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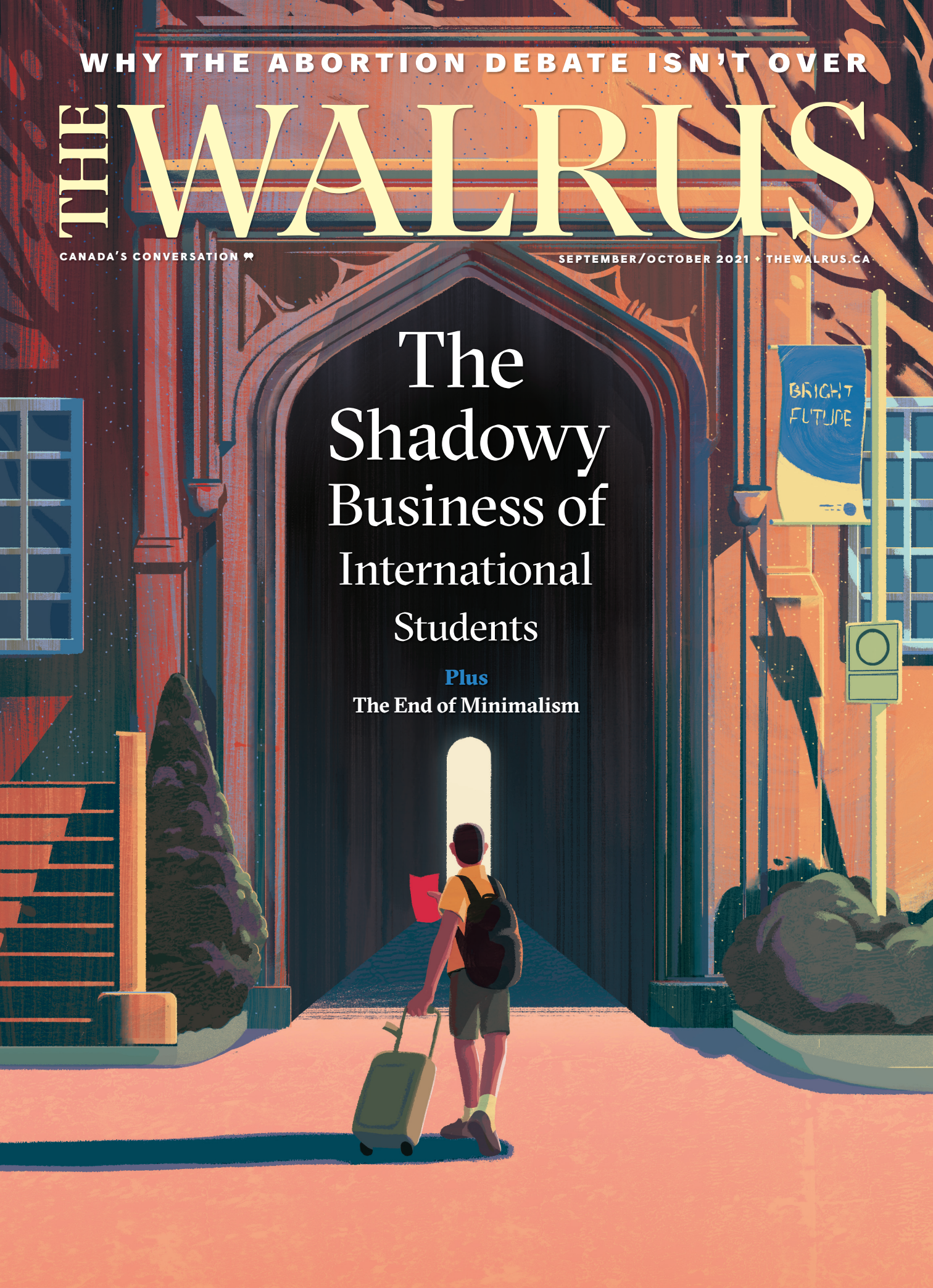
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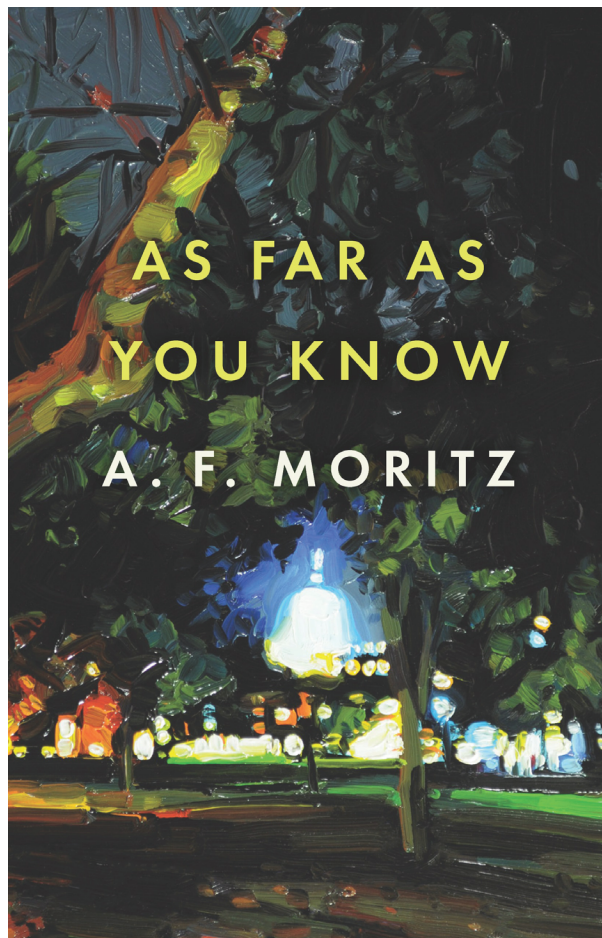
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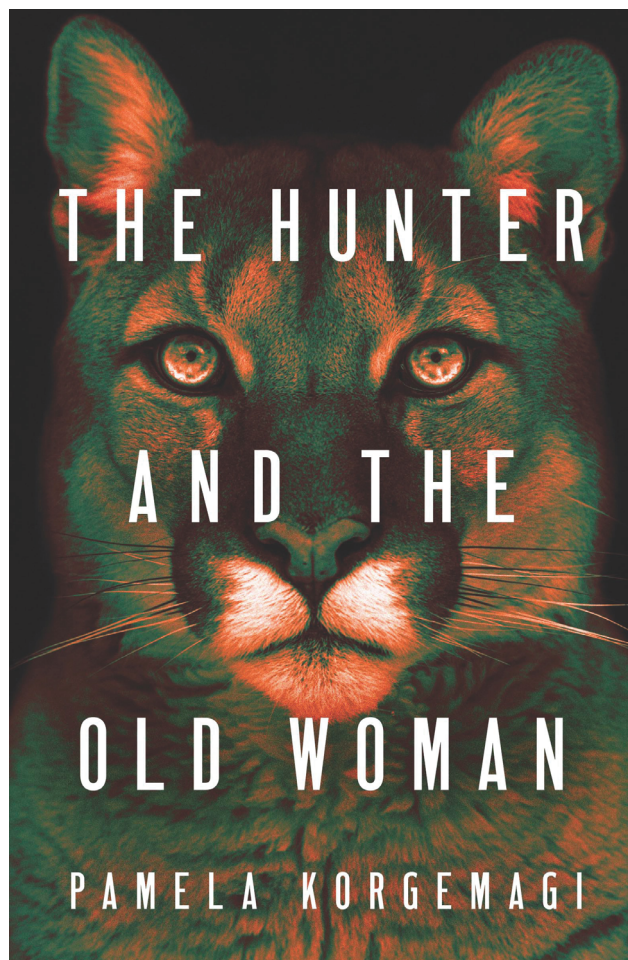


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Cornelia Li's work has been featured in the *New York Times*, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, and the *Washington Post*.

Subscriber Services

The Walrus (ISSN 1708-4032) is published eight times a year and sells for \$8.95. A one-year print subscription within Canada costs \$29.75. A digital edition is also available.

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We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of Canada, provided through the Canada Periodical Fund of the Department of Canadian Heritage.

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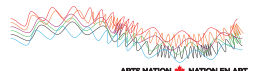
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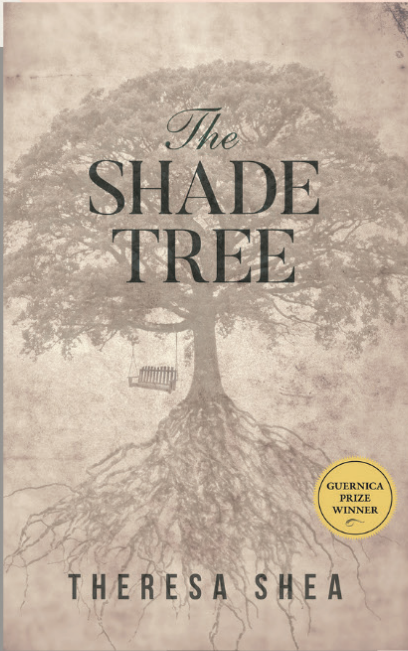
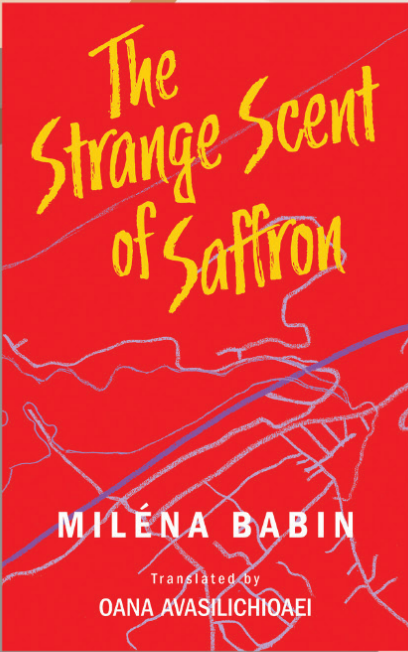
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THE WALRUS | CANADA'S
CONVERSATION

Editor's Letter

WHEN YOU publish a general interest magazine under an educational mandate, there's always a risk that the reporting will be depressing. From the climate crisis to the COVID-19 pandemic, there's no shortage of bad news to focus on. One of the ways we navigate this challenge at The Walrus is by approaching every story through the lens of how it advances or helps contextualize a conversation. In this issue, a number of features explore what we're learning in this time of rapid disruption, change, and growth—reflecting the theme of education, literally or more broadly.

Our cover story, “Students for Sale,” describes the professional industry that has sprung up around the recruitment of international students for Canadian colleges and universities. As Nicholas Hune-Brown reports, many international students pay high tuition fees, as much in the hope of obtaining permanent residency in Canada as to get a degree. The financial pressure has only risen with pandemic restrictions and reduced access to jobs, and these students must navigate unforgiving bureaucracies with few of the social and familial supports the average domestic student receives. Besides exposing the realities behind Canada's not-so-publicly-funded education system, the story makes clear that the high cost of international tuition, on which our postsecondary institutions have increasingly come to rely, is borne by those who are, for all intents and purposes, still kids.

Other features in this issue challenge some long-standing myths about Canadian exceptionalism—for example,



that the country has very different values from those of the United States. In “Province of No Choice,” Jessica Leeder describes the plight of Adrian Edgar, the only doctor in private practice performing surgical abortions in New Brunswick. For those of us who grew up hearing the name Henry Morgentaler mentioned on the evening news, and as the US gears up for a Supreme Court hearing that some think could overthrow *Roe v. Wade*, it may come as a surprise that the fight for abortion access is still ongoing in parts of this country. (As a side note, Leeder's piece is one of the most fascinating blow-by-blow accounts of the machinations of provincial politics I've read.)

In an essay adapted from her 2021 CBC Massey Lecture, Esi Edugyan excavates the buried history of slavery in Canada through the example of Marie-Joseph Angélique, a young woman for whom a square in Old Montreal is named. Most Canadians learn about slavery through the story of the Underground Railroad; it's less common knowledge that enslaved people also lived and worked here. Beyond correcting that misconception, Edugyan's story, “Slavery's Ghosts,” offers a literary lesson on the role of ghosts in cultural memory. The spirit of Marie-Joseph

Angélique, who was executed for allegedly setting a fire following a thwarted escape, is said to haunt her old neighbourhood. As the Giller Prize-winning novelist writes, “The stories of the dead, too, are a graveyard, a monument of words.”

Over the past few years, Canadians have needed to reckon with what seems a considerable gap between the country we live in and the country many of us think we live in. As I write this, a highly public conversation is taking place about the realities of residential schools in response to the discovery of over 1,000 unmarked graves, many of them thought to be those of children. How to move forward? When you spend a lot of time thinking about what's been lost, it's easy to focus on disillusionment. A statement made by Lower Kootenay Band chief M. Jason Louie in a CBC interview on the legacy of residential schools has stayed with me: “We were robbed of future Elders.” It's become clear that we need to build new monuments of words.

This fall, we are developing a new series by writers ages thirteen to eighteen. As teens become increasingly visible in public life, from young environmental activists like Greta Thunberg to the many ways Gen Z is influencing mainstream coverage of politics and culture through platforms like TikTok, they are engaging in the same conversations we explore regularly in The Walrus. In the coming months, we will commission work by young people on everything from science to politics to the arts. If you know a young writer or artist who might be interested in contributing, please direct them to thewalrus.ca/teenwalrus. 🐉

—Jessica Johnson

Contributors' Notes



NICHOLAS HUNE-BROWN

"Students for Sale," p. 20

"Before I started reporting this story on Canada's international students, I didn't really know much about them. It's expensive to go to school here, so I think most people assume they are

from wealthy, upper-class families. It wasn't until the COVID-19 pandemic, when there was more coverage of the problems that international students were facing, that we began to see a very different picture. For the first time, we understood them as people crowded into basements in Surrey and working at Amazon fulfillment centres, not just rich kids getting a nice engineering degree from the University of Waterloo."

Nicholas Hune-Brown is an award-winning magazine writer in Toronto and the senior editor of The Local.



