security and urban sustainability issues – provides a forum for discussion between community members, lateral knowledge sharing, and a space for community links to form. Taking into account the collective gardens' relationships with other local organizations, the number of individuals who are involved in some way with the gardens spans far past the estimated 2000 people who volunteer in the gardens directly, to a broader community of approximately 17,000 citizens who volunteer for or benefit from the services with which

Montreal's collective gardens are associated.[26] The 2010 Réseau de Jardins Collectifs du Québec (RJCQ, established in 1997 to consolidate the network of collective gardens)[27] had seventeen members who all together ran sixty-two collective gardens on and around the island of Montreal. These numbers do not include peripherally-affected organizations.

The Future of Urban Agriculture in Montreal

Considering the plateaued support for community gardens in Montreal and the ever-growing immigrant population (who comprise a large portion of the demand for the plots), it seems as though there is a movement away from the community garden network as the dominant incarnation of urban agriculture in Montreal. The desire of the urban population for interaction with the food system on which they rely is leading to ever-growing numbers of organizations linking knowledgeable gardeners with community organizations, housing projects, schools, etc., to incorporate the urban production of food into the lives of a diversity of Montrealers. Though the scale of the collective gardening movement is difficult to see due to the social rather than physical nature of what it produces, the collaboration inherent in collective gardening is important in facilitating the development of a social-aware, active, and mutually-supportive network of community members and organizations. There is a common problem with movements of this type which, like the organic food movement beginning in the 1980s, tend to be somewhat elitist, imposing upper-class values on disadvantaged populations who may be preoccupied with other social problems and not only access to fresh, healthy food.[28]

In Montreal, however, it seems that the urban agriculture movement is unique in its social inclusivity, and as a result holds true potential as a means to diminish the impacts of economic and social disparity. Despite the fact that the city seems to prioritize the creation of community gardens less presently than it did even a decade ago, and is not pulling its weight in terms of answering citizens' demands for green space, this does not negate the positive role played by the gardens that do exist on urban spaces and communities. The fact that the community garden network has seemed to reach a plateau in Montreal is perhaps beneficial for the diversification of the urban agriculture movement as it encourages alternative urban gardening practices and the growth of the collective movement (which relies less on re-zoning urban lots, as is the case with many community gardens, and more often makes use of backyards and empty spaces belonging to organizations such as schools, community centres, etc). It is conceivable that with collaboration between the collective and community gardens in a neighbourhood, the two models could complement each other. Prioritization in terms of allocating community garden plots to citizens who demonstrate particular need for and capacity to manage their own plot (experienced gardeners, people who are under the average income level, large families,

etc.) would allow for the community plots to be put to their most effective use in terms of improving food security. The neighbourhood collective gardens would serve the need of the citizens who involve themselves in urban agriculture for purposes of recreation and social engagement, and would provide a forum for ecosystem development and community events to take place. The university-centred organizations and other establishments with alternative growing techniques or who host workshops and other learning activities could provide horticultural training and education about the social, environmental, and political concepts that are implicated in various ways with the urban agriculture movement. Urban gardeners could flow between the different types of gardens as their skill and knowledge levels, availability, and need for supplementary food changed over time. This exchange of members could serve to change the community and collective garden networks from isolated scenes to interrelated, rich, and diverse communities.

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divine interventions (part 2)
(this is an excerpt)

By Kerri Flannigan,
Undergraduate student of Studio Arts at Concordia University

Introduction:

Recently I've been embroidering stories of growing up in religious surroundings. Stitching becomes a form of meditation, a reflecting and releasing.

Depictions of my mouth washed with soap to cleanse away dirty words.
The bible my mom demanded I swear on that I wasn't dating anyone. (I was).

The exorcism I witnessed in my camp cabin when I was 12.
Images of guilt, sexual shaming, censorship, and rebellion.

For me, depicting the sacred is its undoing, releasing the power these memories still hold over me.


Art comes into contact with the sacred in so many ways.

Art depict the sacred
It resists
It appropriates
It queers
It creates
It undoes the sacred through its own representation
and finds the sacred in the mundane

Depicting the Sacred:

In Christian art, depicting heaven and hell, god and the devil, was speaking to a need to give immaterial divinity a material presence.
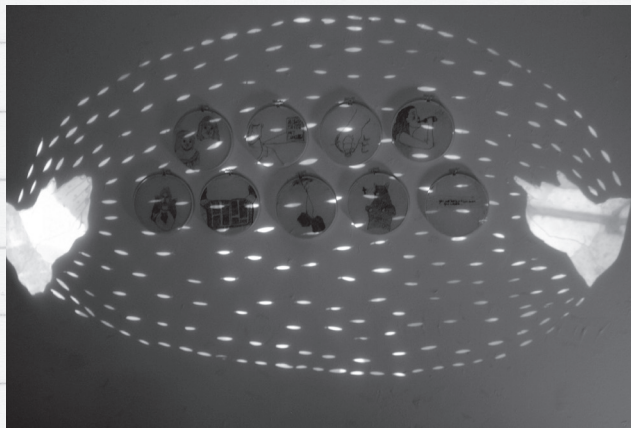
Heaven isn't a physical place, but a condition.

But as the church figured out, it was impossible for people to imagine being without a location or a body.

There was a need to depict heaven and hell as real to be able to understand/desire/fear them.

Hell often becomes an impetus for believing, and in some cases as means of social control or as a justification for colonization.

Art That Responds to the Material Violence in the Name of the Sacred:

There are no words to capture the impact of violence enacted in the hands of the church. But one example is the aggressive assimilation by church-run residential schools, which tore over 150,000 native, Inuit, and Métis children from their homes and left a legacy of abuse and trauma. Many have responded to this violence through art. Depicting, witnessing, resisting, exposing, and reflecting on this trauma.

Cathy Busby's *We Are Sorry*, contains two 20' x 45' banners containing excerpts from the 2008 landmark apologies to aboriginal people for Indian residential schools in Canada and the stolen generations in Australia.

The apologies were of major significance, yet occurred in fleeting moments. In *We Are Sorry,* Busby attempts to give the apologies a renewed and sustained presence.
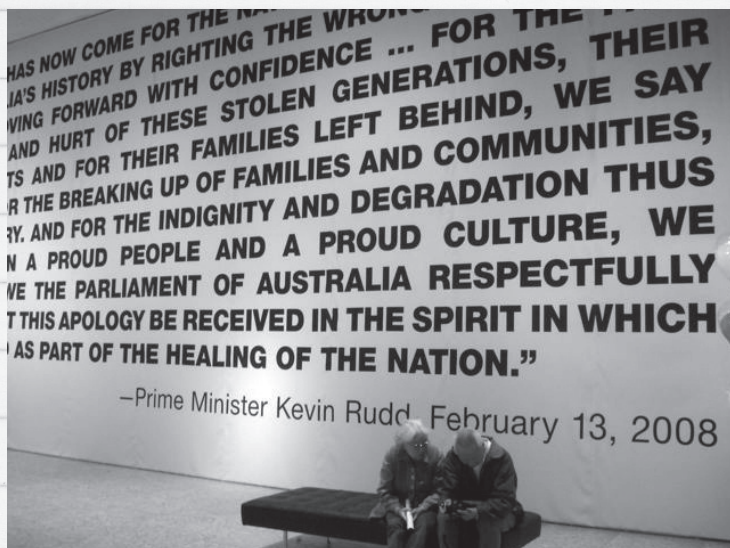
We Are Sorry (detail)
Cathy Busby
20' x 45'
fabric, ink jet prints
2010
Winnipeg Art Gallery

Artists Who Appropriate the Sacred:

Naji al-Ali, renowned Palestinian cartoonist, was born in Galilee and grew up in a refugee camp in Lebanon.

