

**CANADA IS... WHAT?!<sup>1</sup>**  
**A MEDITATION ON THE DIASPORIC THREADS OF SETTLER-  
COLONIALISM**

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Figure 1: CANADA IS... WHAT?! Photo by author.

When I wrote *Unbecoming Nationalism: From Commemoration to Redress in Canada*, I saw it as part of a larger conversation *within* and *with* this land called Canada. So, I must admit,

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<sup>1</sup> Several months prior to the presentation of this paper at the 2021 Vienna Lecture in Canadian Studies, I invited Canadian Studies students at the University of Vienna to participate in CANADA IS...WHAT?! by sharing some of their “thoughts and impressions, dreams and nightmares, images and memories, hopes, fears and random musings about this place called Canada.” I then engaged participant contributions through a performative artistic self-reflection on the intersections of family history and national memory. This paper is the product of that exploration and is framed as a conversation between me, a second-generation settler-Canadian of Dutch descent, and an audience of faculty and students at the Centre for Canadian Studies at the University of Vienna. For more information on CANADA IS WHAT?! and a glimpse of participant contributions, visit [helenevosters.com/2021/02/14/canada-is-what/](http://helenevosters.com/2021/02/14/canada-is-what/).

when I received the invitation to give the 2021 Vienna Lecture in Canadian Studies, while I was certainly honoured, the confluence of *this* place called Canada, and *that* place called Austria — and in a broader sense, Europe — generated a disorienting sense of dislocation in me.

It's a dislocation born of the relationship between distance — spatial and temporal — and perspective. A dislocation born of my location as a child of Dutch immigrants where my sense of where I come from historically, and where I came to be, is shaped by stories, told and untold. A dislocation born of an awareness that 'my story' can be multiplied by millions of first, second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh (and so on) generation settler-immigrants to this land called Canada. Each arriving with their own particular history. Each history with its multiple tellings and contestations depending on the locations of the tellers. A dislocation born of the encounter of these multiple generations of settler-immigrants and the myriad stories they bring with them, and a national Canadian narrative of place "constructed of privileged memory and calculated omissions and lies" (Vosters, *Unbecoming Nationalism* 25).

Several years ago, I began embroidering the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada's ninety-four Calls to Action onto Canadian flags and invited others to join me as a task-based labour of collective reckoning with the gap between the forgetful settler-narratives of Canada and the lived history and ongoing present of settler-colonial violence (Figure 2). As we embroidered, we read from the TRC Report and talked about the Calls and what they meant to us (see Vosters, "Unsettling Labour"). Calls ninety-three and ninety-four had particular resonance for me. Ninety-three calls on the federal government "to revise the information kit for newcomers to Canada and its citizenship test to reflect a more inclusive history of the diverse Aboriginal peoples of Canada, including information about the Treaties and the history of residential schools" (TRC, "Final Report" 337). Building on the previous call, Call ninety-four calls on the Government of

Canada to add these words to the Oath of Citizenship administered to newcomers: “I will faithfully observe the laws of Canada including Treaties with Indigenous Peoples,” (TRC, “Final Report” 337).<sup>2</sup>



Figure 2. Stitch-by-Stitch Unsettling Canada Day Sewing Circle held in solidarity with Unsettling Canada 150 National Day of Action by Idle No More and Defenders of the Land. Photo by Elizabeth Littlejohn.

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<sup>2</sup> On 21 June 2021, three weeks after this talk and six years after the TRC Calls to Action were first issued, the Canadian Government announced that the Oath would be revised in adherence with Call ninety-four (CBC News, “Citizenship”). As Eva Jewell and Ian Mosby write in *Calls to Action Accountability: A 2021 Status Update on Reconciliation*, the Canadian government took more action on the Calls to Action in the three weeks following the discovery of 215 unmarked graves on the grounds of the former Kamloops Indian Residential School than it had in the previous three years (6). While any movement on the TRC Calls is to be celebrated, Indigenous rights activists and scholars also note that the three calls (fifteen, eighty, and ninety-four) reflect some of the reports “low hanging fruit” (30). They also note that after six years of heel-dragging, the timing of the Government’s action is indicative of the Government’s concern over the negative international attention generated by the 27 May 2021 discovery of the 215 children’s remains, begging the question, “would these Calls to Action have been implemented if not for the revelations and the ensuing public pressure?” (30).