MIREILLE SILCOFF

"The Maximalist Home," p. 78

"My stepmother, who is English, decorated her home in a very old-school country-house style. Every surface was covered in picture frames, vases, or flower arrangements, so I grew up in an environment that had a lot of

fullness. I've since emulated some of that in my own life. I am a maximalist by nature: I'm a maximalist in my writing; I'm a maximalist in my verbosity; I'm a maximalist in the way I decorate and the way I adorn myself. Life is short, so I'm going to fill it up with as much as I can, wherever I can."

Mireille Silcoff is the author of the award-winning short story collection Chez l'arabe. Her work appears regularly in The New York Times Magazine and the Guardian. She lives in Montreal.



TERESE MASON PIERRE

"Myth," p. 81

"My poems, like this one inspired by myth and folklore, are rarely about my own experiences, but I've found that I will often write my future into them by accident. Scenarios I've made up have happened to me years later.

It goes to show that the feelings I try to capture are ones that people are experiencing all the time. It's an interesting way to be vulnerable without actually putting yourself on the page."

Terese Mason Pierre is the co-editor-in-chief of Augur Magazine, a Canadian speculative literature journal. Her work appears in Quill & Quire, Brick, and Fantasy Magazine. She lives and works in Toronto.



ALIX OHLIN

"Seahorse," p. 62

"Halfway through writing this short story, I went to a talk given by a poet named Raoul Fernandes, about associative leaps in poetry. He spoke about how putting two seemingly unrelated

things together can create beautiful and startling effects. I was interested in exploring this idea in fiction, so I thought: What if, rather than continuing my story from where I left off, I leaped forward in time to see what would happen to the main character many years later?"

Alix Ohlin's most recent story collection, We Want What We Want, was published in July. She lives in Vancouver and is the director of the University of British Columbia's School of Creative Writing.



CORNELIA LI

Illustrations for cover and "Students for Sale," p. 20

"Artwork is my language, and I think that, in many ways, it's more universal than words. I try to communicate complex ideas by creating interactions between characters and their environments. For this cover, the elongated tunnel is my way of illustrating the long and difficult process ahead for most international students. But I also wanted to show that there is light, or a bit of hope, at the end of the journey."

Cornelia Li is an illustrator based in Toronto. Her work has been featured in the New York Times, The New Yorker, The Atlantic, and the Washington Post.

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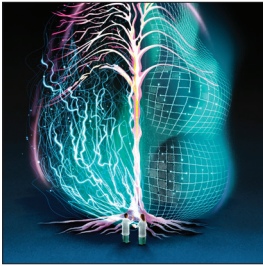
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Letters



NARROW NEUROSCIENCE

In “Mapping Mental Illness” (June), Simon Lewsen tracks a team of neuroscientists attempting to determine the biological causes of mental illness. While Lewsen’s research is thorough, scientists’ obsession with mapping

the human brain distracts from the root causes of mental illness. Scientific research needs to incorporate the impact of preventable, socially produced stressors on mental health, including financial strain and lack of access to food and shelter. My own experience with depression was heightened by ongoing reports of violence against women and a culture that permits misogyny. Looking only at genetic and biological causes of depression means ignoring the larger social context and potential solutions, such as front line treatment that comprises holistic social, medical, and financial support.

Amy Gaeta
Boston, MA

KEEPING THE DOCTORS AWAY

As an Albertan physician who got a medical degree in Australia and resides in the United States, I found Jagdeesh Mann’s “Doctors With Borders” (June), a story about foreign-trained doctors struggling to find work in Canada even amid the pandemic, deeply resonant. I’ve often felt that we Canadians are more interested in projecting our health care system’s virtues than in looking inward at what needs to change. This inability to confront our shortcomings contributes to large-scale health policy problems, such as the poor utilization of well-trained international physicians, inadequate pandemic preparation, and dangerously long wait lists for specialist medical attention. Mann has touched on a symptom of a health care culture more concerned with protecting “the Canadian way” than with serving its communities.

Steve Brennan
St. Louis, MO

SOLO ACT

In “Years of Solitude” (July/August), Sharon Butala ruminates on the loneliness of growing old. The essay’s long, languorous sentences seem to imply an undercurrent of delight in writing earnestly and being true to herself. If not for solitude, after all, how does one find time to write? Yes, loneliness can be quite difficult, but there are also silver linings, and Butala seems to have found one in writing.

Madeleine Wakefield
Calgary, AB

THE ROYAL WE

As one of many Canadians who is proud of our constitutional monarchy, I was dismayed to read David Schneiderman’s explanation of what it would take for Canada to decouple itself from the Crown in “Ask a Constitutional Expert” (June). No system of government is perfect, but by separating ultimate authority from elected leaders, the Crown offers Canadians an apolitical head of state to protect against governmental tyranny and the undue accumulation of power. Queen Elizabeth II has served the institution well in her almost seventy years on the throne. For me, the Crown has evolved to become not an institution of power for power’s sake but a system that safeguards power and is based on lifelong service by a monarch to uphold what defines our nation and the Commonwealth. I find nothing objectionable in that.

Alexander Killby
Ottawa, ON

TUSK, TUSK

In the June issue, the article “Mapping Mental Illness” stated that a composite photograph of Sagittarius A* was released in 2019, that one of the telescopes used was located in France, and that

the black hole in the image was 26,000 light years from Earth. In fact, the image was of the black hole at the centre of the Messier 87 galaxy, none of the telescopes used were in France, and the Messier 87 galaxy is 54 million light years from Earth.

And, in the July/August issue, the article “Mark Carney’s Next Move” stated that Canada has had an inflation target since the late 1980s between 1 and 3 percent. In fact, the target was introduced in the early ’90s and has been between 2 and 3 percent. The Walrus regrets the errors.

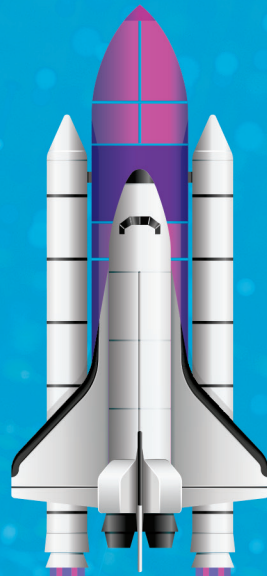
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“The time has come,” The Walrus said, “to talk of many things.” Send us a letter, email (letters@thewalrus.ca), or tweet, or post on our Facebook page. Comments may be published in any medium and edited for length, clarity, and accuracy.

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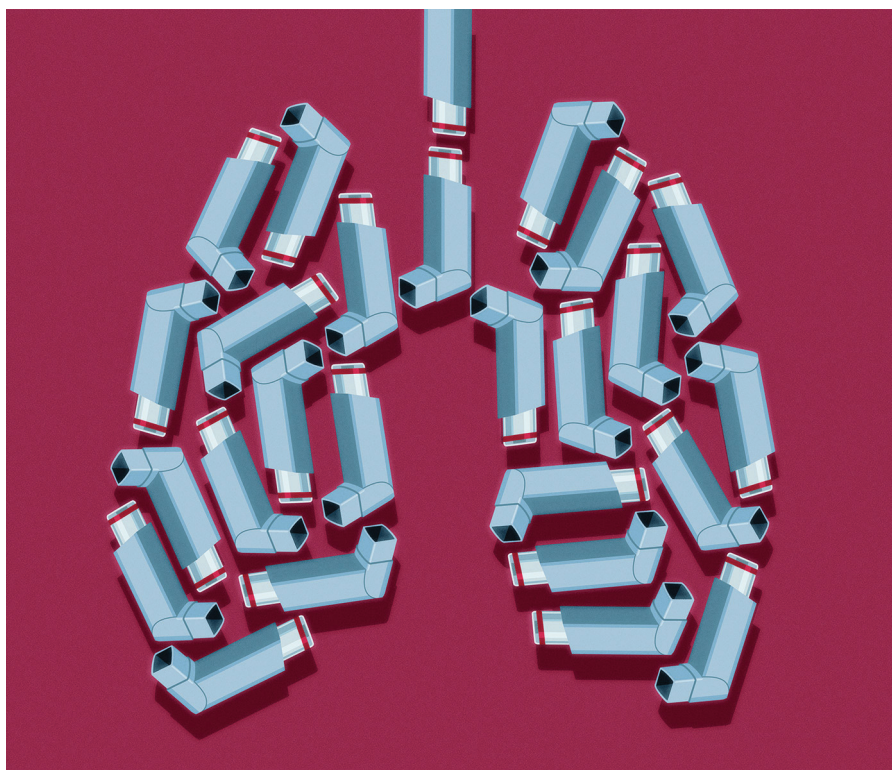
HEALTH

Breathing Trouble

Tens of thousands of Canadians who have received asthma diagnoses don't actually have it

BY RENÉE PELLERIN

ILLUSTRATION BY DAN PAGE



FOLLOWING a bout of pneumonia in 2014, Becky Hollingsworth experienced a persistent cough and shortness of breath. Her doctor diagnosed asthma and prescribed two inhalers plus an oral medication. They eased her cough, but Hollingsworth wasn't convinced that asthma was what she had. Her symptoms weren't severe enough, she thought. So, months later, when she received an automated phone call inviting her into an asthma study, she leaped at the opportunity.

The study was led by Shawn Aaron, chief of respirology at the University of Ottawa and The Ottawa Hospital. His research was inspired by what he was

seeing among patients referred to him because their asthma medications weren't working. Asthma is a common disease of the airways that comes with symptoms, such as wheezing and chest tightness, also seen in other lung conditions. But, when Aaron tested the referred patients, he found many for whom the diagnosis was simply wrong. He'd already done several smaller studies; this new project was ambitious, involving 613 adults in ten locations across the country.

Hollingsworth, a retired nurse, was an eager recruit, willing to undergo repeated tests in Ottawa, an hour-long drive from her home. The first test was spirometry, one she'd not had before.

Wearing nose clips, patients exhale into a tube connected to a spirometer, a device that measures airflow, as fast and hard as they can for five seconds. After three blows, they inhale a bronchodilator—medication that relaxes muscles around the airways—wait fifteen minutes, and do three more blows. If the machine registers improvement in airflow, the diagnosis is asthma.

In Hollingsworth's case, the bronchodilator made no difference, indicating she might not have the disease. But asthma symptoms can come and go. On a good day, a patient can do well on spirometry but still have the condition. Aaron therefore submitted all study participants who appeared asthma-free to a second test: the methacholine challenge. Methacholine is a chemical that causes the airways to get twitchy and irritable. During the test, patients inhale increasing doses of methacholine and blow into a spirometer after each increase. A person with asthma will react badly and be hyper-responsive to low doses of the chemical.

In day-to-day practice, it's too costly to give everyone who passes a spirometry test the methacholine challenge; it is typically reserved for the most difficult cases. But Aaron needed to be precise in determining how many in the study had received incorrect diagnoses. For even greater certainty, he instructed participants who passed the methacholine challenge to wean off their medications over several weeks and then get retested. Those who consistently showed no indication of asthma were then assessed by a pulmonologist to determine what they actually had.

The results ruled out asthma in nearly a third of the participants—203 in total. Sixty-one had no symptoms at all, and almost as many had only allergies. Among the others, some suffered anxiety, others gastrointestinal reflux disease. Several had serious conditions that had been missed, such as cardiorespiratory disease and chronic obstructive pulmonary disorder. Hollingsworth had a post-viral cough linked to her previous pneumonia. She never did, and still does not, have asthma.

Conclusions from the study, published in the *Journal of the American Medical*



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Association in 2017, were consistent with earlier research in Canada, Italy, the Netherlands, and Sweden. Aaron's study is the largest to date, and it demonstrates that many patients can safely withdraw from treatment.

There are reasons for the high rate of misdiagnosis. Asthma is a variable disease and can go into spontaneous remission. If people never get retested, they may assume they still have asthma. But the bigger reason is systemic. Aaron asked each study participant's doctor to complete a questionnaire and medical-record review and provide evidence of spirometry, methacholine challenge, or other objective tests employed in making the original diagnosis. Of the 530 physicians who responded, only half had requested any such tests. The others had made the diagnosis subjectively, on the basis of symptoms observed in an office examination.

It would be unthinkable to diagnose diabetes without ordering a blood test or to prescribe blood-pressure medication without wrapping a cuff around a patient's arm to measure it. Yet many family physicians don't order the standard test for asthma, which has resulted in a staggering number of Canadians—785,000, according to one estimate Aaron helped tally—being treated for a disease they do not have.

WHEN IT COMES TO diagnosing asthma, getting it wrong is not a trivial matter. Being labelled with a chronic illness can have psychological effects and hold people back from physical activity. Drugs have side effects, inhalers included. Typically, people with asthma use a corticosteroid inhaler daily and an emergency bronchodilator—such as the familiar blue puffer, Ventolin—if they have an attack. Prolonged use of steroids is associated with osteoporosis, earlier cataract formation, glaucoma, easy bruising, and skin thinning. Then there's the price tag. For Canadians, the yearly cost of medication can be in the hundreds of dollars.

A University of British Columbia study, published in *BMJ Open* in 2019, calculated the overall health care burden, including hospital and physician visits and drug expenditures, of patients who had received asthma misdiagnoses in Canada. It came to \$242 million per year. And the harm of missing a serious illness due to lack of a proper test is incalculable.

Specialists have long argued that family physicians should not diagnose asthma without first ordering spirometry. Some general practitioners will administer the test in their own offices, but most find

Access to objective tests for asthma remains a huge problem across the country.

it impractical because, for starters, the fees involved aren't enough to cover the effort. In Ontario, the provincial health plan pays physicians \$24 to perform spirometry; British Columbia pays \$28; Saskatchewan, \$50. Some provinces, including Quebec, pay no fee at all. A high-quality, well-interpreted test takes time.

Patients need coaching to do the test properly; the machine spits out results, but they are meaningless if the physician is not experienced at decoding them. Clare Ramsey is an assistant professor of respirology and critical care at the University of Manitoba. When she gets a referral, the first thing she does is make sure the patient really has asthma. She sees some who've never had spirometry; others have had spirometry that "in no way looks like asthma" but led to a misdiagnosis because of poor interpretation.