Naji al-Ali worked for a newspaper and created his character Hanthala. Hanthala is in the foreground of Naji al-Ali's cartoons, witnessing and speaking out against Israel, U.S. imperialism, and corrupt Arab regimes.
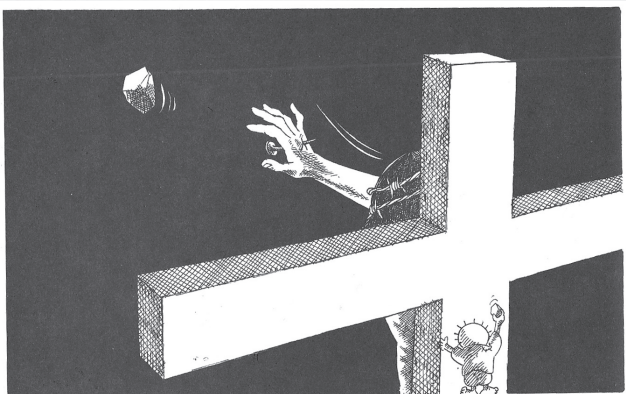
Image taken from: "A Child in Palestine: The Cartoons of Naji Al-Ali
by Naji al-Ali (Edited by Joe Sacco)
2009

Naji al-Ali's art work uses divinity as a source of strength rather than as a role of colonizer or oppressor. He says Jesus is a Palestinian and dreams of returning to his home. He depicts Jesus throwing stones in support of the intifada.

Naji al-Ali was shot and killed in London. He was 50 years old. He remains a hero in the Arab world, and Hanthala, a symbol of Palestinian resistance.

Our Lady, Alma Lopez
14' x 17.5' digital print
1999

The Perversion of Divinity:

What does it mean to take the imagery of oppression and appropriate it?

Artists explore this question in the subversion of re-interpretations of religious icons, for example in the practice of artists' queering of saints and religious icons. This act asserts the right to personally interpret and transform icons to represent one's own place in the world. To counter the mass of imagery of white, sexist, hetero-normative subjects. To insert counter-narratives to religious imagery. Women as strong. Saints as Homos. For example.

These endeavors always leave a wake of conflict by those unable to reconcile any interventions of sacred images. Alma Lopez's feminist and lesbian re-interpretations of the Virgin of Guadalupe resulted in violent protest, national debates, censorship, hate mail, and death threats.

Undoing the Sacred Through its Own Depiction:

Bible stories have been depicted for a long time but they've always been cleaned up and selectively portrayed.

MC Gaines, who claims to have invented the comic medium, published, *Picture Stories from the Bible*. When he died his son took over the business and began making these edgy and sexy crime and horror comics instead.
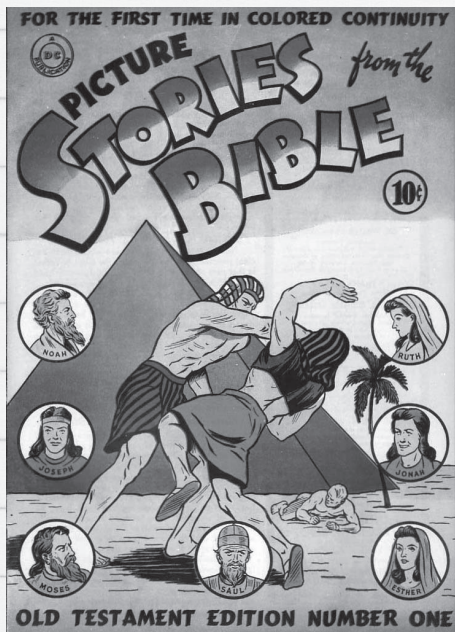
The Catholic Church opposed comic books for some time and in the 1940s even sponsored the public burning of comics. But eventually they came around, recognizing the form's appeal to young people. Their comics were, of course, cleaned-up and wholesome edits of the Bible.

In 2009 Robert Crumb illustrated The Book of Genesis**.** The *Book of Genesis* has a typical western depiction of god, who Crumb says looks like his father. Also, all the main women; Eve, Sarah and Rachel are said to look like Crumb's wife, Aline. It makes for some odd reading.

Genesis is the story of God's relationship with fallen humanity. Murder, incest, slavery, and nudity abound. People were scandalized by the *Book of Genesis* even though Crumb didn't go out of his way to be graphic. Crumb's illustrated Genesis, the chapter of the bible I read when I was seven years old, has a warning on its cover: "Adult Supervision Recommended for Minors." The literal depiction of the bible became the profane.

Finding the Sacred in the Mundane:

Simulacra is the perception of religious imagery in nature.

When images of Christ and Mary appear on toast and pancakes.

An image of the Virgin Mary appeared as a water stain on a glass façade in Clearwater Florida. Millions of visitors came. And an Ohio Catholic revivalism group bought the building.

The Creation of the Sacred:

Those facing oppression by the church can resist by creating their own interpretation of the sacred. Or those who don't have a place in religion create their own sacred system and structures.

Atheists Anonymous was founded in the 60s/70s in Winnipeg. Founders had grown up in small/religious/Mennonite communities in Manitoba and wanted to extend help to people wanting to leave their church/community but without knowing how. It was both a telephone hotline and a regular group meeting. People started calling

in from across the Prairies as the word spread. Many people in small towns who wanted to leave their community and/or religion (many of whom were Mennonite) didn't actually know anyone outside of their community, never mind know anyone who wasn't religious. Atheists Anonymous would leave little flyers around small towns in public but discrete places, people would call, and basically just get support and talk to someone who would listen to them, not judge them, and offer them ways to leave if they wanted. Often these people would come

to Winnipeg, and Atheists Anonymous would help them find an apartment and a social circle of people they could talk to about how to settle in to the big city. Many of these people were gay, or just really different from their community, and knew in their heart of hearts they could not, with a good conscience, get married and stay in their small town forever. But for many, up until Atheists Anonymous, their isolation had kept them from leaving.

