

Performance Matters

Migrant Memory, Movement, and Misrecognition: Reactivating Diasporic Experience Toward an Anticolonial Politics of Place

Jimena Ortuzar

Volume 7, Number 1-2, 2021

Performing (in) Place: Moving on/with the Land

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1085314ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1085314ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Institute for Performance Studies, Simon Fraser University

ISSN

2369-2537 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this article

Ortuzar, J. (2021). Migrant Memory, Movement, and Misrecognition: Reactivating Diasporic Experience Toward an Anticolonial Politics of Place. *Performance Matters*, 7(1-2), 84–96. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1085314ar>

Article abstract

How might diasporic experiences of loss and displacement aid immigrants in responding to and acknowledging Indigenous lands and territories? Drawing from my own immigrant experience, I retrace and reinvent my movement in Tkaronto through walking practices that recover memories of migrancy as a newcomer to the land known as Canada. Such memories can be useful sources for immigrants to consider their relationship to settler colonialism. Reactivating them through movement might elicit a new responsiveness to the land as well as recognition of its caretakers and their struggles. I reflect on the possibilities that such a practice of walking and thinking through embodied memories can open up for undoing the coloniality of thought that underpins migrant aspirations for “a better-than-survival kind of living” (Berlant) and that so often results in assimilation to, and participation in, a settler colonial state.

© Jimena Ortuzar, 2021



This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

<https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/>

érudit

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

<https://www.erudit.org/en/>

ARTICLES

Migrant Memory, Movement, and Misrecognition: Reactivating Diasporic Experience Toward an Anticolonial Politics of Place

Jimena Ortuzar

When your life experience is touched and formed in and by the Third World, geopolitics matter; or when you realize that as a citizen of the First World you belong to a history that has engendered coloniality and disguised it by the promise and premises of modernity, you encounter coloniality from the two ends of the spectrum.

—Walter Dignolo and Catherine Walsh, “On Decoloniality”

Walking and Thinking . . .

I walk and think about the Avá Guaraní, Kolla, Mapuche, Ranquel, Qom (or Toba), and Tupí Guaraní nations on whose ancestral lands I first learned to stand and walk.

I walk and I think of the Matlatzincas, Mazahuas (Hñatho), Nahuas, and Hñāñhü, and the Tenochca (or Mexica) nation on whose ancestral lands I ran and played as a child.

I walk and I think of the Mi'kmaq and Beothuk, of the Inuit of Nunatsiavut and NunatuKavut and the Innu of Nitassinan on whose lands I first walked upon arriving in Turtle Island.

I walk and I think about the Anacostans (or Nacotchtank), the Piscataway and Pamunkey peoples on whose ancestral lands I marched and chanted with my children.

I walk and think of the Anishinaabe, Wendat, Haudenosaunee, and Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation on whose ancestral lands I now dwell and learn.

I walk and I think about the Coyaima Natagaima, Embera Chamí, Embera Katío, Muisca, Nasa, Sikuani, Guambiano, Kankuamo, and Uitoto peoples on whose ancestral lands I hope to walk and think soon.¹

Two moments that explore what it means to recognize and respond to ancestral lands through embodied practice have inspired me to recently engage in walking, moving, and thinking in different parts of Tkaronto, where I now live. The first occurred during “Walking Our Way Here,” a walking/movement working group convened by Jenn Cole, Natalie Rewa, and Keren Zaiontz at the 2018 Canadian Association for Theatre Research conference, which took place at Queen’s University in Kingston. During our collective walk on Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee ancestral lands, Anishinaabe scholar and theatre practitioner Jill Carter handed the walkers a piece of thick and textured red fabric while speaking to us about the Crawford Purchase of 1783 (the fabric

Jimena Ortuzar is a SSHRC Postdoctoral Fellow at X University’s School of Performance. She recently completed a PhD at the University of Toronto’s Centre for Drama, Theatre and Performance Studies with a collaborative program at the Centre for Diaspora and Transnational Studies. Her research contributions explore a wide range of social issues through the lens of performance, including transnational migration, affective labour, digital culture, urban activism, feminist art, visual studies, and Latinx theatre.

symbolizing the red cloth gifted to the Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg) and asking us to engage with the question of where “here” is. I have carried this red fabric with me (in the same red bag I’ve carried for ten years) since that walk as a reminder to think about the land, its original inhabitants, their histories, and their struggles.²

The second moment took place when Malaysian-born dancer and choreographer Lee Su-Feh performed a ritual of acknowledgment at the 2019 PSi (Performance Studies International) conference in Calgary to recognize the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Tsuut’ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda.³ The performance, as she put it, was “one immigrant’s way of acknowledging the Indigenous territory on which she dances,” ultimately asking spectators to consider how we are all situated in relation to the nation known as Canada and to the colonial project. Courageously, Su-Feh performed this ritual during a storm, her body shaking as she endured the cold rain. The difficult conditions under which this acknowledgment was performed gave rise to another question: how might diasporic experiences of hardship and displacement aid in responding to and acknowledging Indigenous lands and territories? Can these experiences be activated in immigrants whose communities tend to conform to the dominant order of settler colonialism?