The better option than conducting their own spirometry is for doctors to refer patients to labs that measure lung function, but Ramsey acknowledges that there are waiting lists. The labs that do spirometry are most often in specialized centres or hospitals, where appointments aren't easy to get. At Winnipeg's Health Sciences Centre, for example, it can take six months to get a test. It's a problem that exists across the country. When a patient has trouble breathing and it looks like asthma, it's expedient to offer medication and say, "Let's try this and see if it helps." Yet medication may improve breathing even if the

patient doesn't have asthma, so if a doctor doesn't follow up with spirometry to confirm, the patient could be one of the thousands who end up living with the wrong diagnosis.

Rhonda Gould knows the frustration of waiting. She is a fifty-eight-year-old certified dental assistant living in North Vancouver who developed a lung infection last spring, just as COVID-19 erupted in Canada. Her COVID-19 test was negative, and her infection was treated, but she was left with an annoying worsening cough. By June, she was experiencing difficulty breathing. A spirometry test did not indicate asthma, but her respirologist suggested she try inhalers, hoping they would provide some relief. She needed a methacholine challenge test, but due to the pandemic, pulmonary-function labs were severely restricted in what they could do. She would have to wait.

The breathing attacks continued through the summer, and in September, Gould's family doctor, suspecting that her condition was triggered by fumes from the aggressive use of disinfectant wipes in the clinic where she worked, recommended she transfer to office duties. Her breathing improved, but on November 18, she was needed back in the clinic. By the end of the day, she could not get a breath and was panicking. "It was the scariest thing of my life," she recalls. "I felt like I was choking." That evening, she made a desperate call to her respirologist, who helped her calm down as she took puffs from her steroid inhaler. He told her to stay away from the wipes. Then he sent a referral to Chris Carlsten, head of respiratory medicine and director of the occupational lung disease clinic at the University of British Columbia.

Finally, this January, Gould had a second spirometry test, followed two weeks later by a methacholine challenge, which confirmed the absence of asthma. Her respirologist also did a scope of her lungs and noted that her vocal cords were erratic and twitchy. After reviewing the complete file, Carlsten concluded that she likely had an irritable larynx syndrome that could explain her reaction to the sanitation wipes. He recommended

speech therapy to strengthen the muscles around her vocal cords. Gould was off work for months. Circumstances related to the pandemic, not lack of good care, delayed the testing she needed. Nevertheless, it's a lesson in the importance of confirming diagnoses.

TO SEE WHAT improved spirometry access can look like, we have the example of the Vancouver area, where, several years ago, seventeen hospitals agreed to use the same referral form, making it easier for patients to book appointments and choose the lung-function lab most convenient for them. There is also a special clinic attached to Vancouver General Hospital where anyone with a doctor's requisition can walk in and get a spirometry test. In 2019, prepandemic, the clinic reportedly saw 4,000 walk-ins. But access remains a huge problem elsewhere in the province—and the country.

"We know that the need for spirometry is massive compared to what's actually being done," says Carlsten, who is also the director of Legacy for Airway Health, a new organization dedicated to the prevention and care of asthma and chronic obstructive pulmonary disease. He has tried for many years to educate family physicians about the importance of objective tests for asthma and agrees with Shawn Aaron that getting a spirometry test should be as easy as getting an X-ray for a broken bone. But it will take a cultural shift. Spirometry is, quite simply, undervalued. While Carlsten firmly believes that, if more labs offer spirometry, more family doctors will request it, efforts may be better directed at educating the public so that patients know to demand the test.

"Doctors and administrators love to set up tests that are going to bring in a lot of money, either into the doctor's pocket or the hospital's coffers," Carlsten says, "and this is not a big money maker." +

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RENÉE PELLERIN's most recent book is *Conspiracy of Hope: The Truth about Breast Cancer Screening*. She lives in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

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EDUCATION

STUDENTS FOR SALE

International students are lied to, cheated, and exploited on multiple fronts. They're also propping up higher education as we know it

BY NICHOLAS HUNE-BROWN

ILLUSTRATIONS BY CORNELIA LI

BIBIPUR

THE SINGH FAMILY home is a one-storey building of brick and cement on one of the main streets in Bibipur, a village of 1,000 in Punjab, northern India. The house has cracks in its walls and a roof of wood and mud that leaks during monsoon season. It was built about sixty years ago, and every decade or so since, whenever government workers have repaved the road outside the house, they've simply added another layer of asphalt on top of what was already there. Over time, the road has grown higher and higher, and the house has seemed to sink in contrast.

Kushandeep Singh was born here in 1999, and by the time he was a teenager, the house sat well below grade. Whenever it rained, water would stream in off the road and the family would rush to try to hold it back as best as they could with brooms and buckets.

Like just about everyone in Bibipur, the Singhs are farmers. The family owns a small plot—twelve acres of wheat and rice with a few cows and buffalo. On warm days as a child, Kushandeep would

run off with his friends and bathe in the same pond the cows lolled around in. As landowners, the Singhs were far from the poorest in town, but they were a long way from wealthy. Fourteen people lived in the three-bedroom house: Kushandeep, his younger sister, and his parents in one room; one set of grandparents in another; and his uncle, aunt, and cousins in the third.

The family's biggest investment by far was Kushandeep. Most of the kids in his village learned while sitting on the floor of the local government school, but Kushandeep's father insisted on sending him to the nearest city, Patiala, to attend a private school with basketball courts and a cricket pitch and instruction in English. "My father never compromised on my education," says Kushandeep. The tuition alone cost almost a third of the family's income.

His father hired a rickshaw to ferry Kushandeep an hour to school each way, picking up other students en route. Over the years, on long rides down dusty highways, Kushandeep would sit back and watch the billboards float past—an ever-shifting window into the world

outside Bibipur. When he was young, all the ads were for local restaurants and stores. As he grew older, billboards for multinationals like McDonald's followed. Finally, as Kushandeep neared the end of secondary school, a new product began to appear: postsecondary education in Canada.

A decade ago, few people in rural Punjab were thinking about schools in Canada. It was a cold, mysterious place that didn't hold much appeal. "But, in the past five or six years, it's become a hot topic," says Prithvi Raj, a student in India who was preparing to study overseas when he spoke with me. "Canadian education is being sold like hotcakes. You don't even have to sell it—people will just come and buy."

The product being advertised on billboards in Patiala is the same one that thousands of recruiters are hawking at education fairs in Beijing and private-school visits in Rio de Janeiro: a new version of the Canadian immigrant dream. The pitch is straightforward. First, get a student visa to study in Canada—the specific school doesn't particularly matter. After that, get a postgraduate work permit that lets you live and work in the country for up to three years. Then apply for permanent residency. When described by a seasoned recruiter, the process seems simple. Details about what to study, or the actual odds of becoming a permanent resident, aren't important. What's important is the idea that, if you run that gauntlet, you can build a life beyond anything you could dream of in a place like Bibipur. "Every student is going to these agents and saying, 'I want to go to Canada,'" says Kushandeep.

At eighteen, Kushandeep was a baby-faced teenager with big brown eyes and a thoughtful, earnest way of expressing himself. He did well in school, though not as well as some of the richer kids in his class. His English was improving, but he had never left the state, let alone the continent. He had one distant cousin on his father's side who had studied in British Columbia. But, as far as he knew, not a single person from his village had ever gone to school overseas. When Kushandeep did well on his

English proficiency exams and education abroad began to seem like a real possibility, his family considered borrowing money from every relative and friend they knew. But the numbers didn't add up. For an international student, tuition at a Canadian school started at \$20,000 a year, excluding the cost of living. In a good year, if the harvests went well, the Singh family earned about \$9,000 in profit. Eventually, it was decided: the family would mortgage their farm.

Students like Kushandeep have complicated the usual picture of international study. The 2000s-era stereotype of the pampered young foreigner, usually from mainland China, who drives flashy sports cars and shops for Gucci bags between classes was always a caricature, but now it's entirely divorced from reality. In 2019, 34 percent of the more than 642,000 international students in Canada were from India, well ahead of China's 22 percent.

Many of these students are from Punjab, and they generally attend small community colleges, not internationally renowned universities. A recent study by Rakshinder Kaur and Kamaljeet Singh, professors of education at Punjabi University Regional Centre, surveyed students attending an English-language training school in preparation to study abroad: 80 percent came from farming families, most from small farms. When asked where they wanted to study, 78 percent said Canada. Mortgaging land to cover tuition has become common, with more and more families literally selling the farm to send their children to community colleges.

These students are driving an international education industry that has exploded in recent years, their numbers tripling in the last decade. Today, Canada says it's the third most popular country for study in the world behind only the United States and Australia. In press releases and reports, the federal government brags that foreign students bring over \$21 billion into the economy each year—more than auto parts, more than lumber. Those numbers are the result of a decade of careful nurturing, a triumph of salesmanship, and carefully calibrated government policies.

International students are also the product of a system that has blurred the lines between immigration and education in an unofficial, ad hoc arrangement meant to appeal to potential immigrants while avoiding any responsibility for their settlement. It's a system that is quietly transforming postsecondary institutions, which have grown dependent on fees from foreign students and therefore on the shadowy world of education agents who deliver them. And it's a system built on attracting teenagers like Kushandeep from small villages across the world, taking their money, and bringing them to campuses from small-town Nova Scotia to suburban BC with lofty promises for the future but little regard for what actually happens to them once they arrive.

THE AGENTS

WHEN KUSHANDEEP wanted to figure out how to begin a life in Canada, he did what everyone does: he went to an education agent.

These salespeople aren't difficult to track down in India. "You could find an agent shop on every corner, on every street, on every road," says Kushandeep. One agent I spoke with put their numbers in the tens of thousands in India alone, though there is no way to know the exact figure—it is a largely unregulated business, open to anyone.

Agents connect students like Kushandeep with postsecondary institutions overseas. They often find the school, complete the paperwork, and apply for the visa. Despite this, they're generally not paid by the students but by the institutions. Schools aren't often forthcoming about their commissions, but multiple agents told me that the industry standard is 15 to 20 percent of a student's first year of tuition—a rate that can net them anywhere from \$1,500 to \$5,000 a head.

It's a commission the institutions are more than willing to pay since it will be recouped by an international tuition close to five times higher than domestic fees. Today, attracting overseas students is a financial imperative. The result is a booming secondary economy built on

top of the international student market, with immigration consultants and recruiters mushrooming up around the world.

Mel Broitman can remember the business in its infancy. In the mid-1990s, when the former CBC journalist began his education-consultancy company with his lawyer friend Dani Zaretsky, the market in Canada was modest. He explains that China was sending a few thousand students a year. There was the odd European. "When we first started working, in '97, there were maybe 400 Indian students," Broitman says.

Broitman started building his business in Bangladesh, travelling to elite high schools and giving his little presentation about life in Canada. "It was sleepy times," he says. Over the next two decades, he watched the evolution of what's now a multibillion-dollar industry. In the early 2000s, he went to China—for decades the single biggest source of overseas students—and saw a potential goldmine. Agents, he says, were double-charging, taking money from students as consultants and then taking commissions from the institutions. They were falsifying grades, faking English-proficiency tests—anything to get kids into a Canadian school. Broitman was appalled. He remembers calling up his partner and asking facetiously, "Dan, you want to make \$3 million a year, cash? We only have to be a little bit crooked."

In 2011, Canada attracted 239,131 students. It was around this time that the federal government decided it needed to double that number in the next decade. In "International Education: a Key Driver of Canada's Future Prosperity," the 2012 report that would become the blueprint for the country's strategy, the authors urge the government to act quickly. "We believe Canada is facing a unique window of opportunity that requires coordination of our promotional efforts." These students, the report argues, are necessary to address skilled labour shortages and relieve demographic pressures as Canada's working population ages.

The factors that make Canadian education attractive to international students have little to do with the schools themselves and much more to do with the



fact that Canada is an English-speaking country, it has a reputation for safety, and most importantly, it has tweaked its immigration policies. Canada allows students to work up to twenty hours a week off-campus—a necessity for indebted students like Kushandeeep. Students are allowed to stay in the country and work for up to three years after graduation. During that time, they can also apply for permanent residency. Under the Express Entry program, students enter a pool with other prospective immigrants and are given points according to a number of criteria from language skills to education to work experience. The government selects those with the most points, the cut-off changing each selection period depending on who else applies.

Adjusting those two variables, the ability to work and the pathway to permanent residency (PR), is how governments try to control the flow of students. Create a more favourable path to PR—by, for example, assigning more points to those getting a Canadian degree, as Canada did in 2016—and you open the faucet

wider. Restrict the ability to work post-graduation, as the UK did in 2010, and the market dries up.

Over the last decade, Canada has done its best to increase that flow. In 2019, 642,000 international students came to Canada—three times as many as when the 2012 report was drawn up. And, as the number of students has grown, the recruitment business has grown with it. Broitman claims that his company delivered some 6,300 students to the University of Windsor over fifteen years, worth approximately \$400 million in tuition. But that figure is tiny compared to the behemoth agencies in China and India moving kids at volume. New Oriental, a publicly traded company out of Beijing that combines private education, English tutoring, and international recruitment, has a market cap of more than \$17 billion.

According to Broitman, the economics of the system reveal a fundamental truth: a student who walks into an agent's shop is not the client—they're the product.

If an agent is getting commissions from an unremarkable community

college in rural Ontario, then their only motivation is to get every teenager who walks through their door, no matter how brilliant or hopeless, to enroll in that one college. "That's how the business works," says Broitman. "You just direct people to where your bread is buttered."

The students I spoke with described fast-talking salespeople pitching an unrealistic vision of Canada and, in particular, of students' chances for permanent residency. "They push a lot," says Rajpreet Sohal, a student from India who studied at Lakehead University. "Even if a student is poor, they say, 'Don't worry, you can ask for money.'"

Sohal remembers visiting an agent who kept encouraging him to apply to small colleges in Canada despite his excellent grades and his desire to pursue graduate school. When Sohal eventually went to Lakehead University for a master's in mechanical engineering, he decided to become an international-student ambassador. There, he spoke with students from around the world, from Nigeria to Thailand, all of whom, he recalls, described the same agent behaviours in their home countries. Some had been pushed toward certain private schools that aren't eligible for postgraduate work permits. Others had been given false information about tuition fees. One student had boarded a plane after being told they were enrolled in one college only to arrive and find they hadn't actually been signed up. "This thing is getting nasty," says Sohal. "It's a dirty business."