COLLECTIVE INMATE ACTION:
A Broad Overview of Prisoner-led Organizing in North America

By Nicole Dawn Dunbar,
Undergraduate student at McGill University

Obstacles to Prisoner-led Organizing

The fundamental nature of organizing, a collective process of self-determination and autonomy, runs in direct conflict with the fundamental aim of correctional institutions: to establish and maintain obedience and control (Law, 2009). A summary follows of the external and internal realities that pose challenges to advancing collective action within prison communities.

Public Perspective

The prevailing public desire to maintain a clear and palpable distance away from people imprisoned (and subsequently the issues this marginalized community endures), creates a climate that effectively reinforces and sustains the policies and legislation that hyper-regulate and obstruct opportunities for organizing in prison. Prisoners most likely to engage in organizing (i.e. people with long-term sentences) are viewed as the most degenerate and unworthy which further drives the lack of public support (Huff, 1975). Given the prevalence of prejudiced attitudes towards inmates, incidences of resistance are frequently documented and interpreted as riots as opposed to legitimate and worthwhile human rights-based actions (Mathiowetz, 2010). British Columbia's Public Safety Minister, Vic Toews, responded to union organizing efforts by stating "we will not concede to the requests of prisoner advocates who continue to put the rights of criminals first" (Lindell, 2011). The absence of mainstream media coverage of the week-long strike in Georgia that occurred simultaneously in ten prisons across the state further reflects the public's detachment (Mathiowetz, 2010).

Prisoner Reality

A culture of apathy and individualism is a key obstacle inhibiting people from coming together and taking action (Ferranti, n.d.; Landrum, 2007). Landrum (2011) writes of the increasing presence of indoctrinated individualism, its subsequent erosion on prisoners' capabilities to think of the well-being of others, and identifies the need for collective mobilization for transformation. Prison Legal News founder and jailhouse lawyer Paul Wright explains that prisoners are "demoralized, beat down and defeated, and don't think they can fight for their rights" (p.3, Ferranti, n.d.).

Administrative efforts to suppress access to politically-conscious and radical texts helps to conserve prevailing beliefs that action is either unwarranted or fruitless (Ferranti, n.d; Landrum, 2007). Wright explains it is easier for prison administrations to manage and manipulate "an ignorant and uneducated class... than an educated and politically conscious one" (Ferranti, n.d). On a practical level, illiteracy further hinders access to consciousness-raising texts and limits the ability to disseminate one's own ideas and proposals for change (Law, 2009).

The nature of the issue at hand also influences the accessibility for prisoners to join initiatives. For instance, organizing around the issue of HIV/AIDS evokes fear of anticipated ostracization for association with a stigmatized community (ACE, 1998).

Community Reality

Divisions among inmates is emphasized as a significant barrier. Boundaries defined by social location (particularly between racialized and non-racialized groups), and drawn between social and political prisoners enable prison authorities to encourage discord and conflict through favored treatment, targeted violence, and rumors towards marginalized sub-groups (Bisonnette et al., 2008; Mathiowetz, 2010; Whitehorn, 2011). Additionally, increased levels of surveillance and purposeful interference from officials amplifies difficulties for particular sub-groups such as political prisoners (Law, 2009). In reference to the community's reality, Elaine Lourd (Superintendent at a New York Correctional Facility in the 1980s) asked the question "how can you talk about community organizing in a prison when prison is a community paranoid by definition?" (ACE, 1998).

Finally, the constant turnover of prisoners due to transfers, illness or death, parole, or other factors, compounds the struggle to maintain organizing momentum (ACE, 1998; Bissonette et al., 2008).

Administrative Structure

Prisoner mobilization is often seen as a direct threat to the power and authority of correctional officers who have used their prospective unions to instill guards' work stoppage (or threat thereof) to prevent inmate initiatives from garnering power and momentum (Bissonette et al., 2008; Huff, 1974).

At a higher level, the on-the-ground governance of prison institutions is widely recognized as in the hands of the person in charge of the facility (i.e: warden or superintendent). A prisoner organizer from ACLU's Prison Project states "most prison wardens don't want prisoners to play active, decision-making roles while they're in the facility" (Kaplan, 2008). The potential for administrative suppression or support is closely correlated with the disposition of the warden, leading to either ample space for prisoners to shape and change their environments (as exemplified by John Boone's advocacy and sympathies that paved the way for abolition at Walpole) or excessive and inconsistent restrictions (i.e: refusal of ReCon's request for outings lifted only after a change in wardens) (ACE, 1998; Bissonette et al., 2008; Kaplan, 2008; ReCon, 2011).

Facility Regulations and Prohibitions

Inside facilities, the monitoring and censorship of mail is a continual obstacle for people to access and discuss organizing action (Landrum, 2011; Law, 2009; Whitehorn, 2011). Depending on the facility, tightened restrictions or outright bans on media, sharing resources or material with other prisoners, and prohibited inmate to inmate correspondence present further communication barriers (Law, 2009). Regulations on movement within a facility also limit opportunities for people to meet and interact (ACE, 1998; ReCon, 2011).* The constant shifts and changes made to a facility's rules and regulations pose yet another difficulty as this underlying instability threatens the sustainability of organizing gains (ACE, 1998; ReCon, 2011).

The requirement for pre-approval of clubs, activity groups, or associations creates a near impossible climate for organizing efforts that involve regular meetings (i.e: self-help, support, or education-related groups) without the active support from outside individuals and organizations and cooperation of prison authorities (Law, 2009; ReCon, 2011). Policies that mandate the presence of a prison staff member at meetings are particularly problematic when groups need to discuss topics concerning prohibited behaviour such as drug use or sexual activity (Clark and Bowden, 1990; Whitehorn, 2009). Structurally, some areas in the

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* During early efforts, PEPA (Prisoners Educating Prisoners on AIDS) dealt with a policy that restricted the maximum number of inmates who can gather to six by having two leaders meet concurrently in groups of six with one person shouting back and forth to communicate (Kaplan, 2008).

United States go as far as to prohibit the formation of prisoner groups altogether (Kaplan, 2008). The use of legislation to suppress prisoner advocacy is also evident with the US Prison Litigation Reform Act and its prohibition of people imprisoned to legally challenge prison conditions without proof of a lasting physical injury (Law, 2009).

Anti-Gang Legislation

Canada's "Tough on Crime" agenda magnifies the suspicion and scrutiny of prisoner-led activity. This climate outside of prison walls provides increased leverage for correctional authorities to strengthen efforts to interfere with activity suspected to be linked to organized crime (Rankin, 2005). Presently, prison administrations are employing active measures to destabilize gang activities such as increased and changing scheduled roll-calls, heightened individual surveillance, and increased restrictions on visiting and allowable materials (Rankin, 2005; ReCon, 2011). Moreover, the intensified anti-gang legislation has created an influx of individuals imprisoned for gang-related activity, augmenting the number of people with longer sentences and assumed connections to organized crime, in turn fueling authorities' efforts to quell activity proactively (Rankin, 2005; ReCon, 2011).