Reading Calls ninety-three and ninety-four brought home to me some of the ways Canada's constructed narratives of national innocence, complete with its requisite omissions, are passed on to generations of newcomers, like my parents. These narratives are then further reinforced and reiterated through a variety of nationalist cultural and educational memory projects including (among others) national celebrations, multi-million dollar museums, and military commemoration ceremonies. How might my parents' (and my) understanding of this place called Canada have been different if in the process of immigrating to this land, my parents were required to learn something of the Indigenous peoples whose territories they were entering? Or about the Treaties we are beholden to and the violence of settler-colonialism on which the nation of Canada is founded, and which continues today?

I propose that we approach our virtual encounter between this here/there — 'Canada'— and that here/there — Vienna, and the dizzying array of potential locations our virtuality makes possible — as an opportunity to unravel some of the myths of separateness and sameness that national borders, identities, and discourses construct. That we approach the disorientating dislocation of speaking about place across place, as a kind productive unbecoming about what we know, or think we know.

In my work on Canadian nationalism, I use the terms becoming and unbecoming as both descriptors and to refer to processes. As a descriptor of the nation, becoming refers to Canada's popularized identity as a "nation of global peacekeepers and proud multiculturalists" (Vosters, *Unbecoming Nationalism* 8). Unbecoming, on the other hand, describes the histories and ongoing practices that detract from Canada's idealized image like "the violence of settler colonialism or the not-so-altruistic motivations and actions of Canada's military" (8).

Thinking about the terms as processes, becoming references the political, economic, and

legal processes through which the nation becomes itself as well as the ways it manufactures and maintains its becoming self-image. Unbecoming refers to the “practices and projects that work to unsettle, decolonize, dismantle, or *unbecome* Canadian settler-colonial nationalism” (8).

In this talk/paper, I apply the concept of unbecoming to my settler-Canadian origin story by unraveling my parents’ immigration story to explore the intersecting personal and national mechanisms that contribute to the production of intergenerational and transnational disavowals of colonial violence. Through this process, I invite listeners/readers to shift your attention from Canada, as a distant nation that is the subject of your studies, by broadening your gaze to include, first, an examination of the multiple historical and transnational processes that link here to there, and second, a reflection on your own relationships to place, nation, and colonial (and neo-colonial) violence.

### ***Land acknowledgement***

How do we think about the land we live on? The land we occupy? How do we think about the *countries* we are citizens of or reside in? The countries we emigrate from, or immigrate to? The countries we visit? What are the mechanisms that inform what we ‘know’ or think we know about the lands we live on and with, the lands we pass through? What are the mechanisms that support not only our knowing, but also our *not* knowing? What are the mechanisms that construct a national memory or story of place?

As you may (or may not) know, land and territory acknowledgements have become almost a norm in Canada over the past several decades. They are a way of “inserting an awareness of Indigenous presence and land rights in everyday life” and have *the potential* to draw attention to the “history of colonialism and first nations as well as a need for change in settler-colonial

societies” (The Land You Live On,” 6). They are listed on government and other institutional websites. They are regularly recited at concerts, plays, film festivals, and sporting events; and at the openings of academic conferences and presentations, like this one.

Métis scholar Chelsea Vowel writes: “If we think of territorial acknowledgments as sites of potential disruption, they can be transformative acts that to some extent undo Indigenous erasure” (n.p.). She continues, “I believe this is true as long as these acknowledgments discomfit both those speaking and hearing the words.” Vowel is among many Indigenous (and settler) scholars, educators, and activists who are concerned that land acknowledgements are losing their power to “force non-Indigenous peoples to confront their own place on these lands.”

Disrupt, discomfit, confront. These are strong words. Somewhere along the way, they stopped being words that describe my experience when I hear many land acknowledgements today. In quintessentially Canadian fashion, land acknowledgments have become kind of a badge, or signifier, of Canadian-ness. Rather than forcing a confrontation with my, and perhaps our, relationship with this land called Canada, I am wary that for me to present a territorial acknowledgement here might instead contribute to Canada’s becoming narrative of itself as a humble nation that is willing to admit and apologize for its ‘mistakes,’ a nation that tries (so very hard) to do the ‘right’ thing (Vowel 2016, n.p.).