Beyond the clear-cut instances of fraud, the entire system in Canada is built around the false premise that education, not work and immigration, is the primary aim for most students. According to a survey by the Canadian Bureau of International Education, 60 percent of students intend to apply for permanent residency, a percentage that is likely far higher if you look solely at students attending community colleges. "Everybody knows it's just a pathway to PR," says Prithvi Raj. "That's what the government is encouraging. That's what the agents are selling. Any way you slice it, everybody is in on this."

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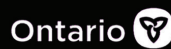


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If students want permanent residency, they need to pick an area of study that will eventually earn them enough points through Canada's Express Entry immigration system. It may be easy to get accepted into one community college's pastry chef program, but what are the odds of that degree turning into a "skilled labour" job that will lead to a future in Canada? For agents on the streets of Patiala, however, who have never been to the institutions they're representing and may have little knowledge of the intricacies of the Canadian immigration system, the incentive is simple: get every student, and their fees, into whatever program will accept them.

"What you see on the ground are a bunch of education agents who are absolutely taking advantage of your average consumer," says Earl Blaney, an immigration consultant and education agent who works in the Philippines and has been outspoken about abuses in the business. "The bottom line is these kids are being set up for failure, left and right, by these education agents overseas who don't know anything about the Canadian labour market and do not care."

The government doesn't release numbers on the percentage of students who apply for permanent residency and actually receive it. But Express Entry is a competitive process, with nineteen-year-old community college students entering the same pool as overseas doctors, French-speaking engineers, and married professionals with twice as much work experience. In 2015, Statistics Canada found that the "transition rate" for international students becoming permanent residents was between 20 and 27 percent. If the vast majority of community college students from India are hoping for PR, the math isn't complicated: a lot of families who have wagered everything on a future in Canada are losing that bet.

In 2019, Broitman left the world of recruiting for good. "The problem with this business is there's so much money at stake," he says. Agents, he tells me, are only part of the problem. Universities and colleges are just as culpable.

THE SCHOOLS

WHEN KUSHANDEEP went to meet his education agent in Chandigarh, a bustling city a two-hour drive away, all he knew was that he wanted to study in British Columbia, the province where his distant cousin lived. The agent did the rest. Kushandeeep, the man decided, should take a two-year business program. He directed him to a sprawling west-coast school that Kushandeeep had never heard of: Kwantlen Polytechnic University.

KPU is a community-college-turned-polytechnic-university with 20,000 students spread out over five campuses across BC's Lower Mainland. It offers a huge selection of degrees, diplomas, and certificate programs from anthropology to appliance-servicing.

Over the last decade, the percentage of KPU's funding that comes from the government has dropped, as it has for most schools. Historically, colleges and universities received most of their funding through the province. Canada-wide, this share of total funding has fallen, from 38.6 percent in the 2013/14 academic year to 35.4 percent in 2018/19. Without much discussion, Canada's publicly funded institutions have ceased to receive most of their funding from the public. In 2015/16, for the first time since the 1950s, more than half of university and college revenues didn't come from the government.

That money is being replaced by students like Kushandeeep. In 2007/08, KPU had just 525 international students. A decade later, it had 6,002 and was receiving so many applications that it had to temporarily shut down international enrolment. Those students were almost wholly responsible for the school's growth. In 2018, the university approved a 15 percent increase on international student tuition, bumping yearly fees up to nearly \$20,000—four times higher than domestic rates. That year, the school posted a \$22 million surplus.

Those numbers are extraordinary, but they're representative of the kind of growth seen at any number of otherwise unexceptional institutions. Today, international students are responsible

for almost 40 percent of all tuition fees across Canada. This year, when Sudbury's Laurentian University went bankrupt, industry watchers had one specific piece of criticism: the university hadn't worked as hard as its competitors to lure in students from abroad.

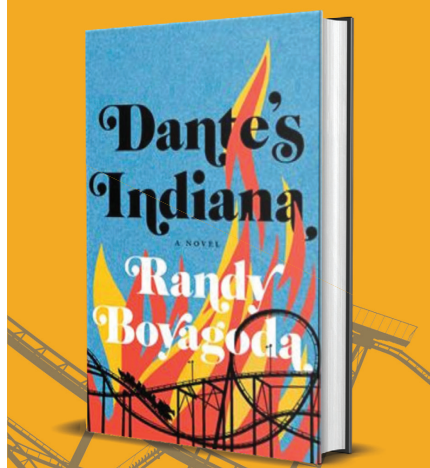
The biggest growth hasn't been at universities, however. It's been in smaller community colleges that offer the same path to a work permit and permanent residency with comparatively cheaper tuition and programs that can be completed in just two years. At Langara College, in Vancouver, international enrolment skyrocketed from just 968 students in 2010 to 4,728 a decade later. At Lambton College in Sarnia, Ontario, international students grew a whopping twelvefold between 2009 and 2019. That year, Lambton earned twice as much revenue from international students as it did from domestic students and government funding combined.

The international-student business has an institutional face in the Canadian Bureau for International Education, a nonprofit based in Ottawa. When the CBIE talks about this growth, it uses high-minded language about the benefits that come with these students. "I think, increasingly, over time, the work of international education is the stuff that binds us together," says president Larissa Bezo. "Part of that comes from the richness and the presence of international students on our Canadian campuses, where our Canadian students and domestic learners are exposed to the really rich depth of those individuals' lived experiences." The word institutions use to describe that process is *internationalization*—a term plastered across websites and accompanied by photos of smiling multicultural students. The students themselves have a different term for it: they say they're being used as cash cows.

As universities and colleges have become dependent on international students, their relationships with agents and consultants overseas have come under scrutiny. The institutions I spoke with all described a careful vetting process for their agents. Brad Van Dam of Langara College says his institution

"A Divine Comedy of our times ... Hysterically funny, but with an underlying sadness—such Heaven and Hell already coexist in America, and in this novel."

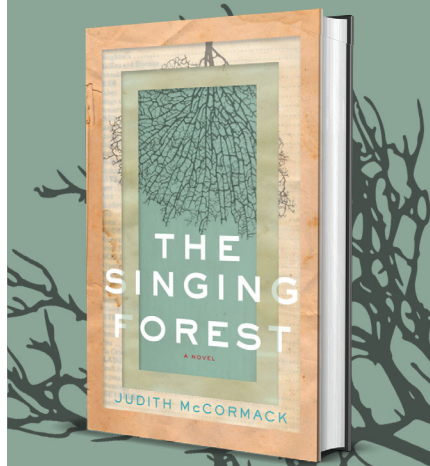
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rejects dozens of new agents a year who want to work with Langara but aren't up to its standards.

KPU works with approximately 100 agents around the world, according to Carole St. Laurent, associate vice-president of KPU International. "We get three solid [employment] referrals. And then we sign a one-year contract," she says, adding that the school takes complaints from students about agent behaviour extremely seriously and has had to dismiss agents in the past.

But some agents say schools benefit from a system that's far more free-wheeling, with little to no oversight from the institutions ostensibly managing hundreds of recruiters from an ocean away. And the problem isn't limited to Canada. In Australia, a 2019 parliamentary inquiry found that "international students were vulnerable, open to exploitation by unscrupulous education agents, and a lack of regulation enabled [agents] to operate without any consequences for their actions." In 2016, after discovering that hundreds of agents in India were submitting fraudulent documents, New Zealand began cracking down on overseas recruiters. Both countries have tried to introduce legislation to protect international students. In Canada, Manitoba is the only province with specific legislation to regulate overseas recruiters. In the rest of the country, it seems, anything goes.

"The whole system is all messed up," says Gautham Kolluri, an Indian-born former international student who worked as a recruiter for Mohawk College and Conestoga College before starting his own consulting business.

In the last few years, Kolluri has seen a troubling new trend—the rise of "aggregator recruiters" who bring the lessons and funding of Silicon Valley to the world of postsecondary education. These venture capital-backed companies work on a simple, disruptive model: sign up thousands of agents and hundreds of colleges and universities, then act as the go-between, making it easier and cheaper than ever for institutions to sign up students at scale.

One of the largest players in this industry is ApplyBoard, a Canadian startup

founded in 2015 by three Iranian-born brothers, former international students themselves. Meti Basiri, one of the co-founders, says there are plenty of reasons companies like his are attractive to institutions. "Universities don't have the resources to go to every single village or smaller and bigger cities of India," says Basiri. ApplyBoard, meanwhile, has thousands of recruiters across the country, meaning schools no longer have to do the expensive, time-intensive work of managing their own agents. Institutions just sign up, and ApplyBoard will funnel in all the students they need. According to Basiri, one out of five Indian students in Canada arrived through ApplyBoard agents.

According to critics, aggregate recruiters allow institutions to avoid any accountability for the actions of the agents representing them. "It eliminates the link between the colleges themselves and the agents," says agent Earl Blaney. "The schools are now not even responsible or connected to these agents, but they're the ones selling the school." It's a \$21 billion dollar industry, he says, with hardly any rules.

ApplyBoard says it vets all its recruiters, rejecting 46 percent of applicants. Approved agents are then trained through online webinars and an interactive course. But institutions seem to understand the potential for abuse that comes with working through aggregators. In the past, Langara refused to allow its agents to work with subagents. "The reason for that is because then we lose the control of who these people are, how they're representing the institution," says Van Dam. Last year, despite those qualms, Langara signed an agreement to work with ApplyBoard in what Van Dam describes as a trial period. In theory, there's nothing stopping an agent that Van Dam rejected yesterday from signing up with ApplyBoard and sending kids to the college soon afterward.

KPU also recently signed up with the company, as did hundreds of other Canadian institutions that may have once had similar misgivings, from Western University, the University of Manitoba, and Acadia University to colleges

like Medicine Hat College and Loyalist College. “A lot of schools want international students,” explains Basiri. “And some of the schools want international students *fast*.”

“The whole business has become student-trafficking,” says Kolluri. A few years ago, he went back to Punjab, where he was born, and saw shopping malls full of fly-by-night agencies selling Canadian education. It’s clear that the business was creating a lot of winners. “The losing side is international students,” says Kolluri. “If they don’t get the correct guidance, their whole life is messed up.”

WORK

THE DAY Kushandeep left Bibipur, the entire village lined the streets to see him off. People he’d never even met came out to wish him well, to give him ten or fifteen rupees and implore him to remember them when he made it to Canada. “It felt like I’d already accomplished something,” he says.

By the time he landed in Vancouver, on December 11, 2017, after a two-day journey, he felt much less assured. His distant cousin, the one person he knew on the continent, picked him up at the airport and drove him out to a basement apartment in Surrey, leaving him with three strangers—his new roommates.

That first month, Kushandeep had never felt more lonely in his life. Surrey was cold, his roommates were constantly working, and life in Canada was expensive. He was paying \$400 a month for his portion of the apartment, where he shared a queen mattress with one of his new roommates. His bus pass was \$50, groceries another \$200. When classes began, he enjoyed them. But his classroom experience was only a tiny part of his new life: before he could even worry about school, he needed to find a job.

Kushandeep dropped his resume everywhere, finally landing employment at a home-fixtures manufacturer. The owner was Indian-born, also from Punjab, and he hired Kushandeep over the phone, no questions asked. “He told me, ‘I will see you for a month and see how you work,

then I will decide how much I want to pay you,’” Kushandeep remembers.

For a month, Kushandeep loaded and unloaded vans. He lugged heavy sheets of plywood. “I was just like a donkey who was just putting loads from one place to another,” he says. At the end of his trial period, after Kushandeep had worked over eighty hours, the owner gave him \$600—a rate that worked out to just shy of half of minimum wage.

Over the following months, Kushandeep’s boss insisted on paying him per day rather than hourly. Knowing that Kushandeep’s visa had strict rules about the number of hours he could work each week, his boss would often bring him out in the van for day-long jobs. “He knew I couldn’t take the pay,” he says. “But they used to say you have to do work or you lose your job.”

His situation was hardly unique. The growing body of international students has created a massive labour force ripe for exploitation. “We call them migrant students, not international students,” says Sarom Rho, an organizer with Migrant Students United, an offshoot of the advocacy group Migrant Workers Alliance for Change. Like other migrants, from farm workers to care workers, international students are defined by their precarity. “What having temporary status means is that power is taken away from us,” says Rho. “We have less access to basic rights and protections, including labour protections. Employers have all the power.”

Rho has spoken with countless students who report being taken advantage of by their bosses. “We were hearing about students working in cleaning and restaurant jobs for far below minimum wage. Employers not paying their wages on time or at all.”

Students can work only twenty hours off campus a week, by law. That rule is, in theory, supposed to discourage those who want to come to Canada simply to make

money. In reality, students desperate to pay rent often end up working under the table. And, once they’re working illegally, they’re at the mercy of their employers.

Sunanda (whose name has been changed to protect her privacy) was eighteen when she arrived at Langara College. After losing her job at Walmart, she took a job at a restaurant in Vancouver. “They were winking at me, always telling me that, if I want to meet a famous Punjabi singer, they can help me, and they can give me more money,” says Sunanda. “Once, my bosses took me to a building in Surrey,” she remembers. “They offered to pay all my fees, I just have to live with them.”

Her employers never directly asked for sex, but Sunanda knew what they were suggesting. She was already depressed and anxious, and their insinuations took a profound toll. She knew other students who’d been harassed and sexually exploited by bosses. She quit a few days later, never going back to the restaurant. “I’m from a very small village. I had never experienced this,” she says. “It was mental torture.”

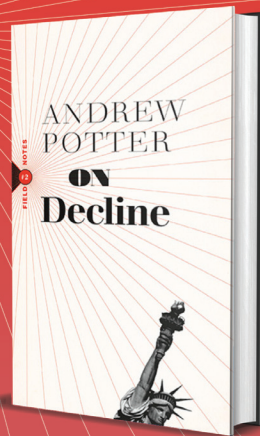
Puneet Dhillon, an analyst at the Brampton location of Punjabi Community Health Services, says young female students often arrive in Canada without any support. They lack knowledge of the legal system and have no financial safety net. “All that makes them more vulnerable to any form of sexual exploitation than any other members of the community,” says Dhillon.