Drawing from my own immigrant experience of feeling the ground shift under my feet, I explore the possibilities of walking/moving with a different relationship to memory and mobility, one that reactivates distress and displacement. Newcomers endure hardship and struggle to overcome feeling uprooted, disoriented and out of place in order to assimilate, only to realize that we are participants in the ongoing process of colonization. How might this struggle to survive and assimilate be recovered and redirected toward an embodied practice of meaningful recognition of our relationship to Indigenous lands? What follows is the beginning of a process toward this recovery, one that retraces and reinvents my movement as a newly arrived immigrant but also my trajectory toward Tkaronto—in other words, how I made my way “here” in the first place. The key to this journey, however, is how I engage the present conditions of my movement with my memory of migrancy and misrecognition of the land we call Canada, connecting past experiences with a move toward an anticolonial politics/praxis of place (Arat-Koç 2014).

I had initially envisioned a walking/movement practice that demanded a great deal of effort and created significant physical discomfort in the hope of forcefully prodding my memory. I soon recognized that this particular memory work demands a different kind of attention—attention to gestures and sensations, emotions and expressions, needs and desires that are constituted in and through mobility and migration. I also realized that I must travel further back, well before my arrival to these lands. Migration is not only marked by departures and arrivals. It is processual and contingent. Its possibilities and enactments entail embodied, affective, and material components of becoming (Papadopoulos and Tsianos 2007, 228). As such, my journey of migration toward and within this land is not a closed chapter in the past. It’s open to imaginative reworkings and transformations. Critically engaging with it can extend the possibilities for reflective connection to place. It might even disrupt the migrant fantasy of freedom and mobility—the fantasy of the modern subject whose movement happens in innocence even as it takes place on colonized territory (Lepecki 2005, 14). If it is true that a diasporic experience allows for “a new imaginative relationship with the world” (Rushdie 1992, 125), then imaginatively becoming more attuned to the place in which we live and move might shift our relationship to Indigenous lands, communities, and histories to one of responsibility and care.⁴

Falls and Detours

Falling Walk

I remember thinking many years ago while living with my family in Toluca, a small city in South-Central Mexico, that there was a slim chance we could be headed for Calgary. Images of Calgary had flooded our home through a tiny black and white television showing the Winter Olympics. I had never seen snow except for the ice patches at the peak of the Xinantecat, a volcano at the edge of our town. At that time, I had no idea Calgary was also called Moh'kins'tsis or that it was in the traditional territories of the Blackfoot Confederacy (comprising the Siksika, Piikani, and Kainai First Nations), the Tsuut'ina First Nation, and the Stoney Nakoda (including the Chiniki, Bears paw, and Wesley First Nations). I knew little about the land called Canada, a place long eclipsed by US imperialism and, at this juncture, by international politics at the close of the Cold War. This all changed when I learned that my parents were seeking asylum in Canada. We were moving to the "First World."

Ideas of First and Third worlds, North and South, had a powerful influence on the sense of place and worth in the world for people situated in what is now known as Latin America.⁵ The First World signalled progress—the idea upon which modernity rests—while the Third World remained associated with nature, the raw material for the "forward-moving engine of progress" (Mignolo 2005, 82). Moreover, the differences between the north and the south of the Americas⁶ were not simply cultural. This conception only "masked the colonial power differential that was translated from its construction in Europe and imposed on the Americas" (80). In other words, the differences between Europe and the two Americas had been defined in Europe (first in Spain and Portugal, and later in England, France, and Germany)—they were not cultural but imperial and colonial differences (80–81). Though America as a continent had long been considered inferior in European narratives, it was Latin America that eventually emerged as the underdeveloped subcontinent, within the West and yet outside of it, inferior to and dependent on a First World that was always already ahead.⁷ In this spatial and temporal hierarchy, the city of Calgary appeared as everything that Latin America had yet to become. I was as fascinated as I was terrified by the prospect of moving there.

But as it turned out, our assigned destination wasn't Calgary; it was St. John's. We had never heard of this mysterious place, and in pre-internet times, it was impossible to simply google St. John's, Canada. So, my mother searched the atlas (the Google Maps of the pre-internet age) while my brother and I waited anxiously. When she found the little dot on the map, she gasped. It seemed so far north, the most easterly city on the map, right at the very edge of the continent. Vertigo. The feeling that we might fall—fall off the edge of the map. Indeed, "falling is a movement between one place and another" (Claid and Allsopp 2013, 1). For my parents, who had lived in Argentina and Chile for most of their lives, the other extreme of the hemisphere must have felt like the end of the world. This is not to say that we viewed the world upside down (like a McArthur's map where the south is on top and the north is at the bottom). We knew very well our place on the north-south axis of the world where the north dominated the south, most visibly through US political interventions in Latin America but also finance capital, trade agreements, debt, austerity, labour exploitation and extractivism. As Walter Mignolo and Catherine Walsh observe, "when your life experience is touched and formed in and by the Third World, geopolitics matter" (2018, 5). Attention to geopolitics is certainly a legacy of anti-imperialist struggles in Latin America, though at such a young age, what I sensed all around me was both contempt and desire for the "Anglo" Americas that had ended up on top, in the north and the First World.