I’m not suggesting that working to undo “Indigenous erasure” through territorial acknowledgments, isn’t important. It is. But as Stó:lō scholar Dylan Robinson asserts, “To move beyond the mere spectacle of acknowledgement as a public performance of contrition, we must take into account acknowledgement’s site and context specificity” (20). For example, on 27 May 2021, Chief Rosanne Casimir of the Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation announced that the

remains of 215 children had been found at the site of the former Kamloops Residential School which operated from 1890 to 1978.<sup>3</sup>

To contextualize Kamloops in a way that I hope will help bridge the gap between my location (here) as a settler Canadian, and yours (there) as Canadian Studies professors and students at the University of Vienna, Kamloops is midway between the popular international tourist destinations of Banff, Alberta and Vancouver, British Columbia. In lieu of reading territorial acknowledgements for these two locations, I instead offer a glimpse of this interactive map, which can be accessed at the Native Land Digital website along with teaching guides on how to use the map (Figure 3). The crowdsourced map is a “platform where Indigenous communities can represent their histories on their own terms [and] non-Indigenous people can be invited and challenged to learn more about the lands they inhabit” (Native Land Digital, Our Mission).<sup>4</sup>

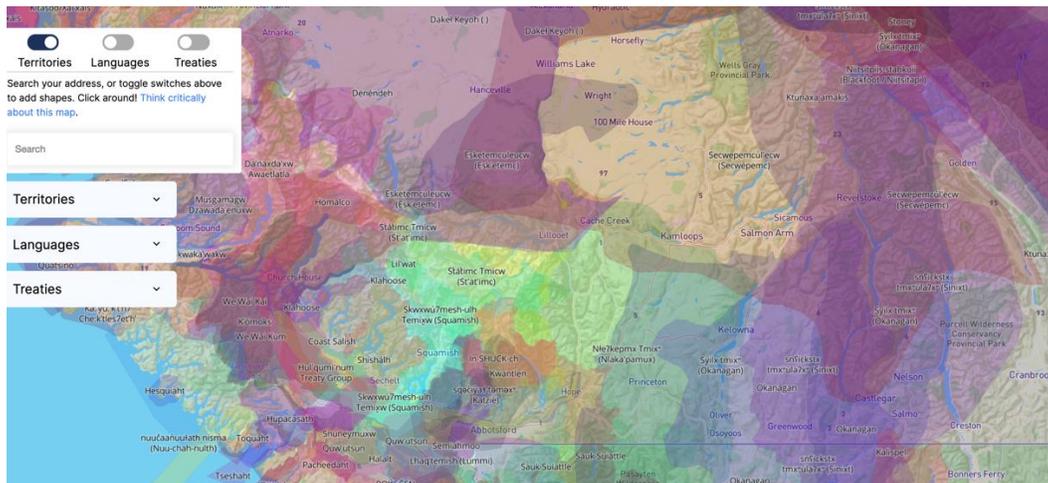


Figure 3. Screenshot from Native Land Digital interactive map showing Indigenous Territories in the vicinities of Vancouver, Kamloops, and Banff (<https://native-land.ca/>).

<sup>3</sup> Tk'emlúps te Secwépemc Media Release 27 May 2021 (<https://tkemlups.ca/wp-content/uploads/05-May-27-2021-TteS-MEDIA-RELEASE.pdf>) Thanks to Professor Ganser for opening of this virtual talk with a moment of silence for the 215 children whose remains were discovered at the site of the former Kamloops Residential School.

<sup>4</sup> I learned about Native Land Digital from my colleague Selena Couture who sent a link to the website as her response to my ‘Canada is... What?!’ query. Selina uses the Native Land website in her Introduction to Canadian Theatre course as an aid to help students “think differently about what Canada is” (personal email, 3 March 2021).