For Kushandeep, nearly eight months of being paid below minimum wage was all he could take. He quit, eventually finding work at another manufacturing company that agreed to pay him minimum wage.

He began work a few days later, in early December of 2018. During winter vacations, when schools are closed, international students are allowed to

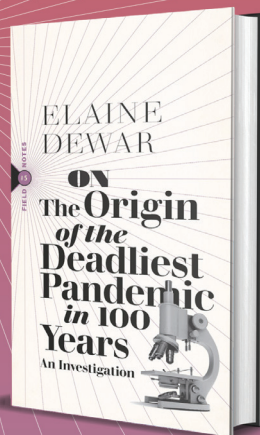
“They’re being told all these fake promises and fake dreams that are shattered the moment they get here.”

Examining history and failures in public policy exposed by COVID-19, acclaimed scholar Andrew Potter asks: what if there is something to the notion of “the decline of the West” after all?



A SOCIETY IN CRISIS

Prize-winning author and journalist Elaine Dewar spins a compulsive whodunnit on the origins of COVID-19 and how leading science journals got it wrong.



work full-time, and Kushandeep was eager to get as many hours as he could. Like at his previous job, he says, his new employer hadn't given him any training or made him sign any employment papers. There were no official breaks, and he found himself pushing through exhaustion.

On January 3, he was loading a van with an enormous mirror when it broke in his hands. He felt the sharp edge flick across his wrist. Then he couldn't feel his hand at all. When Kushandeep looked down, the cut was gruesome: a U-shaped gash that had sliced through the sinews, cutting right down to the bone. He says a coworker rushed over to see if he was okay and then immediately got on the phone—not to the paramedics but to their boss. He came back with instructions: *Put him in a van and take him to emergency and say he got hurt at home.*

Kushandeep staggered out of the shop, bleeding profusely, and passersby eventually called an ambulance. When he woke up, he was in the hospital. The doctors told him the cut had severed his nerves and tendons. His artery had also been damaged. There was a fifty-fifty chance he would never use his hand again.

That night, Kushandeep spoke to his boss. “He didn't ask how I was,” Kushandeep remembers. The next day, he says, his boss explained that he didn't have insurance and Kushandeep wasn't covered. If Kushandeep told authorities he was hurt on the job, the man said, it would mean trouble for everyone.

When the worker's compensation board called, Kushandeep told them the truth about what had happened. After that, things changed. Kushandeep says his employer refused to pay his hours on the job; when worker's compensation interviewed the boss, he told them Kushandeep was a stranger who was trying to blackmail him. “He knew that I had no family here in Canada,” says Kushandeep. “Who would be guiding me? I had no resources.”

After the accident, Kushandeep fell into a depression. He ignored his parents' calls for weeks; he couldn't bear to tell them what had happened. He tried speaking with his school about how

he was feeling, but it seemed like there was no way for them to help him. He didn't know if his insurance claim would go through, and as a temporary worker in this country, he had no recourse to disability. “Who would pay my rent? Who would get my groceries?” he wondered. He knew his English wasn't good enough to get a customer-facing job. “I was just a hard worker. I could lift heavy things. But, if I was without that, I would have no more options.”

Failing in Canada was unthinkable. It would mean returning to India with tens of thousands of dollars of debt. It would mean losing the farm, destroying not just his future but his entire family's as well. “I was really scared,” says Kushandeep. “I used to think that, if my hand never started to work, I would commit suicide.”

CONSEQUENCES

ABOUT THREE YEARS AGO, Kamal Bhardwaj began to notice a disturbing trend. The British-born fifty-three-year-old is a prominent member of the South Asian community and the owner of a pair of funeral homes in Brampton and Toronto. He's someone Indian Canadians know to call when they need a “ship out”—someone to prepare a body for transfer overseas. Dealing with tragedy is his business. But, when Bhardwaj began seeing more and more young people showing up at his funeral homes, it gave him pause.

“When international students pass away, people contact us,” says Bhardwaj. He was hearing from landlords, from the deceased's classmates, and from distant relatives. Bhardwaj says the cause of death isn't always shared with him. “But sometimes it's quite obvious,” he says. “There are ligature marks on the neck. Those are the easy ones to know. Other cases, it could be drug overdose, drug related, and so forth. But we know that a percentage of those will be suicide.” For the last few years, Bhardwaj says, he's been getting several such cases each month.

Shivendra Dwivedi, an anesthesiologist and the president of Canada India Global Forum, says that, last year, during an informal lunch he was hosting, the

high commissioner of India to Canada told him that he was concerned about the rise in suicides. According to the High Commission's official numbers, seven international students took their own lives in 2020. But those numbers show only part of the problem, says Dwivedi. The taboo around suicide and mental illness in Indian culture means that other deaths are kept quiet. "If there is a suicide, many families tend to hide it," he says.

When he first noticed these deaths, Bhardwaj got in touch with the Punjabi Community Health Centre in the Peel region, a suburb of Toronto with a large South Asian population. Together, Bhardwaj and the PCHC decided to launch a new support group, Sunoh. Anupma Cvejic, CEO of the PCHC, wants the group to partner with Canadian universities to let students know there's help for them. Ultimately, though, she knows she needs to reach students before they arrive. "We want to have these conversations with students before they even apply," she says. "They're being told all these fake promises and fake dreams that are shattered the moment they get here. Their first experience here is of abandonment, of isolation and loneliness."

There are countless reasons an international student may suffer serious mental health issues, but for Cvejic and Bhardwaj, it was clear that the immense pressure students face in a foreign country is one of them. The smallest mistakes here—something that would be inconsequential for a Canadian student—can have devastating repercussions. Not remembering to sign up for a course, changing your program, failing a class, working too many hours—all can result in study permit problems. At worst, they can even lead to deportation.

In 2018, twenty-five students at St. Clair College, a small school in Windsor, Ontario, were denied their post-graduate work permits when a course they were taking, which they believed to be part of their business management program, was deemed ineligible by the government. Without their permits, they would be forced to leave the country. The students described feeling sick with the news, unable to sleep or eat. "I'm broken

and I'm very upset," one told the CBC. Shortly afterward, another of the students, Ajesh Chopra, died by suicide.

In late May 2021, news of another suicide broke. The information on the GoFundMe page asking for donations laid out the barest of details, but the outlines were familiar. Lovepreet Singh had come to Canada in 2018 to study at Centennial College. He came from a very poor family in the village of Charik, in Punjab, and was "stressed about his situation since last year due to financial and immigration problems." Singh had dropped out of Centennial and was living on the streets. He took his own life by jumping in front of a train.

According to Daljeet Kaur, a family friend and former international student herself, Singh's parents had sold their farm. "They're \$70,000 in debt," she explained. The money being raised in the group wasn't to return his body, which was not fit to be transported. It was for a funeral and to help his parents.

In recent years, there is some evidence that schools have started to recognize the gravity of the problem on campuses: some have rolled out peer support groups, others have brought in counselling in students' first languages. But the fundamental way the system is set up ignores the reality of the pressures these students face. Community colleges and even large universities aren't equipped to manage an immigration settlement program for teenagers. They'd rather think of themselves as institutions of higher learning, not convenient way-stations for young people in search of better lives. "It's wilful denial," says Earl Blaney. "Purposeful denial. They don't want to be responsible."

THE NEW CANADIAN DREAM

IN THE WEEKS after his accident, his dominant hand still bandaged and useless, Kushandeep spent a lot of time praying at the gurdwara near his apartment. There, he saw a poster for a support group targeted at international students, One Voice Canada, which was holding a meeting at the temple.

We Knew What Was Coming

BY MATT RADER

We knew what was
Coming—the outburst
Of green,

The fanfare of needles
And leaves,
And always, eventually,

The copper and auburn,
The russet and ochre
Tickertape

Reckoning windswept
And eddied
In our doorstep,

Like confusion blown clear,
Finally but not
Forever, of its origins.

The meeting, with more than 100 people filling the gurdwara, was eye opening. “It’s not just me,” Kushandeeep realized. “We leave our parents, we leave our home country. Our families spend all their resources on us just for us to have a good future here. That’s a lot of pressure on your brain. An eighteen- or nineteen-year-old brain is not a brain that can handle all of that.”

The organization, formed by concerned members of BC’s South Asian community, helped Kushandeeep fight his employer. They made sure his insurance claim went through and he was able to receive compensation for his hours worked as well as the time he had to take off due to his injury. Kushandeeep couldn’t work for nearly a year, but slowly, his hand healed back almost to what it was.

When I first spoke with him, in the fall of 2019, Kushandeeep was finishing off the final three credits of his two-year program at KPU. He was working again, still living in Surrey, and trying to make sense of the long road to permanent residency still before him.

In the time since, the world has turned upside down. The pandemic wreaked havoc on international education, leaving some students stranded in Canada and others stuck overseas, paying premium prices for middle-of-the-night Zoom tutorials. With travel restricted, enrolment plummeted. The Canadian government responded with various enticements to keep the students flowing, introducing a two-stage admissions process to encourage students to begin their studies online and tweaking postgraduate work-permit eligibility to allow those studying abroad virtually to qualify later. Despite that, colleges and universities saw losses.

For the students and former students who were already in the country, the lockdowns brought new hardships. In the Peel region, volunteer groups popped up to deliver free meals to the many who had lost their jobs. Others lost the “skilled labour” employment that might have led to a permanent spot in Canada and instead found jobs as essential workers. “We know current and former international students who are working

overnight in grocery stores,” says Sarom Rho. “The warehouses in Peel region and Scarborough are filled with international students.” Sunanda, the young woman who quit her restaurant job after fearing sexual harassment, eventually dropped out of school. During the pandemic, she worked as a security guard at an Amazon fulfillment centre.

But, despite the pandemic slump in the international-student market, those who know the industry best are betting on it returning stronger than ever. In June, ApplyBoard finished its latest round of funding, raising \$375 million, which values the company at more than \$3 billion (US). Cofounder Meti is confident that Canada will remain a big draw for students in the semesters to come. If anything, he says, it could soon be even bigger: if the country is willing to allow hybrid virtual teaching models, removing class-size limitations, the potential is limitless. “Canada can double up their international numbers in the next three years,” he says.

For Kushandeeep, the pandemic has proven a boon. When I spoke with him in the spring, as vaccines rolled out across

Smart conversations about the green economy



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the country, he was living in Winnipeg. Manitoba needed workers, and he had been happy to oblige.

Now a KPU graduate with a three-year work permit, he was making cabinets on an assembly line (a skilled trade, according to the government, putting him in a good position for permanent residency). Life, he told me, was mostly good. He was living in a shared house on the outer limits of the city and earning \$18.50 an hour—enough to send money home on occasion. He was working from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. every day, then driving for Uber until he was exhausted. He was determined to do whatever it takes to buy his family's land back. His coworkers were kind Canadian-born men his father's age. "They think of me as a kid," he said. The other weekend, on one of the first warm Sundays of the year, they took him out to a golf course, showing him how a lefty holds a club.

Kushandeeep, in some ways, could be seen as proof that the system is working as it should. After all, immigration has always been difficult; people have always

found ways to make money facilitating it; why not postsecondary institutions? In this light, it's a win-win-win story: a college gets tuition, a Winnipeg cabinet manufacturer gets a worker, and Kushandeeep gets a shot at life in a country he'd have had no chance of immigrating to any other way.

In a few months, he'll have completed a year of skilled work in Canada, and he plans to apply for PR. And, this year, because the pandemic has slowed other forms of immigration, graduates like him have been given extra spots to help Canada hit its quota. It has never been easier for an international student to immigrate. The dream of a permanent home here seems well within Kushandeeep's grasp.

On the phone from Winnipeg one evening, he talked about his plans for the future. The first thing he would do, of course, was pay his family back. But, after that, who knows? Cabinetmaking wasn't something he'd ever thought about before, but he liked it. More than that, he was good at it. Maybe one day he'd own his own business.

He warmed up as he spoke, spinning out a vision of the future. "By that point, maybe I will be married," he said. He wouldn't stay in Winnipeg—the Sikh community, like the city itself, felt too small, and the weather was awful—but maybe he could find a job back in BC. Most of all, Kushandeeep wanted to bring his parents here. "They deserve it," he said. "I want to show them the world outside their village."

None of it would be easy, but Kushandeeep was determined. And he'd already come so far. "I'm the first kid from my village in Canada," he said.

It was an appealing vision—a twenty-first-century version of the immigrant dream. It's the kind of story that travels, carrying the promise of a better future. It's something you could sell on a billboard. ▶

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NICHOLAS HUNE-BROWN is an award-winning magazine writer in Toronto and the senior editor of *The Local*.

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This article was written with the support of the OCUFA Fellowship in Higher Education Journalism.



WE WANT WHAT WE WANT

Alix Ohlin

Thirteen glittering and darkly funny stories of people testing boundaries, from two-time Scotiabank Giller Prize finalist Alix Ohlin



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POLITICS

Province of No Choice

Why doctors are still fighting to provide abortion care in New Brunswick

BY JESSICA LEEDER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DARREN CALABRESE

ADRIAN EDGAR was just eight days old when he arrived in New Brunswick for the very first time—too late to claim being a tenth-generation New Brunswicker by birth but young enough that the Atlantic salt air worked its alchemy, embedding in him a deep sense of belonging. Of course, Edgar, now in his late thirties, can't remember that first visit, but it launched a rhythm that shaped his life: summer vacations were spent floating on the waves off New Brunswick's coast, and through the other seasons, there was the countdown to his return.

The year he was fifteen, Edgar spent time at the public library near his home, in London, Ontario, doing research. "This was before the internet. Long before Facebook or Twitter or Grindr... If you wanted to know if you'd like kissing someone of the same gender, you couldn't google it," he said a couple of years ago in his speech as grand marshal of Fierté Fredericton Pride. "If we had a question like that, we went to the library and looked it up in physical books." Sitting at a long wooden table, reading *Leaves of Grass* by Walt Whitman (thought to be among the first poets in North America to describe homosexual love), Edgar began to realize he was queer—and the implications of that. "The status quo then was terrifying. Gay marriage wasn't legal. Too many gay men and trans women were dying of AIDS or random acts of violence or suicide," Edgar

continued. "The status quo then was a world that didn't seem to want me in it. I had to choose to accept that or to resist."