If my relation to the hemisphere was infused with a particular view from below, it was also shaped by Eurocentric legacies embedded in Western geopolitics of knowledge. Indeed, the very map of the continent on which my mother and I traced our transnational journey northward was the result of cartographic conventions and naming privileges during Europe's colonizing enterprise. As with the world map, so too "colonial narratives, descriptions and arguments appropriated the world," turning it into a universal regime of truth (Mignolo 2005, 187). Western Christian Europeans assumed their specific image of the world was "the representation of a geohistorical ontology of the world"—this is how "coloniality of knowledge orients both geopolitical designs and body-political subjectivities" (195). Decolonization from Spanish and Portuguese rule in Central and South America during the nineteenth century had succeeded politically (and to a lesser extent economically), but it had not been accomplished epistemically. The "logic of coloniality" (Mignolo 2003) remained and was reinscribed in the nation-building projects that followed independence from the empire.⁸

The walking practice I began responds to the coloniality of knowledge that had long shaped my subjectivity and also aims to recover the vertigo my family and I felt when confronted with the fact of moving so far north and so close to the edge of the map. It's a simple walk with two conditions. The first involves allowing myself to get lost along the streets and alleys of the city, a mode of ambling that works against my cartographic conditioning—that tendency to see the world as a map with fixed points of location. As Cree scholar Dallas Hunt and settler scholar Shaun Stevenson observe, "the production of maps remain(s) an integral mode of solidifying nationalist, and indeed, settler colonialist constructions of Canada's geography" (2017, 374). The primacy of geography is a key aspect of imperial culture (Said 1993, 93) and refusing it means rejecting "an assumed topography, an already 'worlded' world" (Clifford, 1989).⁹ Lost in urban space, if only momentarily, the city becomes a place that is once again unknown—a site open to new creative engagements and relations that disturb settler motion and subjectivity. It's a reminder that place is not an ontological object that is rooted and bounded, and certainly not a set of coordinates on a map. As Glen Coulthard explains, "place is a way of knowing, experiencing, and relating to the world" (2014, 79). It's a process that is open and subject to change, to be redefined and reimaged in practice.

While getting lost in the city may recall the urban walking practices of *flânerie* and *dérive* or "drifting" where individuals "let themselves be drawn by the attractions of the terrain" (Debord [1958] 2006, 62), and which historically valorized the male gaze of a socially privileged white and abled-bodied walker, my attempt to get lost is about recalling the sense of disorientation I felt when I arrived in Toronto as well as the actual (and frightening) experience of getting lost.¹⁰ It is also about recalling the experience of loss, the loss of connections and attachments to place that often fuel migrant imaginaries of diasporic return to the homeland. Remembering these early migrant experiences as I walk—remembering the feeling of the ground shifting under my feet—brings an awareness of my affective and embodied experience of space with new attention to where "here" is. Reactivating migrant memory through movement to shake up perceptions of space thus differs from psychogeographic walking practices, which too often treat urban space as open territory for exploration and self-discovery.

The second aspect of this walk involves moving along the edges—the edges of walls, structures, ledges, sidewalks, bridges, benches, cracks, and crevices—so as to feel a slight sense of vertigo, a sense that I might fall, the feeling of becoming unbalanced, unsettled, unsure. The here-and-now uncertainty of falling, as Emilyn Claid and Ric Allsopp observe, sparks "a realisation that a sense of self emerges in relationship with the environment and that letting go (falling out) of a fixed identity taps into a potential for unknown possibilities" (2013, 1–3). In contrast, the sense of falling from the

map we had imagined and experienced so profoundly was linked to epistemic assumptions of Western knowledge. The act of almost falling is also a reminder not to fall into colonial spatial and discursive practices. Recovering vertigo through a walking practice, then, is one way to start letting go of colonial thinking and doing.

Detour Walk (An Unwalkable Walk)

“You’ll never forget your first immigration officer,” filmmaker and scholar Ali Kazimi told his audience as he recounted his experience of arrival during a conference on radical hospitalities and intimate geographies that took place in Toronto in 2017. He was right, I thought. I would never forget the name of the immigration officer who met us at the airport in St. John’s, even after all these years. It’s hard to describe how shocked he was when he saw us, or rather when he realized that we were the refugees. Despite our lack of English or the look of terror on our faces, we couldn’t possibly be people coming from South America (in his particular vision of the world). We just didn’t fit the image he had constructed of us, or perhaps we had simply failed to perform properly as new arrivals. It turns out that our immigration officer knew as little of the Americas of the South as we knew of the land called Canada. This (mis)encounter set the tone for the next turbulent weeks as we waited to know what would happen to us. The weeks felt like years, the ground felt shaky and unstable, and the feeling of falling returned.

During this time, my brother and I were to stay close to the hotel where we were housed in the outskirts of the city, so we took several walks between the hotel and a place called the Avalon Mall on Kenmount Road. What I remember vividly from this walk was the sound of our feet as we marched on the pebbles of an unpaved road, the cold wind on my cheeks, the overcast sky, and the feeling of displacement and uncertainty. I realized that knowing where I was on a map meant nothing; maps told me little about where “here” was—the land on which I walked, its people and their histories. We had ended up there as a result of Canada’s refugee dispersal policy and, like so many immigrants, ultimately made our way to the larger metropolitan centre of Toronto.