What if nations did land acknowledgments? What if as citizens of nations we did land acknowledgements based not only on where we stand, but also where we come from, and how we've come to be where we are? Land acknowledgements that take into account the extent to which our nations are products of dislocation, dislocating forces, and sites of diasporic dislocations. What if our acknowledgments were to trace the dislocated resources that have been extracted and appropriated to build our national infrastructures, monuments, universities, and wealth? For example, when I wrote about the Canadian Human Rights Museum in Winnipeg, I was struck by the dislocating dissonance of the museum's narrative around its architecture.<sup>5</sup> A narrative that celebrates a building designed to reflect the values of the Indigenous communities on whose territories the museum is located, without any reflection on the extractive environmental ethics that facilitated its monumental architectural occupation.

As a second-generation settler-Canadian of Dutch descent addressing you, a readership I assume are primarily citizens of European countries, I have decided that it would be more in the spirit of Robinson's proposition that we "decolonize acknowledgment" for me to unravel some of the particulars of my colonial relationships to this land called Canada by tracing the threads of my parents' immigration story back to my European ancestral homeland of the Netherlands.

### ***Origin stories***

Canada is a country with an origin story, a becoming story of the country's becoming. It's an "always told story," writes Mohawk scholar Audra Simpson, "that settler-colonial nation-states

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<sup>5</sup> See Vosters, "The Canadian Museum for Human Rights: Collisional Encounters of Unbecoming Canadian Nationalism" (154-91) in *Unbecoming Nationalism*.

tend to tell about themselves... that they are new; they are beneficent; they have successfully ‘settled’ all issues prior to their beginning” (177).

My being here, on this land called Canada, also has an origin story, one that reaches beyond the time and place of my birth. In that way of children, for whom the presence of parents goes largely unquestioned, for years my siblings and I never thought to ask how or why my Mom and Dad immigrated to Canada. We never thought to consider the complex personal and geopolitical backstories that informed their, and subsequently, our, presence in Winnipeg, Manitoba, what I now know is Treaty One Territory, the traditional territory of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Oji-Cree, Dakota, and Dene peoples, and the homeland of the Métis Nation.<sup>6</sup>

The generic Canadian and North American immigration story is one of peoples who leave their homelands for a ‘better life.’ When we eventually thought to ask why they came to Canada, the stories my parents, grandparents, and aunts and uncles told about their immigration were fragmented, and at times, contested by one another. What they all agreed on was that the propelling force was the Second World War and its devastating impact on the Netherlands.

As the story goes, in the aftermath of the war, many young people were leaving the Netherlands because of a lack of employment, housing, and other opportunities. Concerned that his family would end up scattered all over the world and that he may never see them again, my Opa, my Mom’s dad, decided to be proactive. So my grandparents, together with nine of their ten children, took a bus from their hometown of Bladel to Rotterdam where they boarded a repurposed military transport vessel re-christened the *Groote Beer*, crossed the Atlantic Ocean, and landed three weeks later in Mi’kma’ki, the ancestral and unceded territory of the Mi’kmaq People, a land

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<sup>6</sup> Note: Throughout the virtual presentation of this paper, whenever I mentioned a Canadian place name, I used Native Land Digital’s interactive map as visual tool for land acknowledgement and as a mechanism to disrupt our dominant nationalist and colonial relationships to place.

introduced to them only as Halifax, Nova Scotia, Canada. From there they traveled for two days by train to Winnipeg, and then another 46 kilometers to a small rural community in Southern Manitoba where they worked for the next year in the sugar beet fields of Southern Manitoba.

### *A love story*

My parents' immigration story was also told as a love story. One part of the love story was the love between the peoples of two nations. My parents, grandparents, and aunts and uncles recall their liberation during the Second World War with vivid detail and the Canadian soldiers who were on the front lines of the Netherlands' liberation with deep affection. The second part of the love story goes like this: My father, who met my mother the year before she emigrated, followed her to Canada in 1954. He also boarded a re-purposed military transport ship, this one dubbed the *Johan van Oldenbarnevelt*, which landed eleven days later in Wendake-Nianwentisiio, territory of the Huron-Wendat nation, introduced to him only as Quebec City, Quebec, Canada.