Fear and Reprisal

Reprisal, or fear thereof, is the historical, universal, and frequently immediate response to activity rooted in rights-based action behind bars. Beyond the widely-known occurrences of physical violence and sexual aggression from guards which have immediate consequences on an organizers' emotional and physical well-being and capacity for continued action, correctional forces employ numerous other avenues of reprisal.

Segregation

Segregation and isolation measures (i.e. solitary confinement, Special Housing Units, therapeutic segregation, control units), especially those directed towards identified leaders, is a direct impediment on organizing activity as it fractures momentum, morale, and ability to communicate. The harsh conditions that accompany segregation often act as an effective deterrent to continued efforts to affect change as even the threat of isolation can be sufficient to quell prisoner-led activity (Huff, 1975; Law, 2009). Lockdowns are another common form of isolating and punishing inmates for mobilizing outside established facility structures (Bissonette et al., 2008; Huff, 1975; Law, 2009).

Transfers

The threat or actualization of transferring an individual to other units or facilities is an additional tool used by administration to destabilize efforts or penalize individuals involved in organizing (Bissonette et al., 2008; Huff, 1975; Kaplan, 2008; Law, 2009). This

form of reprisal is particularly undesired as it severs an individual's relationships, secure work placement, and established life in an institution (Law, 2009). Transfers may involve placement in a higher security facility or a mental institution as experienced by Christiana Madraza who was sent to a psychiatric institute after filing formal complaints regarding her rape by an officer (Law, 2009). Transfers may be additionally punitive as evident in the instance of Delores Garcia whose grievances and communication with outside advocates concerning inadequate medical care resulted in her transfer to an institution that entirely lacked the resources for her necessary medical treatments (Law, 2009).

Misconduct Tickets

Misconduct tickets pose an additional deterrent as they precipitate delayed parole and are used to justify segregation (Law, 2009). The heightened surveillance, arbitrary shakedowns, and cell searches that follow an administration's suspicion of undesired activity often result in excessive tickets for minor or absurd offences (Law, 2009). For instance, Mary Glover (plaintiff for a class-action suit regarding rights violations) received an out-of-place misconduct ticket (major misdemeanor) for not having a pass to stand under a tree (Law, 2009).

Health Care Control

Control over one's health care is used to hamper inmates' advocacy. For instance, limitations imposed on necessary medical care and the use of sedation or "the nod" (as referred to by lead Walpole organizer Bobby Dellelo in the 1970s) substantially compromise one's ability to carry out organizing actions (Bissonette et al., 2008; Law, 2009). Dellelo describes how Talwin, a highly-addictive substance used in the preparation of Oxycontin, was systematically used by officers to garner information by placing people in segregation units until symptoms of withdrawal led to the exchange of information for Talwin.

Designation

Labels such as "Multiple-Griever" (an official classification for those deemed as submitting too many complaints) or "security-threat" (attributed to those perceived as involved in anti-government or gang-related groups) come with increased surveillance and often restricting conditions to lift the categorization (Commissioner's Directive; Law, 2009).

Parole Deferral

The direct implications for early parole or release is a significant barrier to a person's willingness to organize (Law, 2009; ReCon, 2011). Marcia Bunney, plaintiff for the Shuman v. Wilson lawsuit regarding medical cruelty, summarizes this reality with the statement "I have been told that I will never leave prison if I continue to fight the system" (p.9, Law, 2009).

Program/Privilege Interference

The threat or actual cancelation of privileges like family visits and valued programs serves as another disincentive to taking action (ACE, 1998; Bissonette et al., 2008; Law, 2009). In light of significant mobilization within the Black community at Walpole, administration implemented an arbitrary lockdown the evening of a planned cultural celebration, turning away prearranged bus loads of family and allies (Bissonette et al., 2008). Officials also interfere individually by refusing family members during visiting hours with unfounded, arbitrary reasoning (Law, 2009).

Outside Support

Outside ally assumptions and ideals can be obstacles to advancing mobilizing efforts (ACE, 1998; ReCon, 2011; Whitehorn, 2011). For instance, early ACE (AIDS Counseling and Education) training sessions were banned after health care allies suggested writing to the Commissioner to advocate against condom and dental dam prohibition (ACE, 1998). An ally's refusal to "play the system" also creates an immediate obstacle to prisoners' leverage to execute non-confrontational organizing (ReCon, 2011).

Post-Organizing Structure

Once a prisoner-led group or movement is established, issues of professionalization or cooptation can threaten the maintenance of an initiative's foundation (ACE, 1998; Bissonette et al., 2008; Huff, 1974). For instance, following substantial administrative support (i.e: funding, work placements, official training, formalized membership), ACE organizers struggled to balance favorable relations with administration with the need to safeguard authentic peer-to-peer relationships (ACE, 1998).

Prisoner-led organizing is confronted with a number of challenges rooted in the fixed structures embedded in a prison environment. Issues that arise from allyship (or lack thereof), the navigation of correctional regulations and reprisals, and divisions among social groups generate a particularly rigid climate to mobilize for rights-based change. In response to these challenges, those imprisoned employ targeted strategies including unification, consciousness-raising, community-building, and strategic timing and leadership. An overview of prisoner-led organizing strategies is discussed in the Convergence Journal's online edition.

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THE TRUE NORTH STRONG AND FREE?

Colonialism in Canada's North: Free Entry, Yukon First Nations, and the Peel Watershed Basin

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"The true North strong and free" is a myth in Canadian nationalism, grounded in colonial legacy. While the idea of "North" occupies a firm place in our national imaginary, it remains largely a southern construction in dominant discourse – and one that is underpinned by political exploitation and neglect. Our southern idealism of the remote North is in many respects similar to the way settlers historically viewed the colony of Canada: a distant, severe, and largely unknown territory, with "land for the taking" to be developed and exploited. Today, colonialism in theory and practice continues to be reenacted in the Canadian North – and, specifically, in the Yukon – via the Free Entry mining system, ineffective devolution, and the subsequent promotion of national and private interests over local needs in resource development and management. As voiced by Farley Mowat: "Yukon Territory is, as it has remained since Klondike times: a classic example of exploitative colonialism in action."[1] The widespread struggle for the protection of the Peel Watershed is a living example of this continuing colonial confrontation, while also demonstrating the ongoing forms of active resistance that First Nations exercise in the face of persistent political power imbalances in Canada's present-day Yukon Territory.

The concept of Free Entry mining, like our idealisms of "North," arose in Canada during Britain's expansionist wave to the "New World." In the 19th century, miners were viewed as leading settlement:

> The land was perceived [by settlers] to be an unpopulated wasteland and its
> exploitation and settlement were high priorities.[2]

In 1887, Canada officially "reserved" all mineral rights west of the Third Meridian to the Crown under the Dominion Lands Act.[3] A decade later, the Quartz Mining Regulations (1898) effectively implemented Free Entry for the first time on "Canadian" soil.