By the time Edgar began to study medicine at McMaster University, in 2007, he had decided firmly on the latter. As an undergraduate, he spent one formative term working at a medical clinic on the Thailand–Myanmar border; the clinic saw scores of people who had been assaulted and raped, but politically motivated restrictions prevented its doctors from providing them with abortions. They were allowed to treat patients who had attempted to terminate pregnancies themselves, a policy that brought a stream of horrors through the door.

"We just had so many women come in who had been so violated and had hurt themselves so violently just to try to take back some control of their body," Edgar recalled in one of several telephone interviews earlier this year (pandemic restrictions prevented us from meeting in person). He spent a semester learning how to remove sticks, wires, and other objects from vaginas and uteruses—items that patients hoped would end their unwanted pregnancies. "You do that and then you never, as a physician, will ever consider a world in which barriers to abortion are anything but harmful."

He had no idea, back then, that the next time he'd slam up against such barriers would be in the place he'd fallen in love with while growing up.

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Adrian Edgar in Fredericton, New Brunswick, this summer. The physician has been fighting for expanded access to abortion services in the province while providing care as well—sometimes covering the costs himself.

New Brunswick is the only province or territory in Canada that still has a regulation on the books designed to restrict access to abortion. Unlike most other jurisdictions, New Brunswick covers abortion services—which, medically speaking, are generally low-risk and straightforward—only if they are provided in hospitals, although there are just three in the province that routinely perform them. (In other provinces, though there are barriers to access, insured abortions can be obtained in a variety of outpatient settings, including doctors' offices, community clinics, and hospitals.) No hospitals offer ready access to abortions in two of New Brunswick's largest cities: Fredericton, the capital, and Saint John. Individuals seeking to terminate a pregnancy often endure uncomfortable waits, undertake lengthy travel, and pay associated expenses to have the procedure. None of the three hospitals will perform a routine second-trimester abortion, meaning those who cannot secure an appointment in the earliest weeks of their pregnancy or who do not learn they are pregnant until after fourteen weeks must leave the province for the procedure. All of these measures, taken together, have the effect of discouraging abortions in New Brunswick; those who seek them anyhow often have guilt, shame, and difficult experiences navigating barriers that were designed to stymie their choice.

Now a physician with expertise in abortion, Edgar has spent the last seven years battling this long-held status quo. In 2014, to help combat New Brunswick's restrictions, Edgar and his wife, Valerya Edelman, moved to Fredericton to provide health care for underserved patients and save the only clinic in the province (and one of the only two in Canada east of Quebec) that offers abortion services outside of hospital. Edgar is the only full-time physician on staff, and Edelman manages the clinic's operations; patients are covered for all other health care services under provincial medicare as usual, but they must pay for abortion services out of pocket. Since Edelman and Edgar's arrival, they have met with any provincial official they could,



attempting to demonstrate that abortions performed outside of hospitals are safe, cost-effective, and—in a province whose hospital system is already under enormous strain—necessary. These efforts have shifted some attitudes, but not among those with the power to actually change policy.

It is easy to assume that accessing abortion care is no longer a problem in Canada. The procedure was partially decriminalized just over fifty years ago and fully decriminalized in 1988, and although the provinces and territories administer health care, federal legislation requires that they make medically necessary services available “without financial or other barriers.”

But, in New Brunswick, the decades-old battle for access is still being waged. Patients, advocates, and even local obstetricians have been lobbying the province to allow medicare coverage for clinic-based abortions and bring access in line with other provinces. The federal government has pressured provinces since 1995, citing the Canada Health Act, which requires coverage

New Brunswick is the only province or territory in Canada that still has a regulation on the books designed to restrict access to abortion.

ABOVE LEFT Valerya Edelman in the gutted basement of Clinic 554.

OPPOSITE After the couple arrived in Fredericton, Edelman had part of the clinic painted in rainbow colours; it quickly became a beacon for LGBTQ2+ people in the area.



of medically necessary services—including abortions—regardless of where a physician performs them. For two consecutive years, federal health minister Patty Hajdu has tried to emphasize this obligation by holding back \$140,000 in transfer payments to New Brunswick; the number represents a small fraction of the \$860 million health transfer payment the province received in 2020 but is intended to symbolize the cost of the clinic-based abortions it refused to cover. (Hajdu did not agree to an interview for this story.) Blaine Higgs, the province's Progressive Conservative premier, has publicly invited anyone who disagrees with New Brunswick's clinic-funding ban to challenge the province in court. Hajdu, like other federal health ministers before her, has stopped short of pursuing such a course.

But, earlier this year, the Canadian Civil Liberties Association did take up that challenge: in June, the nonprofit human rights group, backed by Toronto-based law firm Torys LLP, was given a green light by the Court of Queen's Bench of New Brunswick to proceed with a

constitutional challenge of the province's abortion policies. When arguments are presented, likely next year, the CCLA will argue that the province is in violation of two sections of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms: Section 7, which guarantees rights to life, liberty, and security of the person; and Section 15, which guarantees equal rights and protection without discrimination. "Pregnancy discrimination is sex discrimination," the CCLA's statement of claim reads, noting that "the right to reproductive freedom is central to a person's autonomy and dignity."

When Edelman and Edgar decided to move to New Brunswick to fight for expanded abortion access, they understood that providing care would involve challenges. "If New Brunswick is the one province where the most barriers to abortion exist, it is the province I want to work in," Edgar says. "That's where, as a country and as a profession, medical people need to stand up and see the consequences of this slippery slope." Edelman laughs wearily at the memory of how eager she was. "I was bright eyed and bushy tailed. People did warn me that New Brunswick

feels like a small town, that people will talk about you, that you don't have much anonymity in a small province like this," she says. "They said it's really difficult to make any change. And people are not supportive of abortion providers."

Edgar's faith in the system is now much more fragile, and his clinic is in tatters, but he is hopeful that the CCLA suit will finally force a change. "It is accepted here that abortion access will be less than in the rest of the country. People in health care have been working on the issue for decades, and the province has never changed its policy," Edgar says. "I figured it would be an uphill battle."

The steep grade of it was just not something he had a sense of.

ABORTION HAS always been a charged subject, though its controversial roots run particularly deep in New Brunswick. Canada was not yet formed as a country when, in 1810, New Brunswick passed legislation (modelled after English law) to criminalize the procedure. It took more than twenty-five years for neighbouring jurisdictions to

follow suit, but Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland, and what was then Upper Canada all criminalized abortions in the mid-1800s. When Canada's first criminal code was enacted, in 1892, terminating a pregnancy became illegal across the country.

While abortions in some limited situations were technically decriminalized across Canada in 1969, the circumstances under which they were allowed were still highly restrictive. Patients were required to submit requests to therapeutic abortion committees of three doctors, which were supposed to assess whether an abortion ought to be granted, but few hospitals ever established these committees: according to the Abortion Rights Coalition of Canada, in 1982, only about one-third of Canada's hospitals had them. In New Brunswick, the government amended the province's Medical Services Payment Act to ban clinic-based abortions: a physician could be found guilty of professional misconduct—and lose their medical licence—if they performed an abortion outside of a hospital.

In the mid-1980s, physician and pro-choice advocate Henry Morgentaler began expressing interest in providing abortions in New Brunswick. Morgentaler, a Toronto-based doctor who had previously practised and provided abortion services in Montreal, was on a cross-country tear to dismantle barriers to abortion by opening private clinics across several cities and provinces and challenging anti-abortion laws in the courts. New Brunswick's legislation had been revised with Morgentaler in mind, in the hope of preventing him from operating in the province—ultimately, it turned out, to no avail. In a historic 1988 win for Morgentaler in the Supreme Court of Canada, the country's abortion restrictions were declared unconstitutional: a violation of the right to life, liberty, and security of the person.

That decision, which made abortions legal at any stage of pregnancy, certainly did not open the floodgates to access. A few days later, British Columbia's then premier said abortions wouldn't be funded, and the following year, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia enacted legislation to

prevent doctors from being paid to perform abortions. (The BC decision was later found to be unconstitutional.) New Brunswick also drafted a new regulation that required anyone seeking an abortion to get the approval of two doctors and to have the procedure done by a specialist at an approved hospital. Its beloved premier at the time, Frank McKenna, vowed to spar with Morgentaler if the doctor dared to persevere. "If Mr. Morgentaler tries to open a clinic in the province of New Brunswick," McKenna said, "he's going to get the fight of his life."

It was not an idle promise. Morgentaler broke ground in Fredericton, building what was at the time the only private abortion clinic east of Montreal. *Maclean's* reported that Morgentaler performed his first five abortions there on the twenty-fifth anniversary of the decriminalization of abortions in Canada. Those procedures launched a two-decade battle with the New Brunswick government that played out across two acts. In the first, Morgentaler challenged the rule that restricted abortions to hospitals; the Court of Queen's Bench agreed, deciding that the legislation amounted to an overstep of provincial powers with the aim of "suppressing or punishing what [it] perceives to be the socially undesirable conduct of abortion." The court also noted that the rule was not ensuring the highest-quality health care for women. (New Brunswick appealed, forcing Morgentaler to spend more time and money in court, but the province eventually lost.)

Morgentaler's win was bolstered by then federal health minister Diane Marleau when, in 1995, she sent a letter instructing the provinces to fund abortions, including those performed at private clinics. By this point, New Brunswick had amended its Medical Services Payment Act to state that doctors who performed abortions outside of hospital could not be paid under provincial medicare coverage. (Those who performed vasectomies, though, were not subject to the same restriction.) If the province's power brokers could not stop people from having abortions at the Morgentaler Clinic, they would at least force them to pay out of pocket for the perceived transgression.

This decision diverged from the direction of most other provinces as they implemented abortion policies, though it was not a surprise. New Brunswick has for years had one of the oldest populations in Canada, second only to Newfoundland. Statistics Canada surveys also show that the province is overwhelmingly Christian—around 85 percent of New Brunswickers identify as Christian and almost half of those as Catholic. While many Christians and Catholics are pro-choice, these demographic indicators help contextualize why several leaders from both the Liberal and the Conservative parties have refused to open abortion access despite judicial and federal direction to do so.

The ban on funding clinic-based abortions sent Morgentaler, who thought the province was offside, back to court. His second suit against New Brunswick, which he announced he'd be pursuing in 2002, tested the constitutionality of the policy. The lawsuit was plagued with delays, including time spent considering the argument mounted by the province in 2007 over whether Morgentaler was entitled to bring a suit at all when he had not personally been denied an abortion. The debate was volleyed through the court until, in 2009, Morgentaler was given the green light to sue. When he died, in 2013, the case, still before the courts, died with him. By then, Morgentaler's Fredericton clinic had performed thousands of safe abortions, including many for which it never charged patients—at up to \$750, the procedure was often unaffordable. Still, the province showed no signs of softening.

"It just got imprinted on minds here that [abortion] was bad... and they've never let go of it," says Simone Leibovitch. Morgentaler's sister-in-law, she managed the Fredericton clinic for a decade and was at the helm when, in 2014, the decision was made to close it. "At some point, you just get worn out."

EDGAR GOT his first insights into how constrained abortion services were in New Brunswick long before he opened his practice. As a recent medical graduate, he made the trip east

to locum at a community health centre in Saint John and volunteered at Fredericton's Morgentaler Clinic. At that time, it offered first- and second-trimester abortions once per week, when a doctor drove in from out of town; no local physician would perform the procedure. While the barriers to access rankled Edgar, he had his sights set elsewhere.

After his stint in Saint John, Edgar settled into an interdisciplinary practice treating folks in Vancouver's Downtown Eastside. He treated people contending with substance use disorders, HIV, hepatitis, homelessness, and trauma and provided abortion services when patients needed them. The young physician was also building a life with his partner, Edelman, a social worker who shared his commitment to providing health care for marginalized people.

It was Edelman who, in 2014, came across an interview of Leibovitch on Facebook and summoned Edgar to see it. The Fredericton Morgentaler Clinic was closing, and activists had launched a crowdfunding campaign to buy the building in the hope of attracting a new doctor to perform abortions—a desperate, last-ditch effort to avoid a claw-back of already-limited sexual health services. Edelman and Edgar were nervous but loved the idea of a relocation, which would bring them closer to Edgar's family, and they saw an opportunity to expand on the values that informed their medical and community work.

By the time the pair arrived in Fredericton, later that year, the Morgentaler Clinic had been dormant for a few months. With Edelman's help, Edgar opened up a full family practice, which they named Clinic 554 after its Brunswick Street address. One day per week, Edgar would focus on reproductive health care, including abortion procedures; the rest of the time, he would treat babies with earaches, seniors with diabetes, cancer patients, and whoever else walked through the door. (Thousands did—Edgar's clinic has seen more than 3,000 patients.) While patients would have to pay out of pocket for abortions, provincial medicare covered the rest of his services, the same as for any other family doctor.

To Leibovitch, the scenario could not have appeared more perfect. "When I was manager of the [Morgentaler] clinic, we thought, 'Wouldn't it be amazing if we could get a family doc in here?' It just made so much sense." Obstetricians were also grateful for Edgar's presence and began consulting him on complex abortion cases. In some instances, they also referred patients who required second-trimester abortions to Clinic 554.

It wasn't long before Edelman and Edgar realized just how big the deficits for some health care services and communities were. Care for transgender patients was sorely lacking; accessing what little there was pushed a troubling amount of work onto patients themselves. Edgar began to offer specialized trans care without requiring patients to have a referral from another doctor or a psychologist. (Edgar himself realized he is trans when he was in his early twenties; he transitioned when he was twenty-five.) Patients drove from across the province and elsewhere in the Maritimes to see him.