If we read my parents' immigration as a love story, we need to also recognize the extent to which it was an arranged marriage. A marriage born of the pushes and pulls of national interests. From the push perspective of the Netherlands, in addition to the devastating effects of the war there were two other intersecting factors that contributed to the post-war emigration of over 500,000 of its citizens to other countries, almost 200,000 of whom landed in Canada. First, the Netherlands had a pretty serious overpopulation problem. From 1900 to 1950, the population of the Netherlands had doubled, from five million to ten million. Much of this growth took place in rural areas which basically meant: too many farmers, not enough land (a problem that was further exacerbated by the destruction of land that took place during the war; see Immerseel).

The second factor was the loss of Indonesia<sup>7</sup> as a colony that, prior to the war, had been the source of “14% of the Dutch national income and 40% of its foreign investments” (Immerseel). Indonesia first declared its independence in 1945, when Japan (Indonesia’s Second World War occupying military force) fell. One would have hoped that the experience of occupation by German forces might have caused the Dutch government to view Indonesia’s independence through a lens of solidarity. Instead, however, the Netherlands waged a four-year armed offensive in an unsuccessful attempt to reassert colonial control over Indonesia. The Netherlands finally formally recognized Indonesian sovereignty in 1949, after 350 years of Dutch occupation.

As with all colonial relationships, the stakes were high. For Indonesia, sovereignty. For the Netherlands, access to economic, trade, and territorial and land-based resources. When Indonesia prevailed, it meant that in addition to massive economic losses, the Netherlands was forced to absorb 80,000 demobilized Dutch military personnel and repatriate 300,000 Dutch settlers into its already overpopulated nation (see Immerseel).

From Canada’s side of the marriage agreement, as the post-Second World War economy began to boom, there were calls to let in more workers, which led the government to loosen its highly restrictive immigration policies that had been in place since the Great Depression. And so, in 1947, the Netherlands and Canada came to terms on an immigration agreement called the Netherlands Farm Families Movement (see Immerseel).

Just as my parents were not informed that they would be occupying Indigenous lands, Indigenous nations were not privy to the ‘nation to nation’ negotiations that facilitated my parents’ arrival and my subsequent presence as an uninvited guest and privileged settler-citizen of this land

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<sup>7</sup> During 350 years of Dutch occupation and prior to independence, Indonesia was internationally identified by the colonial title of Dutch East Indies.

called Canada. And just as my parents arrived in a nation invested in colonial forgetfulness, they also left behind a nation similarly invested.

### *Unraveling colonialism's diasporic threads*



Figures 4 and 5. CANADA IS... WHAT?! responses and unraveling the Canadian flag. Photos by the author.

While I worked on this paper, I alternated between inscribing ‘CANADA IS...WHAT?!’ responses onto one Canadian flag (Figure 4) and unraveling a second flag (Figure 5). As I unloosed the red and white threads of Canada’s iconically friendly mascot-flag, I watched and listened to a presentation by John Immerseel titled “For a Better Life: Post-War Dutch Immigration to Canada.”

Some of what I heard was a familiar part of the stories that had been passed on to me by my family. But some of the information was new. For example, it was first time I heard about the role that Dutch overpopulation and the loss of Indonesia as a colony played in prompting the Dutch government to promote and financially sponsor the emigration (or export) of five percent of its population to other nations — settler-colonial nations that rely on the arrival of settler populations to establish and maintain their ‘dominion’ over Indigenous lands and their ongoing ability to access, or appropriate, land-based resources.

It's not that I wasn't aware that the Netherlands had been a colonial Empire. But it always seemed like distant history, far removed from my family, from my parent's immigration story, and from me. I don't know if, or how, my Dutch relatives contend with our colonial history.<sup>8</sup> The subject of Dutch colonialism came up only once during the transnational visits made by several generations of family members over the decades as international travel became more affordable.

The visit was one of those dual-purpose trips: On one hand, I had come to present at a Performance Studies conference in Utrecht. On the other, to see my extended Dutch family, who I had last visited 30 years previously. The trip, already a disorienting academic, personal, diasporic mash-up was further complicated because at the time I was performing *Impact Afghanistan War*, a counter-memorial project where I fell one hundred times a day in a public space for one year — each fall in recognition of a death in the Afghan War.