Colliding with the upsurge of the Klondike Gold Rush, Free Entry directly promoted the exploration and settlement of the Canadian North. It allowed miners to occupy traditional lands, stake claims, lease, produce, and export minerals without consent or compensation to existing aboriginal communities. Prospectors moved to seize and develop as much territory as possible. As voiced by historian Nigel Bankes:

> Free entry mining regimes were introduced to suit the needs of a colonial and
> settler state seeking to develop frontier lands and to wrest control of those
> lands from their indigenous owners.[4]

The colonial assumptions behind 19th century federal policy persist today under the Yukon Quartz Mining Act (YQA)* (1924). Mirroring the settler-state inspired legislation of its predecessor, the YQA has been described as "the least-amended mining legislation in Canada."[5] It allows any individual over the age of eighteen to stake a claim on virtually any land – including Settlement Lands, traditional territory, and private property. In Yukon, 79% of the territory (375,900 km²) is available for mineral exploitation. Neither government nor First Nations discretion is required to register a claim, acquire a mineral lease, or develop minerals. Once a claim is staked, the claimant receives exclusive subsurface rights and may maintain those rights indefinitely**.[6]

Mineral exploration is not just desired under Free Entry – it is considered the priority. Land management is based on prospector (private) interest, at the expense of local communities, governments, and ecosystems. Mining operates on an unregulated, first-come-first-served basis, creating a "needle-in-a-haystack" rush that undermines any attempt to control the rate at which lands are dispossessed. The result is an overwhelmingly vast territory that is subject to scattered mineral claims, fragmenting the landscape so that it becomes unavailable for other uses (such as conservation, hunting, trapping, subsistence harvest, wildlife, recreation, tourism, etc).[7]

This frontier ideology assumes that mineral exploration is the best way to use the land.[8] It promotes the ethic of development over that of cultural or environmental conservation and self-determination – which, in an age of mass machinery and industrial

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* YQA replaced the Quartz Mining Regulations in Yukon.

** Provided that prospectors do a minimum of $100 worth of "representation" work per year. After five years, any miner can apply for a lease that lasts twenty-one years, with right of renewal (Bankes & Sharvit, 1998).

dredges, is both anachronistic and a violation of constitutionally protected right.[9]

Section 35(1) of the 1982 Canadian Constitution "recognizes and affirms" aboriginal and treaty rights. These rights may be infringed upon only if that said infringement is justified – that is to say, third parties must meaningfully consult and accommodate aboriginal communities prior to development. Yet, because Free Entry allows individuals to acquire property rights without any discretionary authority, it precludes both consultation and accommodation, leaving no opportunity for a First Nation to object to development. A mining claim on land that is subject to aboriginal title therefore symbolizes a direct prima facie infringement of that title.[10]

As voiced by the British Columbia Union of Indian Chiefs:

> Indigenous Peoples who have entered into treaties with Canada share the common complaint that Canada has steadfastly refused to honour the terms of the treaty or the promises it has made.[11]

Open staking on First Nations land or traditional territory in Yukon is inconsistent with aboriginal rights and title. Nonetheless, it is a legal right that continues to be granted by legislation and an elected Yukon government.[12]

In Yukon, the groundwork for land claims agreements was established in the 1993 Umbrella Final Agreement (UFA), a document created by the Yukon Council of First Nations, Canada, and the Yukon Territorial Government (YTG). The UFA was drafted as a structural base for future negotiations of individual Final Agreements, in an attempt to both integrate First Nations people into the state and allow groups to maintain values and traditions vital to their own identities.[13] Although praised as a progressive step in the mutual arrangement between First Nations and the Crown, the UFA has in effect stripped many aboriginal communities of any tangible control over their traditional lands.

While affirming and recognizing aboriginal rights, the document "conditionally surrendered" all but a small portion of First Nations territory to the YTG.[14] Making up 22% of the total population, First Nations' Settlement Lands are only 8.5% of the territory's land base – the remaining 91.5% lies under government jurisdiction.[15] Although communities maintain the right to continue subsistence activities on traditional lands and engage in regional land planning, the reality is that the majority of the territory rests under state (Crown) control. As pointed out by anthropologist Paul Nadasdy:

> The right to hunt on a particular piece of land, for instance, may not be compatible with the right to log or mine it. And if hunting rights to a particular piece of Crown land does not prevent the government from selling it to a third party or leasing it for development, then those rights are in reality subject

> to the whims of government, despite their 'entrenchment' in the Canadian
> Constitution. By separating the right to hunt on Crown lands from the right to
> otherwise use, alienate, or derive income from them, the Yukon agreement
> guarantees First Nations people the right to hunt only so long as the condition
> of the land and the state of development in the area allow. It does not give
> them the right to ensure that such conditions continue to exist.[16]

Historically, national rather than northern interests have dominated resource use and management in Yukon. Federal authorities have promoted the exploitation of natural resources for generations, with few (if any) benefits to northern communities. In 2003, devolution – the transfer of jurisdiction and authority from the federal government to territorial and indigenous self-governments – was advanced as a solution to this inequitable system.[17] It was believed that the YTG would be more responsive to the needs and concerns of its own population, including that of First Nations. Rather than create any real change in northern governance, however, the Devolution Transfer Agreement (DTA) adopted mirror legislation, retaining "national interests" in Yukon, with regulations kept low as incentives for developers to continue exploration in the North. According to Natcher & Davis, devolution in Yukon more closely resembles "deconcentration" than any real devolving of power:

> The concept of devolution, as applied in the Yukon, remains obscure, if not
> meaningless, to many First Nations people, and the management of natural
> resources continues to represent one of the most pervasive remnants of
> colonial experience.[18]

In resource development itself, a power imbalance remains: the YTG is a major promoter of oil and gas exploration, is party to any benefits agreements, and, in due course, is the body of power that ultimately decides what will be developed, where, and by whom. Like its federal predecessor, the YTG continues to promote outside interests in a highly centralized development regime that is isolated from many local communities.[19] This disadvantages First Nations, who bear the brunt of misrepresentation and misrecognition in government. Moreover, state authority determines the parameters of political possibility, which in itself is problematic: "By agreeing to play the land claims game on terms set by the government, First Nations people and their allies help assure that property remains a hegemonic discourse in the arena of aboriginal-state relations."[20]

The case of the Peel Watershed is a tangible example of the everyday forms of colonial confrontation and resistance that transpire in present-day Yukon. Comprising 68,000km² in the North-East Yukon, it is the traditional territory of the Tr'ondek Hwech'in (Dawson), Tetlit Gwich'in (Fort MacPherson), Vuntut Gwitchin (Old Crow), and Na-Cho Nyak Dun (Mayo). The area's relative inaccessibility (due to lack of roads) and status as unceded traditional territory prior to 1993 has allowed for whole ecosystems and traditional livelihoods to be sustained for centuries.[21] However, despite the groups' widespread ties to the area, only 3% of the basin is today recognized as First Nations Settlement Land.