While the current pandemic makes it difficult for me to physically retrace the steps of these walks, it doesn’t prevent me from imagining a walk—a walk that recognizes the missteps of our trajectory. That we had suddenly found ourselves in a liminal place, waiting for others to decide our fate, opens up possibilities to imagine what might have happened in this time of suspension and how things might have unfolded differently. This walk, then, is an imagined walk that I visualize in retrospect. It’s a walk in which we know we’re arriving as guests on the ancestral lands of the Mi’kmaq and Beothuk as well as the Inuit of Nunatsiavut and NunatuKavut and the Innu of Nitassinan, and it’s a walk in which our stay as guests in this land is not determined by paper documents or left to the whims of an immigration officer. In this walk, I remember and reimagine the sound of our feet as I marched with my brother among the pebbles of that unpaved road. In this moment of suspension—of not knowing where I am—I recall walking on pebbles many times before on the land that had been home to me for so long. This was a land where I knew something about its peoples and histories: the ancestral lands of the Matlatzincas, Mazahuas (Hñatho), Nahuas and Hñāñhü, and the Tenochca (or Mexica) nation. Beyond the land where I lived, I had walked on pebbled roads to visit the lands of the Zapotec (Binnizáa), Mixtec (Tu’un savi), Chinantec (Tsa jujmí), Huastec (Téenek), and Mixe (Ayüükjä’äy). I imagine a trail of pebbles linking these lands with the lands of the Mi’kmaq and Beothuk across Turtle Island. This trail is a figurative one that connects shared histories of colonial violence but also of political and identity struggles for sovereignty and survival. As Diana Taylor observes, what connects many populations across the Americas is not the geographical fact

of the hemisphere but the conditions of impossibility and opposition that define their “shared hemispheric reality” (2007, 1417). This shared hemispheric reality includes traumatic memories of genocidal practices as well as ongoing struggles against racial, economic, and political oppression in the here and now.

In this reimagined walk of suspension, the land on which I am a newly arrived guest appears less strange and more familiar. It’s no longer just a location on a map from which I might fall; it is a place of Indigenous cultures and histories, languages and cosmologies, traditions and rituals, habits and beliefs. It is also a place where Indigenous people continue to fight to maintain and protect the land, where the struggle for sovereignty is based on responsibility to the land rather than on control of territory (Monture-Angus 1999, 36). As Patricia Monture-Angus of the Mohawk Nation relays, “the request to have our sovereignty respected is really a request to be responsible. I do not know anywhere in history where a group of people have had to fight so hard just to be responsible” (36). In this reinvented memory, I no longer walk in fear; I walk with care and gratitude, with respect and admiration, and with a desire to learn what responsibility really means from the traditional custodians of the land.

Making My Way Here

Shame Walk

Making my way here means, in one sense, looking back at my journey to this land (along with the stumbles and detours that make it a distinct migrant experience).¹¹ But making my way here is also about a journey in the making, across real and imagined borders, across space and memory, in the hope of becoming more attentive to the land on which I now dwell. It’s a process that might reveal unexpected insights and pathways for a more meaningful relationship. However, learning about my relationship and responsibility to the land called Canada means taking account of my relationship with a land called Mexico, a place to which I had previously migrated as a child, and one that radically changed my view of the world. My arrival in Mexico represents a critical moment in my transnational journey; it was the beginning of an education in class-specific consciousness (and its complex relation to race and nationality) as well as the beginning of an awareness of the land as a place with a history—a history that felt palpable there, as if the stories of the past were constantly seeping into the present.¹² It’s important to note, however, that much of the Indigenous history I learned was framed through the national ideology of *indigenismo*, which glorified Mexico’s Indigenous past while ignoring the contributions and claims of contemporary Native peoples.¹³ It was not until after I had departed that the Zapatista rebellion burst onto the political stage, bringing to light the ongoing activism of Indigenous organizations fighting for autonomy and self-determination.

Before Mexico, I had grown up in Argentina, in the largest public housing development ever built in Buenos Aires, which housed thirty thousand people in more than a hundred monoblock buildings linked with elevated walkways. Living in this massive low-income housing complex as a small child had shaped my social consciousness: with everyone around me living in the same way, in the same buildings and the same tiny apartments, life appeared (to my five-year-old eyes) relatively equal for all. This illusion was, to a certain extent, a reflection of Buenos Aires at large, where the middle classes consciously ignored disparities in an effort to maintain the social integrity of a city they associated with their own class identity.¹⁴

No such illusion seemed possible in Mexico, where class origins were (and continue to be) a central factor in the production and reproduction of social inequality. Class difference was hypervisible in Mexican society—it was seen and felt everywhere and all the time. However, racial dynamics were not explicit or publicly acknowledged, largely as a consequence of the homogenizing racial logic of *mestizaje* that valorized a mixed national identity (Moreno Figueroa 2010, 387–88).¹⁵ The mestiza identity as a measure of national belonging erased Indigenous struggles for autonomy while the discourse of a racially undifferentiated society hid the presence of racism in the country.¹⁶ I quickly learned I had a social advantage as a South American immigrant with white skin, but I was constantly reminded that I lacked the corresponding socioeconomic status associated with whiteness as a site of privilege. This lack of socioeconomic status is readily understood as a material condition, but it has a performative dimension that shapes everyday encounters. Manner, dress, language, taste, style, as well as education, housing, and access to capital (the ability to make and spend money), are all part of a codified system of identification rooted in visible or performed social markers.