I began *Impact* on Canada Day 2010 as a response to, and a dialogue with, Canada's highly popular "Highway of Heroes" public memorials where people gathered along the 172-kilometer repatriation route between the military base in Trenton, Ontario and the Toronto coroner's office. I dedicated my first 150 falls of the year to the Canadian military personnel who had been killed while serving in the Afghanistan war (the number of Canadian casualties rose to 158 by the time I completed my year of falling). The remaining falls were dedicated to the thousands upon thousands of Afghans whose deaths existed outside of Canada's popularized national frame of military commemoration.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> See Paul Bijl, "Colonial memory and forgetting in the Netherlands and Indonesia" for an analysis of the absence of colonial violence in dominant discourses of Dutch history and the public sphere in the Netherlands.

<sup>9</sup> See "Chapter One: Beyond the Highway of Heroes: From Reverential Silence Toward a Peripheral Poetics of Lament" for an elaborated discussion of *Impact* and the context within which it was performed (*Unbecoming Nationalism* 28-69).

Whenever I fell, I set up a stand that had “Dear Witness” information cards on it and a Canadian flag with the same message attached to it (Figure 6). For my trip, my cousin Ton translated the card into Dutch. (Figure 7).



Figures 6 and 7: Witnesses reading *Impact Afghanistan War* information card. Photo by Cassie Scott. Dutch language version of information card.

June 3, 2011  
Mill, The Netherlands  
Falls 33,700-33,800

*It's been over a week since we arrived in Nederland where I encountered a dizzying fear of falling — a kind of psychological and diasporic vertigo. My concern over whether Impact's meaning makes sense here combined with an amplified sense of shyness that comes with falling in a new place and a fear that I might embarrass my Dutch relatives. So, after eleven months of performing Impact daily I found myself wondering whether I should continue.*

*Three things brought me back from the brink of quitting: First, the commitment I made to fall everyday for a year served as a kind of ritual container that has helped me continue despite my insecurities and resistances. Second, throughout the trip I received a great deal of support from family, friends, and strangers. And finally, the horrific reports of the Afghan civilians killed this week by Canada's US allies helped shift my focus from the 'small me' of my self-consciousness to Impact's larger intention.*

June 5, 2011  
Reusel, The Netherlands  
Falls 33,900-34,000

*We arrived in Reusel yesterday where we were warmly welcomed by my extended family on my Dad's side. Dad was born and raised in Reusel, and Mom, in neighboring Bladel. When I began Impact I had no idea that I would spend part of the final month falling in The Netherlands, where both my parents experienced what it is like to live through a war fought on your own soil.*

*As I've fallen throughout the Netherlands, I have been haunted by a question people have frequently asked over this past year: Why Afghanistan?*

*On the one hand the answer is simple. I fall in recognition of Afghan dead because Canada is at war in Afghanistan, and because there is little to no public recognition of Afghan casualties within Canada. On the other hand, the answer reflects the problem of singling out some populations as worthy of mourning, and in the process, excluding or ignoring others.*

*Falling this morning in Reusel, I thought of all the blood shed on this soil — not just that of Canadian (and ally) military casualties, but the blood of the many civilians, and yes, even the blood of the 'enemy' German soldiers. Each death left behind grieving mothers and fathers, brothers, sisters, spouses, children, and friends.*

*Impact Afghanistan War: Blog archive*

As the result of a query by a Dutch friend, a camera crew came to film me falling in a square in Eindhoven and did a short interview that aired on Brabant Television (Figure 8). When I returned to Reusel there was a small group of family members gathered around the TV. In the past, pilgrimages to Canadian War memorials in Bergen-op-Zoom and Groesbeek had been a regular part of the itinerary arranged by my Dutch relatives when my parents, or my siblings and I visited. But, prior to this moment, I don't recall *ever* having a critical discussion about militarism and war with my Dutch relatives during any of our visits in the Netherlands or Canada.



Figure 8. *Impact Afghanistan War* on Brabant Television. Photo by Cassie Scott.