Although conservation initiatives have been pushed by First Nations since mineral interest in the region became apparent in the early 1990s – both the Tetlit Gwitchin and Na-Cho Nyak Dun called for protection in their individual Final Agreements – no specific conservation strategy for the Peel was adopted.[22] Lacking the power to control escalating mineral interest in the area, First Nations moved to participate in the formation of the Peel Watershed Planning Commission (PWPC)* in 2004. This in turn ignited a staking rush that ensued until a moratorium was finally enforced in 2009. Over 8,400 current claims in the Peel, including 525 iron ore leases and coal leases, have been sought under the Free Entry system.[23]

Use of the land-planning process as a form of resistance to Free Entry and imperialist governance has been a double-edged sword for the Tr'ondek Hwech'in, Tetlit Gwich'in, Vuntut Gwitchin, and Na-Cho Nyak Dun. The PWPC is a valuable tool that has empowered communities through direct agency, community consultation, and the expression of aboriginal demands. However, it has its drawbacks: working within the structures of government limits aboriginal agency to that which may be recognized as useful to scientists and resource managers, public forums are often subject to bureaucratic language and spaces (boardrooms, etc.) that may alienate First Nation participants, and planning commissions embody and permit the presence of state control where local management has been tradition for generations. By adopting the structures of the state in Commission co-management – just as by signing Final Agreements – First Nations communities are striving to have land rights recognized while simultaneously authorizing the very colonial structures that continue to marginalize them.[24]

In 2009, the PWPC recommended that 80% of the Peel Watershed should be conserved. Pushing for full protection of the basin, the Yukon Council of First Nations and the National Assembly of First Nations decisively rejected the Plan as insufficient:

> The lands and waters of the Peel have unparalleled cultural and ecological significance for our peoples. They have sustained us in body and spirit for thousands of years...It should not be subject to hasty exploitation without thinking of the legacy we leave for future generations.[25]

First Nations will not idly stand by as outside developers lay their sacred lands to waste in the name of "national development." In resistance, First Nations communities have banded together with local environmental groups and the Yukon public to fight for the protection of the Peel.[26]

* "An independent public agency appointed to represent the best interests of the Yukon people" that operates under the umbrella of the Yukon Land Use Planning Council (Yukon Land Planning Council, 2011, para. 1).

Meanwhile, mining and government representatives have argued that Free Entry is a legislated right, and therefore the rights of claim holders should continue to be recognized and open staking allowed throughout the Peel.[27] As contended by Carl Schulze, Chair of the Yukon Chamber of Mines, legislation should not be contradicted:

> Ending free staking will destroy the idea of personal property in the name of 'values'… we have to govern our country by this rule of law, we can't govern by values because it could be anybody's values, or any one group of persons' values, or any one single ethnic group, or single interest group…[28]

Ironically, Schulze's statement assumes that Free Entry itself is objective, and that it does not represent any particular group or body of "values."

No matter, decision-making power is ultimately in the hands of the Yukon Territorial Government* – a government that continues to represent private over public interest, promote Free Entry without consultation, and deny effective devolution to aboriginal communities. Like Schulze, the YTG has stated that the PWPC plan is "unworkable" for development and infringes upon the mineral rights of miners – despite the fact that an overwhelming 71% of the Yukon population supports full protection.[29] Rather, economic considerations – mirroring our mythological narratives of the North – have been prioritized above all other concerns: "Make no mistake in assessing the negative impact that this land use plan recommendation will have on the mineral exploration industry in the Yukon; the Yukon whose very essence and character are wrapped up completely with the 'lure of Yukon gold.'"[30]

The North continues to occupy an important place in our national imaginary, yet it is far from being "strong and free." Free Entry and the imperial ideology behind it has been normalized and institutionalized in Yukon and in our idea of "North, land for the taking" for over a century. The fight for the conservation of the Peel Watershed is a living example of colonialism that dominates daily discourse in Canada and in our approach toward the management and development of resources in the North. Free Entry mining, failed devolution, and the continued prominence of national over local interests have and continue to put the traditional lands of Yukon First Nations – as well as aboriginal communities across Canada – into the hands of private developers. Furthermore, the negotiation and implementation of land agreements and planning initiatives limit aboriginal governance and force groups to conform to the existing legal and political parameters of the Westphalian state. Aboriginal-state relations remain premised on the idea of state

* The YTG will accept or reject the Final Recommended Land-Use Plan in autumn, 2011 (Frost, Taylor, Loeks, Kaye, Genier, & Hayes, 2009).

expansion and control, in which the underlying title of the Crown is unquestioned.

Colonialism is not just an issue of the past – it is real, tangible, and current. Free Entry legislation should be repealed, governments should work to make devolution actually effective in local communities, and the Peel should be protected as Yukoners wish it to be. Furthermore, in order for self-government – and, in turn, resource management – to truly be empowering to First Nations communities, we must re-examine and restructure the very foundations and underlying assumptions on which management is based, and we must take responsibility for our colonial legacy. The communities and peoples of the North need our recognition and support. For change in the North, we must first transform the imperialist narratives that have dominated northern history and constructed our views of northern lands. For, as voiced by author Grace Sherill:

> Not only are our 'nordicity' and our sub-Arctic and Arctic geography inescapable realities, but the North is deeply embedded in all that we do…. We will not change Canada by jettisoning the idea of North but by interpolating new voices into the dialogue, by actively participating in the unfinalizable process of what I call the discursive formation of North.[31]

Endnotes:

1. (Mowat, 1967, 154)
2. (Taggart, 1998, 8)
3. (NWT & Nunavut Chamber of Mines, 2001)
4. (Bankes, 2004, 322)
5. (Taggart, 1998, 9)
6. (Campbell, 2004; CPAWS-Yukon, 2010; Bankes, 2004)
7. (Bankes, 2004; Campbell, 2004).
8. (Munson, 2009; Taggart, 1998; Bankes, 2004)
9. (Bankes & Sharvit, 1998)
10. (Bankes & Sharvait, 1998; Bankes, 2004; Campbell, 2004; Union of BC Indian Chiefs, 2010)
11. (Union of BC Indian Chiefs, 2010, para. 68)
12. (Yukon Chamber of Mines, 2009)
13. (Nadasdy, 2002)
14. (Government of Canada, Yukon Council of First Nations & YTG, 1993)
15. (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2009)
16. (Nadasdy, 2002, 256-7)
17. (Irlbacher-Fox & Mills, 2007)
18. (Natcher & Davis, 2007, 272)
19. (Mowat, 1967; Irlbacher-Fox & Mills, 2007)
20. (Nadasdy, 2002, 258)
21. (Yukon Parks, 2008)
22. (Peepre, 2007)
23. (Rifkind & Gulliver, 2009)
24. (Sandlos, 2008; Nadasdy, 2002; Frost, et al, 2009)