I wondered if class difference mattered so much in Canada and whether it was so palpably present in daily life. Perhaps it would no longer be a problem, I thought, because what I lacked in terms of social status and material well-being could surely be remedied by moving to the First World—the land of the modern and the possible, of progress, wealth, and opportunity. First World dreams reigned among aspiring middle-class Mexicans holding on to promises of prosperity in a country that was always in a state of becoming a modern industrial nation. Rather than waiting for the First World to arrive (which certainly meant it would arrive only for some), migration offered the possibility to go there at a time when staying put proved increasingly difficult for us, both from a political-legal and economic standpoint. Migration, however, is rarely the result of a fully rational and calculated choice at a single point in time and more often occurs in relation to articulations of the past, present, and future as well as imaginations of the world, emotional valences, aspirations, hopes and desires (Collins 2018, 967; Shubin 2015, 353). Fear and anticipation filled my mind as I thought of migrating northward, moving up toward that little dot at the edge of the map of Canada that represented “a better-than-survival kind of living” (Berlant 2007a).

I soon discovered that moving northward came with a different kind of mobility than expected—downward social mobility. As new refugees/immigrants with no home, no jobs, no networks, no language, no return ticket, and no assurance of our legal status, we had fallen down the social ladder to the bottom and were now desperately struggling to gain a foothold in a foreign place. Our first home in Toronto seemed to reflect this feeling of falling or sinking below the surface: a dark, minuscule (surely illegal) basement with a stove hidden inside a closet and a little bar sink too small to wash plates (except perhaps little dessert plates, which we didn’t have). Its low ceilings and tiny windows indeed made us feel like we were living underground.¹⁷ Nonetheless, it felt good to have some sort of housing we could call home after weeks of being in limbo, both in St. John’s and Toronto. We worked hard to make it liveable, finishing the unfinished basement on our own, and fixing, sanding, varnishing, and painting recycled furnishings. I was surprised by our strong desire to make the uninhabitable homely.

I quickly learned to love my new subterranean dwelling; it was a refuge from the daily hardships and sorrows of migrant life in the city. However, I had accepted my new home only insofar as it could be kept secret. I dreaded to think what kids at school would say if they knew where I lived (it was bad enough that I was the new immigrant with the outdated outfits who couldn’t even speak English). But I had learned to conceal well what I lacked (to the extent possible) during my time in Toluca, where doing so was simply part of social relations and everyday life. I kept quiet about my

living conditions at school, and this was easy enough given my lack of proficiency in English. However, I soon started walking home from school with a couple of girls from my class who lived in the neighbourhood. With my stop first on the route home, I had to think of some way to keep my home a secret from my new friends. This need led to a particular walking-home-from-school practice that unfolded as follows: upon reaching my stop—the house of our landlords that hid my home below it—I would say goodbye and slowly walk up the stairs to the porch of the house (as if it were my house). Once I would reach the door, I would slowly open the mailbox beside it and pretend to sift through the mail while looking out of the corner of my eye as the girls walked away. Once they had turned the corner and were out of sight, I would descend carefully from the porch and make my way down the narrow alley toward the back of the house where the stairs to the basement were located. I performed this ritual every day for the entire school year.

What would have happened if my school friends had discovered where I lived? Certainly nothing scandalous given that, on the one hand, class divisions were neither obvious nor extreme compared to what I had experienced in Toluca, and, on the other, the neighbourhood was a motley urban space that housed people from many walks of life. I had translocated my lived experience of class difference from Toluca to Toronto along with the humiliation it brought about. I was performing this ritual out of shame or fear of feeling ashamed—ashamed about the lack of proper housing, which was a reflection of a lack of social standing and ultimately of being poor. It was compounded with our position as outsiders, as newcomers from the Third World, always already inadequate, always already inferior. I continued with this walking practice until, one day, we were able to afford a real apartment farther away but above ground level.

My current walk is a reperformance and reconsideration of this walking-home-from-school practice. Unlike the previous getting-lost-and-walking-on-the-edges walk, this walk has a very specific route and movement. The neighbourhood, just north of St. Clair Street and Oakwood Avenue, has clearly changed over the last couple of decades, not in dramatically visible ways but certainly in terms of who can afford to live there. I spent some time walking around the neighbourhood before starting the walks so as to refamiliarize myself with the urban space and remember what it was like in those early days of feeling so out of place.