It was the first time we ever talked about how nations construct frames of grievability for some of war's dead, while 'others' are cast outside of those frames.<sup>10</sup> A cousin spoke of her father-in-law who served in the post-Second World War Dutch offensive to reassert colonial control over Indonesia. She said that he often expressed resentment over the disparity between how Dutch soldiers who died in Indonesia were memorialized compared with the more reverential treatment afforded to Canadian and ally forces who died during the liberation of the Netherlands. At the time, no one mentioned, and I didn't think to inquire, about the 300,000 Indonesians who were killed during the war to regain control over Indonesia, or of the violence and oppression perpetrated by the Dutch throughout their 350 years of colonial occupation of the former Dutch East Indies.

***Colonization: Here, now, there, then***

Over the last several decades, because of the ongoing work of an assemblage of Indigenous (and settler) activists, artists, lawyers, scholars and educators, there has been a growing awareness within the Canadian national consciousness about the violent history and ongoing legacy of settler-colonialism. But Dylan Robinson's proposition that we think about land acknowledgements in terms of historical specificity has prompted me to consider more deeply the histories I/we leave behind and how the dislocation from my/our histories affects our current relationship to the lands we live on.

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<sup>10</sup> *Impact Afghanistan War*, as well as my broader research into social memory, nationalism, and violence are deeply informed by Judith Butler's *Frames of War: When is Life Grievable* and *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (see *Unbecoming Nationalism* 34-35). Butler argues that the different ways we frame war need to be understood, not merely as symbolic, but rather as "material instruments of violence" (*Frames* xiii). The images and narratives we place inside the frame serve to legitimize selective geopolitical agendas and worldviews. Frames also work to "de-realize" 'enemy' or "otherized" populations either by overtly demonizing them, or more subtly, by placing them outside the range of our collective grief. Commemoration, or practices of "celebrated public grieving" render some populations as "grievable" while there is a corresponding "prohibition on the public grieving of other's lives" (*Precarious Life* 33-37).

When I first began thinking about settler colonialism, I reflected on how I could be more accountable as a settler-Canadian in the present. But I never really considered my, or my family's lack of historic accountability. I had placed the historical responsibility for Canadian settler colonialism on Canada's British and French colonizing nations. As I tugged on the threads of my family's immigration story, however, I found myself reflecting more deeply not only on the settler-colonial omissions my parents encountered when they arrived here, in this land called Canada, but also on the histories of colonization they left behind — Indonesia, Africa, South America, North America. The Netherlands' wealth, like that of many nations, is dependent on colonization. In fact, the territories my parents landed on when they first arrived in Canada had once been on the Northern edge of territories claimed by the Dutch West India Company.

What histories do we bring with us? What histories, knowingly or not, do we leave behind? What if we undertook to doing land acknowledgements that were also acknowledgements of the larger forces that propel, coerce, force, or entice people to traverse from one land, territory, or nation, to occupy, or extract resources from, the lands and territories of Indigenous populations?

***In Closing: Canada is...***

My initial impulse for sending out a call inviting people to respond to the query CANADA IS... WHAT?! was as a way of reaching out to those of you who are students of Canadian Studies at the University of Vienna. I was searching for a way to bridge here and there and what it means to think and talk about this place called Canada across such a disorienting distance. I was curious to learn something about your impressions of Canada. I was also curious to see what kinds of response I might receive if I circulated the query more broadly as well. The responses I received were informative and diverse in perspective. There were also relatively few which, in part, I

attribute to my limited social media presence and a general Covid-era digital fatigue. In closing, I offer this short (ever-incomplete) crowd-sourced ode to this place called Canada.

CANADA IS...WHAT?!

a living postcard  
icon of wildness tamed  
empty and inviting  
mountains, lakes, prairies  
photo-op bear, elk, moose.

maple syrup, Tim Hortons, Niagara Falls  
friendly, friendly, friendly

an idea, a collective myth, a construct  
an imaginary fiction made fact by laws and borders with profoundly consequential material effects economic, social, political, environmental.

a member of the Country Club of nations  
born and reborn of dispossession and disavowed violence  
becoming, unbecoming, becoming, unbecoming over and over and over again.

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