The clinic became a beacon for gender nonconforming people, allowing community groups to hold their meetings in its waiting room—literally creating space for the queer community in Fredericton to grow. "Clinic 554 kind of brought people out and enabled people. It's been a real community centre," says Karen Pearlston, a reproductive justice advocate and a law professor at the University of New Brunswick. A lesbian woman who was out while living in Toronto, Pearlston said she felt uncomfortable when she initially moved to Fredericton, which did not seem queer-friendly at the time. "I found myself in a homophobic and misogynistic environment. I didn't know a lot of queer or trans people except those who were deeply unhappy because they couldn't get services," she says. "Clinic 554 changed so much of that." Outside, Edelman had part of the building painted in rainbow colours. Through the clinic's security cameras, she often watched as patients snapped grinning selfies documenting their first gender-affirming treatment.

Edgar took on the work of increasing awareness of trans-inclusive care among other physicians in the province, offering training to other doctors. In 2016, he was part of a team that was instrumental in convincing the province to provide medicare coverage for gender-affirming surgery. (New Brunswick was the last province in Canada to do so.)

Where progress on abortion care was concerned, though, success was more elusive. Considering the long controversy surrounding it in New Brunswick, some weren't surprised.

"This has been an issue that we've struggled with since the late 1980s," says Jeff Steeves, president of the New Brunswick Medical Society, which issued its first public position in favour of non-hospital abortions just last year. Physicians in the province, Steeves says, can opt out of providing any treatment for a patient on moral or religious grounds. It is well-known in the province's medical community that some physicians still do not prescribe birth control and have reservations about being associated with those who administer abortions. "It's not as if people are jumping up and down and calling the people who provide these services heroes."

WHEN EDGAR hung out his shingle at Clinic 554, in 2015, there was reasonable optimism that abortion access was truly on the verge of opening up. Brian Gallant, the newly elected Liberal premier, was just thirty-two—he would have nary a memory of a time when abortions were not legal in Canada. He was also in step with prime minister Justin Trudeau's insistence that everyone representing the party vote pro-choice, and Gallant campaigned on the promise that his government would "swiftly act to define all barriers to these rights and make sure that we eliminate them."

Buoyed and prepared to make their case for change, Edelman and two nurses secured a meeting with the provincial minister of health. They discussed study results that show abortions in clinics actually carry lower infection risks and rates of complications compared with

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hospital-based procedures, and they presented letters of support from the National Abortion Federation and even the department of obstetrics and gynecology at Fredericton's Doctor Everett Chalmers Hospital. "We are completely in support of Dr. Adrian Edgar's application to have the pregnancy terminations performed at his clinic funded by the government," wrote doctor Petr Landau on behalf of the department. "If for no other reason [than] that... finally women in Fredericton will be able to access the services unimpeded like they can in other parts of the country outside of New Brunswick."

The meeting ended on such an encouraging note that Edelman and Edgar treated themselves to dinner out. "Me and Adrian went for sushi afterward and there was a bit of a celebration," Edelman says. But nothing changed. "We followed up and were told something very vague, like the government was going to go in a different direction—something that didn't really mean anything."

While it did not change funding regulations, the Gallant government did forge more progress on abortion access than any government before it. The regulation that required people seeking an abortion to have two doctors' approval was struck down in 2014. At the same time, the third hospital was added to the province's list of those "approved" to offer abortion care—though this did not substantially increase access since it was in Moncton, which already had a hospital that routinely provided abortions.

It's troubling that two of the three approved sites are in the same city while most of the province's urban centres have none, says Lianne Yoshida, an abortion provider and co-director of the Nova Scotia Women's Choice Clinic, in Halifax. For a couple of years, Yoshida travelled to the Morgentaler Clinic in Fredericton to fill in when the doctor there needed time away. She also teaches at Dalhousie University; she uses a map of the Maritimes with dots representing abortion access points to show where the service is available in the region. "When you see the map of New Brunswick, the dots are kind of all in one

area," Yoshida says. "And then there's the rest of New Brunswick. There's nothing there."

The Gallant government received little scrutiny over that decision, perhaps because it grabbed headlines by becoming the first in Canada to make Mifegymiso, known as the abortion pill, available for free. The move won the province national applause from pro-choice advocates, but it was not without its difficulties: few doctors in the province had been trained to prescribe the pill at the time of the announcement, some were slow to learn, and pharmacists were initially prohibited from stocking it. Although the medication was technically free, it was still quite tough to access. That led to criticism and questions about whether the government was genuinely trying to increase access or just aiming to appear to do so.

It also helped distract from delays inside the government's closed-door conversations about increasing hospital-based access to surgical abortions, which (despite the name) are typically faster, more effective, and less painful than the medication version. "It wasn't as simple as saying, 'Every hospital can perform this,'" says Katie Davey, who was a policy adviser to Gallant at the time. She was tasked with learning about the barriers to abortion access in New Brunswick and figuring out how the government could knock them down.

At first, it seemed that the most obvious means of easing access to surgical abortions would simply be to allow more hospitals to provide them. But a series of roadblocks stunted that effort. "New Brunswick's infrastructure is crumbling and hospitals are at capacity," Davey says. "What were we going to kick out to add this in?" In Fredericton, there was no space in the building to add abortion services. While the nearby Oromocto hospital likely had space, there was no public transit access. Another hospital, according to Davey, was leased to the government with terms that precluded, among other things, abortion services.

It didn't help matters that physicians in many areas expressed a reluctance to perform abortions, some on religious or moral grounds and others due to

concerns over their inexperience with the procedure. But some were willing, and enabling them would have helped, Davey acknowledges. The government balked after its civil service advisers warned that funding clinic-based abortions would be tantamount to sanctioning private health care.

Whether the civil service truly believed that or simply knew it was an effective strategy to block change is unclear. "The folks that were giving advice on this did a very good job of spinning this as doing private care," Davey says. "It's a department of health that has spent the last forty years fighting providing abortion services.... Public service is excellent at many things. Major culture shifts isn't one of them." Even the small steps the Gallant government took were hotly contested by the bureaucracy, Davey says. But the failure to improve access to surgical abortions is something Davey says she regrets. "If I'm being honest, I would say this is one of the things we probably wished we would have done."

The cost savings alone ought to have been considered in a province where the health care system is under extreme pressure. While trying to provide health care in two languages for its bilingual population, New Brunswick has some of the country's longest wait times for routine procedures such as hip replacements (an average of 272 days compared with the national average of 182 days). For a new knee in Fredericton, the wait is between 461 and 737 days. (The national average is, again, 182.) Not even the argument for savings was enough to bring about change.

IT WASN'T just the provincial government that declined to support Edgar's work. Early on, he got a very direct message that other doctors in Fredericton also disapproved. Family doctors in Fredericton are required to join what is known as a "call group" when they open a practice; the call groups have a rotation system that allows physicians to cover one another during vacations, evenings off, and when patients are admitted to hospital. (In Fredericton and other parts of New Brunswick, family

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doctors are expected to care for their patients if they're admitted; call groups help alleviate the conflict of being required in two places at once.)

When he arrived in New Brunswick, Edgar interviewed with several call groups. The one he initially chose to join asked him to leave shortly thereafter, he says, because some members were worried they might be called upon to treat a woman who had had an abortion and was experiencing complications. After that, others declined to take him on. (A number of doctors with knowledge of the situation, including some from that call group, declined to comment for this story or did not respond to interview requests.) Edgar would have liked the camaraderie of colleagues to help him learn the ropes. "If you're new to a practice setting, there's lots of little processes you're supposed to be aware of," Edgar says. Not many people were willing to help him, he says, and those who were often lent a hand only when they felt that nobody else would know. "It was very difficult."

Support for access to abortion, though often held quietly, has long divided physicians in New Brunswick. Jo Ann Majerovich is a physician who used to work at the University of New Brunswick's Sexual Health Centre. She frequently encountered patients whose anti-choice doctors refused to prescribe birth control and others whose doctors would not help them access abortions. "I used to have secretaries of other family doctors call me when they knew the physician they were working for wouldn't [refer for abortion services]," she says. "I saw women who weren't able to navigate obstacles that were put in place... forced to continue with an unintended pregnancy."

In 2008, Majerovich filed a human rights complaint with the New Brunswick Human Rights Commission, in part to try to tackle the barriers to abortion access. At the time, she did not publicly identify herself as the complainant, a decision she was relieved to have made when a group of physicians she was meeting with happened to discuss the case. "A senior physician who everyone considers a mentor

said we would be branded" if they associated with whoever filed the complaint, Majerovich remembers.

Majerovich's complaint was ultimately rejected because she herself had not been denied access to an abortion. She agreed to be interviewed for this story in part because she believes it is time for change, having watched Edgar be marginalized by the same system she failed to alter.

In spite of the fact that Clinic 554's waiting room was often full and medical students cycled through the practice, the clinic could not dig itself out of financial precarity. That was partly due to the fact that, in keeping with Morgentaler's policy, Edgar refused to deny abortion services to anyone, regardless of their capacity to pay—most of the cost of unfunded abortions came out of his own pocket.

A physician's practice is not unlike a retail business in that a steady stream of sales—or billings—is required to keep the lights on, inventory on the shelves, and staff paid. To help defray building and operating costs, many doctors choose to work in shared offices. While many donations came in from the community, as the sole physician in his practice, Edgar was wholly responsible for covering the costs generated by Clinic 554. That requirement was constantly at odds with his commitment to treating marginalized patients with complex health care needs. Appointments with trans folks and people with HIV, substance use disorders, trauma, or mental health needs were not the quick, in-and-out checkups that the fee-for-service billing model rewards. "Those visits aren't the same as treating an earache," Edgar says. "You have to have more time to hear people, to make sure they feel cared for. Otherwise, you continue to perpetuate the higher rates of self-harm and suicide you see in those communities."

Colleagues from obstetrics and gynecology—Edgar's closest allies in the local medical community—tried to lobby in support of his patients. In a letter to the minister of health last August, Christa Mullaly, then the chief of obstetrics and gynecology at the Fredericton hospital, implored the minister on behalf of her

department to fund surgical abortions at Clinic 554. "Our own department has accessed Dr. Edgar's expertise for complex abortion cases," she wrote. "Most physicians enter medicine to help people, but Dr. Edgar literally saves lives by supporting these patients and the LGBTQ+ community in New Brunswick. He is known for the pro-bono work that he simply cannot sustain." In a last-ditch effort, the New Brunswick Medical Society also issued a public statement in support of the clinic.

Despite all of that and the deepening need for Clinic 554's services, Edelman and Edgar found themselves out on an island. "I get the sense that physicians would lose a lot of social capital if they... came to work at the clinic," Edelman says. "I understand now, living in New Brunswick, that there is this thing where people can be shunned professionally. It's a small community."

Sara Davidson, a medical director of River Stone Recovery Centre, in Fredericton, has lived in the city for twenty years and describes coming up against a "conservative overlay" among doctors and bureaucrats that makes providing innovative care difficult. "More than once, we've heard, 'Things just aren't done that way here. It's just not done,'" she says, adding, "The great thing about living here is that it's like living in the 1950s in that it's really nice and everyone knows everyone. But it's also like living in the 1950s in that controversial or forward-looking health care for people is not as available. That includes abortion services or... sexual health services."

Yoshida, the Halifax abortion provider, says the resistance to providing abortion services in New Brunswick makes her "so sad and angry. We are all supposed to be professionals. There are always going to be public groups that are going to be very vocal about their opinions on abortions, but it's very disappointing when other physicians are."

THE CURRENT PREMIER, Blaine Higgs, was reelected last September with a Progressive Conservative majority. He has attended the annual "March for Life" anti-abortion rally in Fredericton on

at least two occasions. Speaking before the crowd in 2017, Higgs, then leader of the opposition and backed by several MLAs, including the man he eventually made health minister, applauded attendees. “I’m proud of each and every one of you for being here. I’m proud of the conviction, which I share,” Higgs said.

Higgs has implied in local media interviews that abortion clinics “are not what we value as a society” and insisted that access to abortion in the province is not an issue. “We’re meeting the Canada health rules and the Canada Health Act,” he said last year. (Higgs did not respond to multiple interview requests.) Despite increasing federal pressure, the prospect of the CCLA lawsuit, and pandemic conditions that pushed hospitals to capacity limits repeatedly during the past year, New Brunswick did not waver in its refusal to fund clinic-based abortions—even temporarily, to relieve pressure on hospitals or lower possible COVID-19 exposures.

Last winter, Higgs whipped his party to vote against a Liberal motion calling for an amendment that would allow

funding for surgical abortions at Clinic 554. It was introduced by Liberal MLA Isabelle Thériault, who, the CBC reported, pointedly asked the nine sitting female PC MLAs to support it. “Women, sisters, we need you now,” Thériault pleaded. “I hope that the women here who have gone into politics did it to advance the cause of women. Otherwise, what are we doing here?” Despite Thériault’s pitch, the PC MLAs voted unanimously against the motion.

Whether the province is in violation of federal health rules will not feature prominently in the CCLA’s case: the case law is divided on whether the federal government can take on that issue in court. Instead, lawyers will focus on whether New Brunswick’s restrictions amount to a violation of the Charter. Kerri Froc, an expert on women’s constitutional rights at the University of New Brunswick who has advised the CCLA, believes the case is strong. Her sense was underscored in June, when Tracey DeWare, chief justice of the Court of Queen’s Bench of New Brunswick, granted the nonprofit group not only the go-ahead to proceed but \$5,000 in damages to be paid by the

province. (New Brunswick challenged whether the CCLA ought to be allowed to bring the suit and argued that a pregnant woman seeking an abortion would be more appropriate to take it on.)

“That speaks volumes about what the judge thought of the government’s case (not much),” Froc wrote in an email reacting to the decision. In an earlier interview, she expressed optimism that the CCLA case may be the beginning of the end for New Brunswick’s restrictive policy. “There are rights to [reproductive health services]. There is no question that this is unconstitutional,” she said. “I think the government was banking on this never coming to pass.”

For Edelman and Edgar, the case may be too late. Last fall, as the CCLA was drafting its statement of claim, they made the difficult decision to drastically scale back services at Clinic 554. Edgar had hoped that they might sway the Conservative government by promoting the savings that would result from funding abortions at the clinic. “They wouldn’t even meet with us,” says Edelman. “It was like, Okay, how do we do this for another four years?”