The walk starts at my old school, located at 231 Glenholm Avenue. I walk across the back premises of the school and through a path that runs parallel to Earlsdale Avenue, stopping along the way to notice my shadow on the ground. I cross Oakwood Avenue through the crosswalk (which now has a school crossing guide), walk north along Oakwood and turn right at Earlsdale. I keep walking for several blocks until I reach number 79. I climb the little stairs to the porch and quietly approach the entrance. I slowly open the metal mailbox (hoping no one inside the house will notice). But I don't hover over the mailbox like I used to—I'm no longer waiting for anyone to walk away (no one is watching me). Instead, I place an envelope addressed to myself inside. The next time, I place a note addressed to no one in particular. The next time, I whisper into the mailbox. I plan to drop a tiny pebble in the mailbox on my next walk.

With each walk, I reflect on the shame I felt or feared, which, as Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick reminds us, is an affect that moves toward painful individuation but also uncontrollable relationality (2003, 37). I realize now that as refugees/immigrants, our way of relating to the land and the people of Canada was structured by a “politics of inclusion” (Coleman 2016, 62) as we tried desperately to adapt and survive in our new environment. In striving for inclusion in the Euro-Canadian project, we were unwittingly becoming implicated in the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous peoples. The

more immigrants strive toward inclusion, suggests Sunera Thobani, the more they become invested in “the nation’s erasure of its originary violence and its fantasies of progress and prosperity” (2007, 16). However, during this early period, as new arrivals trying to survive, fantasies of progress and prosperity had all but evaporated and were nowhere on our horizon. Our struggle for social belonging was perhaps better characterized by what Lauren Berlant calls “aspirational normativity,” an affective need to “feel held by the social world,” a desire “to feel normalcy as a ground of dependable life”—one that doesn’t have to be reinvented again and again (2007b, 281). Walking up the steps of that house, as I did every day in the presence of new friends, was about both enacting and being in close proximity to that dependable life that ensures reciprocity in one’s exchanges, a confirming reciprocity that, as Berlant observes, “engenders satisfaction and optimism toward a better-than-survival kind of living” (2007a).

Walking Toward an Anticolonial Praxis of Place

As I continue this process of recovery and recognition, my hope is that reflective walking practices like this one, while only small gestures, might nonetheless help in shifting migrant attention away from aspirational normativity and toward what Glen Coulthard and Leanne Simpson call “grounded normativity” where the land is the basis of reciprocal relations and obligations to other people and the other-than-human relations that constitute the land (2016, 254). Whereas aspirational normativity is an affective need driven by the desire to belong to a place, grounded normativity is an ethical framework arising from place-based practices (254). Aspirational normativity leads to a constant reinvestment in normative promises of intimacy under capital (Berlant 2007b, 281) while grounded normativity, and the practices of deep reciprocity it entails, emerge from an intimate relationship to place (Coulthard and Simpson 2016, 254). Unlike “the feeling for that feeling” of aspirational normativity, which doesn’t depend on the forms of living to which it attaches (Berlant 2007b, 281), grounded normativity is about living in relation to others and other life forms, and crucially, in ways that are not dominating or exploitative (Coulthard and Simpson 2016, 254). This shift in attention demands a critical awareness of how migrant desires for aspirational normativity perpetuate structures of colonial and capitalist dispossession. While changes in how immigrants see their relationship and responsibility to the land will not happen through reflective walking practices alone, an intentional practice of walking and thinking through embodied memories of shifting grounds could be the beginning of undoing the coloniality of thought that underpins both migrant trajectories to the “First World” and migrant aspirations for a better-than-survival kind of living that so often results in assimilation to, and participation in, a settler colonial state.

Immigrants, like settler nationals, argues Taiaiake Alfred, must radically reimagine themselves, no longer as citizens or citizens-in-the-making, but as human beings in equal and respectful relation to other human beings and the natural environment (2010, 5–6). Diasporic memories of loss and displacement can be useful sources for such reimagining, especially since decolonizing entails a critical engagement with the past—how as migrants we made our way “here,” and, as Jill Carter asks us, what it means to be “here” now. This critical engagement and constant questioning of how we are (and came to be) situated in relation to the colonial project might allow for a deeper understanding of the past, one that connects the consequences of colonialism and capitalism across the hemisphere. If migration is a transformative experience, then perhaps we can think of the transformation as ongoing, as a process in which immigrants learn from and respect Indigenous land, thought, and politics. For immigrants like me who now call this land home, this transformation entails engaging with the erased histories of “here” through embodied memories of loss and

displacement that elicit new responsiveness to the land as well as recognition of its caretakers and their struggles. This unfinished walking practice (thus far comprised of falling, detour, and shame walks) is a gesture against forgetting such migrant experiences in the hope of *un*making place (as previously constructed through assimilation to settler colonialism) and better understanding the reciprocity and responsibility of grounded normativity.

Recovering migrant memory while moving on the land and in recognition of Indigenous territories is one small step toward an anticolonial praxis of place that reconsiders how I might inhabit the land differently. To dwell on Indigenous land and “embody territory as Indigenous people do,” explains Métis theorist David Garneau, “is not to settle the land” but rather “to settle oneself” to a territory that’s not one’s own (2015). To dwell on Indigenous territory as an immigrant, then, entails dwelling on my movement northward to this land and learning how “to home without settling,” without imposing a will upon the land and with respect for its Indigenous stewards (Garneau 2015). Walking is a means to this dwelling on the past and the present, to this movement of thought that keeps me unsettled.¹⁸ While my walking and thinking in Tkaronto is, for the moment, a solo practice (and certainly a personal journey), I envision a collective practice in the near future, one where I walk with others who might share their migrant journeys to “here” and where we reflect together on our relationship to settler colonialism as immigrants or newcomers to this land. As I continue walking while waiting eagerly for the next “Walking Our Way Here” walking/movement working group, I think about the possibilities that diasporic experiences might open up for both immigrant and Indigenous peoples who share histories of movement to, within, and beyond the land we now call Canada.