25. (Official First Nations response, 2010, para. 3 & 10)

26. (Garon, 2010)

27. (Munson, 2010)

28. (Munson, 2009, para. 24)

29. (CPAWS-Yukon, YCS, & WTAY, 2010)

30. (Yukon Chamber of Mines, 2009, 10)

31. (Sherrill, 2001, 23)

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INTERVIEW WITH CURE STUDENT RESEARCHERS
–Allison Happ and Sharon Cromwell

By Siji Kompanal,
Coordinator of the Community-University Research Exchange (CURE)
at Concordia University

The Jobra Centre is located in Parc-Extension, a working class and immigrant neighborhood of Montreal. The centre was founded as response to the lack of support services for newly landed and existing immigrant members of the community. The Centre states that its mission is to promote social entrepreneurship, self-employment, and to empower unemployed immigrant communities. It also seeks to relieve poverty through micro-credit tools that facilitate participation in income generating activities.

The center has sought to accomplish its mission by founding a social business enterprise, the Jobra Coop Laundromat, and through the implementation of community development workshops with a focus on women's empowerment. The name Jobra takes after the village of Jobra, Bangladesh; where the Grameen Bank Project, a successful micro-credit initiative, was founded for the poor borrowers of the village, mainly rural women. Today its borrowers, the poor rural borrowers that it is meant to serve, own 90% of the bank.

The following interview was conducted by Siji Kompanal for a panel presentation on community-based social justice research at the 2011 Study in Action Undergraduate and Community Research Conference. The interviewees: Allison Happ and Sharon Cromwell, students at McGill University, are both Community-University Research Exchange (CURE) student researchers who have worked extensively at the Jobra Centre since September of 2010.

Allison Happ - Interview

Siji – So first off, what's your name, where are you from, how did you get here?

Allison – Okay, my name is Allison Happ. I am a master's student at McGill. I am doing a program called Education and Society and I came to Jobra in September (of 2010) because I was taking a class called Non-Formal Learning and for the

class we had to do a forty-hour practicum and so I found information about Jobra and was interested in the micro-credit initiatives that they are taking and so that's how I came here.

Siji – What was your role initially and how has it transformed from when you first came here to now? How long have you been here?

Allison – When I first met with Mohammad Hassan, who started the Jobra Center and then the coop, we tried to assess what would be the best way for me to get involved and the best way to concentrate my efforts into something that could be used for my practicum and he decided that what would be most useful is a series of workshops. And so what we started was one about micro-credit and then we kind of diverged from there and talked about community resources, entrepreneurship, starting your own business, women empowerment, which is our most popular workshop and then a wrap up at the end to kind of go over what we talked about and other things that we might talk about in the future.

Siji – What were your expectations when you came to the Jobra Centre and do you think that they may have been met or not and were you surprised in any way?

Allison – Initially, I did expect that I would be working or learning more about micro-credit but after having become involved with the workshops, I realized that even though that would have been nice, it wasn't exactly what Jobra needed at the moment. What they really needed and what I thought that I could help with was building a community here, between the people in the neighborhood and bringing in expertise from the outside and people sharing their stories. So, that was more of the role that it developed in and I feel completely satisfied and happy how it went.

Siji – For someone that's coming from a university background, what would you say the differences are between talking about this kind of stuff and applying it at the community level?

Allison – Well, it's definitely different from my classes where we read published authors and we read academics and their papers that they've researched extensively. It's a little bit different when you're in the community but you're still talking about the same thing the same issues, it's just in a slightly different context.

Siji – What kind of skills do you think a person needs to be successful in this environment as opposed to being in a university? Are you using a different set of skills here?

Allison – I'd say it's more practical but I am not sure if that is the right word to describe it. I think that you are still dealing with and discussing the same issues but it is a much more practical action-based way, if that makes any sense. (laughs)

Siji – Yeah. And do you think that you changed at all since the beginning to now?

Allison – Hmmm.

Siji – Are you the same person? Do you think that Jobra has changed you in any way?

Allison – No, I think that I have changed. This was my first experience in a really grassroots environment and so there is a whole cycle of the ideas that you have and how they evolve into something that is going to be useful for the community. That's definitely changed how I see community action and grassroots action.

Siji – And what's it like working with other people?

Allison – Oh, it's great! When I started at Jobra, I thought that what I would be doing would be kind of alone and I am really relieved that it wasn't because the help of a lot of other volunteers, the collaboration that has been going on has been great. It really developed the workshops into something so much more meaningful for the participants.

Siji – What do you think that the future of Jobra is, how would you envision it?

Allison – I think that Jobra is a very exciting place right now. I think that we just brought in new board members and re-defined the goals for the very present and for the very near future and I think that even though there a lot of challenges that Jobra is trying to overcome, I think that there are a lot of things that are going to come up in future. Especially, with the women's group that we are developing now, I think that has the potential to be a really great resource for the community that isn't necessarily there now.

Siji – How would you compare what you learned about this type of work in university to the practice of it? Would you say that there was a big difference or was it similar?

Allison – I think that it is similar in many ways, we read a lot about non-formal organizing in my non-formal learning class about people becoming involved and grassroots organizations from the ground up and a lot of the frustrations that they communicated in their papers, I encountered as well - trying to find the volunteers, fundraising, everything was very much,

in a way, I lived the challenges that I read about but in a different way in Jobra and in so in that I found many similarities, for sure.

Siji – Did they deter you at all when you faced these challenges?

Allison – It does get frustrating at some points but I think that when you become involved in an organization and when you see what it can promise for community members, you try to remember that when the times get most frustrating.

Siji – and what would you say to students who might be at the conference or other people, not even students but other people that are starting to learn about this way of working at a community level. What would you say to them?

Allison – I think that it is a very enriching experience and personally I came from the States; I was new to Montreal in August, I didn't know anything about the city, anything about community organizations and taking the non-formal learning class was perfect in September because it really threw me into the community in a way that I would not have the courage to seek out on my own.

Siji – So do you think that there should be more classes like that at university?

Allison – Oh, yeah! I mean I can see how – it was a very intensive course in that the practicum was a requirement for the course; forty hours, a lot of people in my program are teachers. They are working professionals all day and go to classes in the evening so they of course wouldn't necessarily have the opportunity to do forty hours on top of that in an organization but at the same time I can't imagine having taken the class without this concrete experience along with it

Siji – Thank you very much!

Allison – Thank you.

Sharon Cromwell – Interview

Siji – What's your name?