Notes

1. I will be a guest in the land now called Colombia and will walk on the ancestral lands where the city of Bogotá is now located.
2. I believe Jill Carter had invited us to leave this red fabric anywhere in the urban landscape, during or after our walk, or later throughout the conference. I remember searching for a location that might be a meaningful place on which to leave it. I hesitated, worried about finding the right place (a reminder of how much work I have ahead of me to decolonize my thought process). The little piece of fabric remained in my red bag, accompanying me but always reminding me to be mindful of where “here” is. I have been keeping it in my care until the right place reveals itself to me.
3. Su-Feh first performed this ritual to acknowledge the Squamish, T’sleil-waututh and Musqueam nations on whose traditional unceded territory Vancouver is situated and where she lives and works.
4. I thank Jill Carter, Jenn Cole, Melissa Poll, Natalie Rewa, and Keren Zaiontz for inspiring me to engage in walking, thinking, and writing in recognition of my relationship to the ancestral lands and territories on which I live and work. I’m also grateful to the peer reviewers for their thoughtful comments and suggestions.
5. This was especially the case during the 1980s and 1990s when new democratic governments were emerging after years of military regimes and the political aspirations of the governing elites were fuelled by the possibilities of moving closer to the First World, politically and economically. For a discussion on how the name and concept of “Latin America” emerged, see Mignolo (2003).
6. Before the colonial invasion that began in 1492, the “Americas” were named Abya Yala by the *Kuna-Tule* people of the land now known as Panama and Colombia. The name resurged in 1992 when Indigenous peoples throughout the continent protested the 500th anniversary of the “Discovery of America.” As Mignolo explains, “Abya Yala became a way to rename, disrupt, and counter ‘America,’ a name-idea imposed in, by, and through ‘conquest’” (2018, 22).

7. For a discussion of the divisions within America after the revolution of independence see the chapter “‘Latin’ America and the First Reordering of the Modern/Colonial World” in Mignolo (2005).
8. For an extensive discussion on the logic of coloniality that remained after independence in South America, see Mignolo (2005), particularly the chapter “‘Latin’ America and the First Reordering of the Modern/Colonial World.”
9. Clifford is referring to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s notion of “worlding” of a world in which areas and territories were inscribed through imperial power and defined in Eurocentric terms.
10. I was eventually found by a police officer, which was also scary, given I had learned to fear the police while growing up in Mexico.
11. “Making my way here” comes from the title of the walking/movement group “Walking Our Way Here” mentioned at the beginning of this reflection.
12. This last observation is the premise of the latest walk I began, which I have yet to articulate in writing.
13. *Indigenismo* was a cultural and political movement that emerged during the twentieth century in Latin America, which advanced the study and often the defence of Indigenous people and cultures. However, in Mexico, as Diana Negrín da Silva observes, this construct defined “the national imaginary through which indigeneity came to be both celebrated and shunned” (2012, 145).
14. Not seeing was about more than just ignoring poverty in the country’s capital—it was also a matter of survival during Argentina’s military dictatorship (1976–82) when thousands of civilians were disappeared. Seeing or witnessing violence came with the risk of becoming a victim of state violence and disappearance. In her insightful analysis of Argentina’s Dirty War, Diana Taylor argues that seeing or witnessing violence “put people at risk in a society that policed the look”; the choice to not see the atrocities taking place in the country led to a “self-blinding of the general population” (1997, 122–23). For a discussion on the middle-class imaginary in Buenos Aires, see Guano (2004).
15. *Mestizaje* refers to the racial and cultural mixing of Indigenous, European, African, and other ethnicities. In Mexico, however, the “myth of mestizaje” is based on the fusion of Spanish and Indigenous peoples (and more specifically in the violent coupling of Spanish conquistadores and Indigenous women), which purportedly produced a syncretic identity that combines the best attributes of the two races. For a discussion on the myth of mestizaje and a critique of the official narrative about mestizaje in Mexico, see Navarrete (2016).
16. While racism is routinely denied and often conflated with class, it is highly visible through politics, aesthetics, speech, and attitudes that associate contemporary indigeneity with poverty and underdevelopment. However, as Negrín da Silva notes in her study on Wixárika youth activists in Mexico, a growing urban heterogenous Indigenous population is increasingly challenging the racial imaginary of *indigenismo* (2012, 145).
17. I would later discover what residing below the surface really meant when I learned about the tunnel dwellers in Bucharest, who until recently were living fully underground in the city’s heated tunnels.
18. On the mobility of thought as integral to walking methods, see Springgay and Truman (2018).