Sharon – My name is Sharon Cromwell. I was born in Zimbabwe and then I moved to Canada, near Toronto when I was three years old with my family. So I am half-Zimbabwean and half-Trinidadian. I studied International development at McGill university and I completed my degree in 2010, in the spring. Until that point, I guess my last year of university, I thought that I really wanted to focus on international issues, things like human rights, civil war, and things like that, really worthy issues. But then I got the sense that there's a lot of issues here back at home, in Canada, the environment that I know, the people that I know, the cultures that I know. There's a lot of problems like development issues here and social justice issues here so I wanted to reorient my focus to more domestic problems. That's why I got involved with Jobra and approached the Community-University Research Exchange just so that I could get more involved with a community organization and just do more grassroots work and see what I could do in that regard. So that's why I got involved with Jobra.

Siji – And so what was it when you first came to Jobra? What was your initial experience like and how has your experience changed, if it has at all? Has it changed in way? Who you are, your perspective about things, have they changed since you first came?

Sharon – Definitely, so when I first started working with Jobra, when I first came to Jobra, I really didn't know what to expect necessarily because I think what I thought I was going to be doing was more just formal research in terms of micro-credit. But, I actually started getting more involved in more operational things and workshops and just really got more within the organization, learning about its history and where it needs to go and then starting to get involved with getting the organization to that point and also getting more involved in the community. So, the first project that I really worked on was the micro-credit workshop and that was interesting. What I really gained from this experience was I just got more into community development work and grassroots mobilization and grassroots work in general.

    I just saw some of the challenges that come when you try to do that so, how to get the community involved? You know, sometimes there's worthy causes, there's a lot of issues that community members are facing especially in a region like Parc-Extension. How do you get them conscious of those issues? How do you get them to a point to where they want to act on them? But not imposing, because that's not what you're supposed to do in community development work. It has to come like an organic need from the community so without imposing or pushing them in a direction that they don't necessarily want to go into.

And so that just seems to be one of the challenges, getting people involved and it's really changed me, I guess to answer that question, it's really changed me, opened my eyes to the importance of education, the importance of consciousness you know? -- There may be objective evidence that there may be a problem going on in the community but if community members that are really just impacted by that aren't aware of it or aren't conscious or don't feel the need to change it then nothing can get done regardless of whether there's people that want to work with community members or not. That's one of the things that I really learned about and I've really gotten passionate about that.

But the experience at Jobra has been really great. Mohammad Hassan who is one of the founders of the Jobra Centre and the Cooperative, he has a lot of enthusiasm and input and passion that just, I feel keeps this whole organization and this whole cooperative, it keeps it going. So that alone was something that I learned a lot and something that I tried to pick up myself because I have the passion but sometimes it takes more than passion to mobilize you and to act on something and to follow through with an initiative so that's been something that I think that I will carry with me from this experience for the rest of my life.

Siji – How do you think it's different in how we interact with each other in a university setting and talk about these ideas and the way that we interact with each other in this community setting? What do you think the differences are?

Sharon – The main difference is that you are interacting with different people. When you are in a university setting, by the very fact that the person is in a university it shows that they are to some degree privileged. That they would be able to access such high education not only privileged in terms of finance or class in that they can afford to go to that but the fact that they've had the opportunity to develop skills or rigorous academic skills that they would be able to flourish in a university setting. A lot of people, they may be brilliant but they don't go that route. The university setting and the academic setting is very much esoteric you know, it's for university students, it's for other university-educated people. You know but when you are in a community setting it's different. You are at a different level of consciousness. You are at a different level of reasoning, you know? And that's like what I was saying before part of it's even the education. So from the university setting I may have on my own developed my own consciousness or my own ideas about what needs to be done but when I come to the community, it's not about what I think needs to be done. It's not about that consensus that we've made at the university about what needs to be done. It's like how to work with community and how to make a consensus together in what needs to be done. You know? So community work is like grassroots, it's something that you are supposed to apply. It's something that's supposed to have action and see change at the

community level. Academia seems to be more about theorizing and research, seeing what that can do but this is like when you are actually working. This is like the foot soldiers, academia seems like it's the thought. So it's different, they're complementary but they are definitely different in terms of their spheres and I think that community work is what's most important so, academic and university work it's useless unless it translates into action and changes and results for the people that need to be impacted. And Mohammad Hassan, he also said something really important, that when he goes to seminars and when he goes to conferences, who's there listening? There's other people that are doing the work, people that are university-educated and things like that. But where's the community there? The people that need to be the ones that are really passionate about, the ones that are experiencing the poverty or the social justice issues aren't the ones that are there and learning about these things. So there's even a very important disconnect that I see which even really kind of turns me away from the whole university experience.

Siji – Tell me about your new position here at Jobra. What is it? What have you learned so far and why did you guys even decide to start this position?

Sharon – Well, okay so my position kind of transformed over the time. So when I first started I was just a volunteer, maybe going to do research. Then I started facilitating workshops with another volunteer, Allison Happ and that was the micro-credit workshop. So we kind of were just like being project coordinators, in that regard. And then after that, after the workshops ended, we became board members, both Allison and I. So we are on the board now of the Cooperative and we are also taking on the specific title of volunteer coordination to see how we can get other volunteers to support the Jobra Centre and just kind of centralize all the work that's going on so that we know that we are going toward together in the same direction.

But that's another one of the problems with the Jobra Centre; it's a hundred percent volunteer-run. No one gets paid, this is no one's full time job but it is a business. It is an enterprise that needs a lot of attention and on top of that it has a social and community mission. So without that, everyone has varying levels of participation, everyone has varying levels of commitment. There is no real, like solid plan that's being put down and that's going forth. So we have a lot of problems in terms of volunteers. They come and don't necessarily know what they should do. Or some people come; they have their own ideas that might not necessarily fit in with the mission of the cooperative. So that's why right now, we are at the very beginning stages of thinking, what's the way forward that we can use to build a whole community, even a volunteer community, if I want to talk about what specifically my position's going to be. But a volunteer community, a community that can just work to prop up the Centre and establish it as a grassroots hub for the whole Parc-Extension region.

Siji – Sounds good. I think the last question will be, what do you think, what do you envision the future of the Jobra Centre to be like? Or if you could choose any future for the Jobra Centre, what you envision it as being?

Sharon – I would just want the Jobra Centre to actually realize its goals. So as a solidarity cooperative, that means there's a variety of different community stakeholders, who are supposed to be members in the Coop and the profits from the Coop are supposed to be reinvested into the community to improve the community, the Parc-Extension community as decided by the members of the Cooperative. I want it to become that so that way it becomes a very transparent, very popular community/communitarian business in that sense. You know what I mean? So, I want it to become a place that generates enough profit to be reinvested into the community so that it becomes something that the community feels that they have ownership over and also I just want it to extend its community mission because obviously dealing with some of the setbacks that come with running a business, there might be neglect of some of the community projects. So, I want it to be able to do both of those; realize its goals as a solidarity cooperative, as a business, and as a community hub.

Siji – Thank you very much, it was an excellent interview!