References

- Alfred, Taiaiake. 2010. “What is Radical Imagination? Indigenous Struggles in Canada.” *Affinities* 4 (2): 5–6.
- Arat-Coç, Sedef. 2014. “An Anti-Colonial Politics of Place.” In “Intervention—Addressing the Indigenous-Immigration ‘Parallax Gap,’” Anna Stanley, Sedef Arat-Koç, Laurie K Bertram, and Hayden King, Antipode Foundation, June 18, 2014.
<https://antipodeonline.org/2014/06/18/addressing-the-indigenous-immigration-parallax-gap/>.

- Berlant, Lauren. 2007a. "Another Way to Think about Normativity," *Supervalent Thought*. December 24, 2007. <https://supervalentthought.com/2007/12/24/another-way-to-think-about-normativity/>.
- Berlant, Lauren. 2007b. "Nearly Utopian, Nearly Normal: Post-Fordist Affect in La Promesse and Rosetta." *Public Culture* 19 (2): 273–301.
- Carter, Jill. 2018. "Walking Our Way Here," Seminar/Walking Group convened by Jenn Cole, Natalie Rewa and Keren Zaiontz at the Canadian Association for Theatre Research Annual Conference, Kingston, Ontario, May 2018.
- Claid, Emilyn, and Ric Allsopp. 2013. "On Falling." *Performance Research* 18 (4): 1–3.
- Clifford, James. 1989. "Notes on Travel and Theory." *Inscriptions* 5 <https://culturalstudies.ucsc.edu/inscriptions/volume-5/james-clifford/>.
- Coleman, Daniel. 2016. "Indigenous Space and Diaspora Space." *Settler Colonial Studies* 6 (1): 61–76.
- Collins, Francis L. 2018. "Desire as Theory for Migration Studies: Temporality, Assemblage and Becoming in the Narratives of Migrants." *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 44 (6): 964–80.
- Coulthard, Glen. 2014. *Red Skin, White Mask: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Coulthard, Glen, and Leanne Simpson. 2016. "Grounded Normativity / Place-based Solidarity." *American Quarterly* 68 (2): 249–25
- Debord, Guy. (1958) 2006. "Theory of the Dérive." In *Situationist International Anthology*, edited by Ken Knabb, 62–66. Berkeley: Bureau of Public Secrets.
- Garneau, David. 2015. "Migration as Territory: Performing Domain with a Non-colonial Aesthetic Attitude," *Voz-à-Voz*. October 13, 2015. <http://www.vozavoz.ca/feature/david-garneau>.
- Guano, Emanuela. 2004. "The Denial of Citizenship: 'Barbaric' Buenos Aires and the Middle-Class Imaginary." *City & Society* 16 (1): 69–67.
- Hunt, Dallas, and Shaun A Stevenson. 2017. "Decolonizing Geographies of Power: Indigenous Digital Counter-Mapping Practices on Turtle Island." *Settler Colonial Studies* 7 (3): 372–92.
- Lepecki, André. 2005. *Exhausting Dance: Performance and the Politics of Movement*. New York: Routledge.
- Mignolo, Walter. 2005. *The Idea of Latin America*. Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Mignolo, Walter, and Catherine E. Walsh. 2018. *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Monture, Patricia A. 1999. *Journeying Forward: Dreaming First Nations' Independence*. Winnipeg: Fernwood.
- Moreno Figueroa, Mónica G. 2010. "Distributed Intensities: Whiteness, Mestizaje and the Logics of Mexican Racism." *Ethnicities* 10:387–401.
- Navarrete Linares, Federico. 2016. *México Racista: Una Denuncia*. México: Grijalbo.
- Negrín da Silva, Diana. 2012. "Wixárika Youth Activists: Unfixing the Geographic ImagiNation of the Indigenous." In *Comparative Indigenities of the Americas: Toward a Hemispheric Approach*, edited by María Bianet Castellanos, Lourdes Gutiérrez Nájera, and Arturo J. Aldama, 139–54. Tucson: University of Arizona Press.
- Papadopoulos, Dimitri, and Vassilis Tsianos. 2007. "The Autonomy of Migration: The Animals of Undocumented Mobility." In *Deleuzian Encounters: Studies in Contemporary Social Issues*, edited by A. Hickey-Moody and P. Malins, 223–35. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Rushdie, Salman. 1992. *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism, 1981–1991*. London: Granta Books.
- Said, Edward W. 1993. *Culture and Imperialism*. New York: Knopf.
- Sedgwick, Eve Kosofsky. 2003. *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.

- Shubin, Sergei. 2015. "Migration Timespaces: A Heideggerian Approach to Understanding the Mobile Being of Eastern Europeans in Scotland." *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 40 (3): 350–61.
- Springgay, Stephanie, and Sarah E. Truman. 2018. *Walking Methodologies in a More-than-Human World: WalkingLab*. Routledge.
- Taylor, Diana. 1997. *Disappearing Acts: Spectacles of Gender and Nationalism in Argentina's "Dirty War."* Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- . 2007. "Remapping Genre through Performance: From 'American' to 'Hemispheric' Studies." *PMLA* 122 (5): 1416–30. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1632/pmla.2007.122.5.1416>.
- Thobani, Sunera. 2007. *Exalted Subjects: Studies in the Making of Race and Nation in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.