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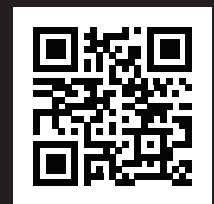
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The family practice, including trans care, at Clinic 554 is now closed; while the building remains unsold, Edgar is still providing abortions, IUDs, and pap tests one day per week. The other four, he has found work at the Canadian Armed Forces base in Oromocto, just outside of Fredericton. Edgar is also working with PEI to provide health care to transgender patients there.

The wait list for primary care physicians in New Brunswick has more than 40,000 people on it. Edgar’s decision to shutter most services was not taken kindly by patients or critics, who have lambasted him for abandoning a much-needed practice and the government for failing to support him adequately. Some say he could have moved to a smaller building, stopped doing abortions, and prioritized the majority of his patients instead of a fight over principles. Edgar agrees that might have helped him keep the doors open, but not without fuelling inequities. “That’s how the status quo persists, when people accept it and then become a part of it and then perpetuate it,” he says. “That’s not ever been my approach.”

Edgar’s goal is to remain in New Brunswick, though the terms of how that may work are unclear. “Being here feels like home...like it’s part of my DNA,” he says. “It’s where I want to have my family.

“All of the patients that I worked with were so full of gratitude and so kind, respectful, generous, and helpful. I don’t want to paint New Brunswick wrong. The majority of people I worked with...are so happy to have us here.”

Why hasn’t public policy shifted to reflect that? The answer, in the estimation of several New Brunswickers interviewed for this story, lies somewhere in the notion that elected politicians in the province, including a long succession of premiers, haven’t necessarily reflected their constituents.

“It demonstrates the value of diverse representation,” says Davey, the policy adviser. “The premiers...are all white men and had predominantly similar caucuses. New Brunswick has never elected a person of colour. It has its record number of women elected right now”—which is both true and, because the figure is less than 30 percent of

elected representatives, a good illustration of her concern. “When you have the same type of people making decisions, especially decisions like this, that have absolutely nothing to do with them, you get the same outcome.”

Layered on top of that is New Brunswick’s cultural reverence for tradition and discipline, plus the general lack of diversity and dynamism in the region, which is not known for a propensity to change. “It’s a part of this thing Atlantic Canada sometimes gets a bad rap for, which is ‘We’ve always done it this way, so why change now?’” Davey says.

For her part, Majerovich believes that politicians in the province have simply grown more accustomed to answering to one another than to their constituents. “There was no political will to change this regulation,” she says. “Women in New Brunswick aren’t treated like women in the rest of Canada.”

JESSICA LEEDER is an Emmy-winning freelance reporter. She was formerly the Atlantic bureau chief for the *Globe and Mail*.

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ENVIRONMENT

SALMON SICKNESS

For years, Fisheries and Oceans Canada has minimized the risk of a virus some of its own scientists believe is threatening wild salmon

BY MAX BINKS-COLLIER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MELISSA RENWICK

BRIAN WADHAMS, a fisher from ‘Namgis First Nation, sometimes sits alone on his docked boat, a thirty-five-foot gillnetter christened *Silver Fin II*. As a boy, he accompanied his father and grandfather on fishing trips, and he started working as a deckhand at the age of eleven. “I’ll probably die with my boots on,” says Wadhams, now sixty-nine. He recalls spending days and nights at sea and catching salmon to share with fellow ‘Namgis in Alert Bay, a village on an island east of Vancouver Island. He bought *Silver Fin II* to teach his two sons how to make a living off the ocean, but they told him they could not afford it. There simply aren’t enough fish left.

Wild salmon in British Columbia are in trouble. According to one estimate, some populations have dropped by as much as 93 percent since the early 1990s. Lately, the situation has grown dire.

In 2018, the Committee on the Status of Endangered Wildlife in Canada assessed sixteen chinook populations in southern BC and warned that half were at risk of disappearing. Last year, the number of sockeye returning to spawn in the Fraser River crashed to a record low. It’s hard to say exactly why this is happening, though logging, climate change, and overfishing all seem to play a role. Among the most controversial potential factors, however, is the virus *Piscine orthoreovirus*, or PRV. The virus isn’t necessarily fatal, but infected fish may be weakened and unable to swim as fast, making them more likely to be eaten by predators or fail to migrate upriver in order to spawn—both of which can have serious consequences on salmon survival. While PRV isn’t solely to blame for the decline, mounting evidence—consistent with research by an international cast of scientists—suggests the virus may be partly responsible for driving already struggling fish stocks to extinction.



A fish farm protester rides his boat in Clayoquot Sound, near Tofino, BC, during a demonstration in June 2019.

Not everyone agrees. Among the dissenters is Fisheries and Oceans Canada (DFO), the federal department tasked with protecting those salmon and marine habitats more broadly. The DFO is worried about the calamitous state of the fish stocks—in June, it announced the closure of 60 percent of commercial fisheries to allow populations to rebound. But it has denied the virus’s link to any disease that could menace the wild salmon. Citing its own scientific assessments, the DFO basically dismisses PRV-1A—the variant of the virus found in BC—as an innocuous microbe that has been floating throughout coastal waters for a long time. A lot hinges on which side is right: PRV ends up affecting nearly 80 percent

to \$30,000 from June to September. Now, they earn about a tenth of that or less. By Wadhams’s count, ‘Namgis First Nation once boasted a fleet of several hundred boats. Maybe ten are left today. Each year, it’s not unusual to find another decommissioned vessel abandoned by owners who can no longer afford upkeep. “Our beach has become a cemetery for our boats,” says Wadhams. Many younger ‘Namgis have left Alert Bay to pursue opportunities elsewhere; about half of the First Nation’s population already lives off of Cormorant Island. “It’s just so heartbreaking to see a community dying,” Wadhams says.

It is not just people who depend on the salmon. The fish are foundational to BC’s ecosystem. They feed a wide range

department to “not continue to perpetuate a false narrative” that the virus “poses ‘minimal threat to wild salmon.’”

That “false narrative” runs deeper than many Canadians realize. As part of their litigation, the ‘Namgis have collected a trove of internal DFO records, including drafts of scientific assessments about PRV-1A and emails between government scientists. These documents and others, obtained via access to information requests, were shared with me by the First Nation’s lawyer and by marine biologist Alexandra Morton, who has been chronicling the DFO’s alleged mismanagement of the West Coast fishery for thirty years. They show that the department’s view of the virus is based

SCIENTISTS HAVE RAISED CONCERNS ABOUT THE WAY THE DFO’S INTERPRETATION OF THE SCIENCE SEEMS TO BENEFIT BC FISH FARMS.

of the Atlantic salmon that aquaculture companies transfer from onshore hatcheries into fish farms floating in the ocean. Fish farms are little more than big nets where hundreds of thousands of salmon grow until they are harvested and sold. Because so many fish are penned together, the virus can fester and spread to the Pacific wild salmon swimming past.

If the DFO recognized PRV-1A as a “disease agent”—that is, as causing or contributing to disease—the department would be legally prohibited from authorizing transfers of infected fish, a move that might well shipwreck the province’s lucrative salmon-farming industry. The seventy-four active farms, scattered mainly around Vancouver Island, support several thousand well-paying jobs and provide Canada, the world’s fourth-largest producer of salmon, with 60 percent of its farmed salmon. Several mayors on northern Vancouver Island have described the industry as “deeply integrated into the fabric of local lives.”

The declining numbers of West Coast salmon have profoundly affected those who rely on them. Wadhams recalls how commercial fishing once “kept our communities alive.” Prior to the mid-1970s, a salmon fisher could expect to make up

of animals, including orcas, sea lions, wolves, bears, and eagles. Nutrients from salmon carcasses, hauled into the forests by bears, are even absorbed into the towering forests along the coast.

‘Namgis First Nation is now in the Federal Court of Canada, facing off against the DFO over the department’s refusal to require testing for PRV-1A before salmon are transferred to fish farms. The ‘Namgis’s view that the virus causes disease is shared by a broad range of conservationists, academic ecologists and biologists, and veterinarians around the world. Indeed, the DFO remains a global outlier, insisting that what it calls the “BC strain” of PRV is different, posing little danger to salmon stocks. Over 100 First Nations have called for the removal of fish farms over concerns that they spread pathogens. Recent research has shown just how high the stakes are. In May, the Strategic Salmon Health Initiative, a government-funded research operation devoted to conserving salmon, published an article showing that fish farms in BC are superspreaders of PRV-1A—the virus’s spread displays the properties of an epidemic. Viral ecologist Gideon Mordecai, lead author on the paper, emailed the DFO, urging the

on scientific conclusions that omit, downplay, or mischaracterize the relevant research. In one report, the DFO stated that a BC fish farm was free of a certain disease caused by PRV—despite the fact that an international team of researchers, including a DFO scientist, had diagnosed it.

“A lot of fairly definitive statements are made based on rather flimsy evidence” is how one scientist from the David Suzuki Foundation, emailing a DFO colleague, described the department’s conclusion that PRV-1A is harmless. Scientists, including those within the department, have consistently raised concerns about the way the DFO’s interpretation of the science often seems to benefit BC fish farms. “There is no way that given ALL of the evidence, including field studies, that one could plausibly state that PRV in BC is no[t] a disease agent,” wrote one senior DFO scientist, lambasting her own ministry.

In an email to me, the DFO said that it “conduct[s] rigorous research and risk assessments” to ensure fish farms “continue to pose minimal risk to their surrounding environment.” But the documents suggest otherwise. They cast serious doubt on the agency’s scientific integrity, its independence from industry, and its willingness to protect BC’s wild salmon.



THE DFO IS responsible for overseeing the seas and coasts, and many of the rivers and lakes, of a country that is surrounded by three oceans and that contains 20 percent of the world's fresh water. With an annual budget of about \$4 billion, the department employs some 12,000 people, among them 1,500 scientists, to carry out its mandate, mainly promoting marine business, like the fish-farming industry, and protecting aquatic ecosystems. The current incarnation of the DFO dates back to the 1970s, after the Fisheries Research Board of Canada—a respected,

politically independent institution that conducted fisheries science—was dissolved and a new stand-alone department was created. The intention was to centralize the government's fisheries-related activity into a single body. The outcome, according to Jeffrey Hutchings, a biology professor at Dalhousie University, was an organization whose science is susceptible to government interference.

Hutchings, who is also a fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and former chair of Canada's national science advisory body on species at risk, began

Alexandra Morton is a marine biologist and activist whose work focuses on fish farms' impact on wild salmon along Canada's west coast.

doing postdoctoral research at the DFO in Newfoundland in 1992, the same year then minister of fisheries and oceans John Crosbie imposed a moratorium on cod-fishing. Around 40,000 Newfoundlanders lost their jobs, and the province spiralled into an economic crisis and population loss from which it never fully recovered. The moratorium shocked Canada: Newfoundland's cod fishery had acquired a quasi-mythic status. As far back as 1497, one observer described fish so plentiful that they "can be taken not only with the net, but in baskets let down with a stone." So what happened?

Hutchings's stint at the DFO led him to believe that the department's structure makes it prone to decisions that selectively use science to justify political objectives. Because DFO scientists work under bureaucrats, he explained to me, there can be unofficial pressures on what kind of scientific information circulates inside the department. Inconvenient findings can end up being overlooked, or studies summarized in ways that skip their most problematic conclusions. In 1997, Hutchings co-authored an article revealing that DFO scientists had repeatedly warned that overfishing was imperilling Newfoundland's cod. Those warnings were never factored into the department's decision-making even though the DFO had access to reports as far back as 1986 that concluded it was overestimating the number of cod and underestimating the toll fishing was taking on them.

One of the overarching reasons the DFO treats science in this way, Hutchings told me, is that, while conserving marine life is part of its primary mandate, its de facto role is to promote marine businesses that generate jobs in otherwise hardscrabble coastal communities. This means decisions about fisheries can skew in industry-friendly directions. Ransom Myers, a fisheries biologist who worked at the department, told the CBC in 1998 that there was "an attempt to bureaucratically enforce a scientific position: that is, the cod stocks were increasing by great leaps and bounds, that the mortality due to fishing was low, and it simply was not so." DFO bureaucrats "seemed

to have a notion that you could sit in Ottawa and make up reality," he told the *Globe and Mail* that same year. (In the late 1980s, a DFO scientist wrote a report about the department's cod stocks assessment; the subtitle asked, in reference to the assessment, "*Non gratum anus rodentum?*" Translation: "Not worth a rat's ass?") Even after the cod collapsed, the DFO held its ground. A 1995 DFO report on the collapse, according to Hutchings's article, contains "almost no mention" of the evidence showing that overfishing was the main cause.

A similar discomfort with data perceived as injurious to industry, Hutchings argues, has compromised the DFO's efforts to conserve wild salmon stocks. In 1986, tense negotiations were held between the DFO, the BC government, and Alcan, a mining company and aluminum manufacturer. The dispute centred on the rate at which Alcan would be allowed to let water flow through a dam and down the Nechako River, as this would have serious consequences for the salmon breeding in those waters. An altered flow rate could affect water temperature and depth, potentially confusing or stranding the salmon and putting them at greater risk of being scooped up by bears and birds before spawning.

DFO scientists disagreed with Alcan consultants over the rate, but DFO bureaucrats allegedly pressured department scientists into producing reports that facilitated a compromise in Alcan's favour. One DFO biologist, quoted in Hutchings's 1997 paper, alleged that the department "surrender[ed]" to Alcan and started a "disinformation" campaign that included "disavow[ing] the existence of credible information contrary to ALCAN's view of the impacts of the project." This was achieved, the biologist continued, in part through the "intimidation and 'gagging' of employees." Today, chinook and sockeye in the Nechako River are struggling. This March, *Canada's National Observer* reported that the changes caused by the Alcan dam have, along with other factors, had a "devastating effect" on the fish.

The Nechako River is a tributary of the Fraser River, which is itself the site of an

alarming decades-long drop in the number of sockeye salmon. From 2009 to 2012, the Cohen Commission, a \$37-million federal inquiry, probed what was behind that decline. While the commission couldn't find a single "smoking gun," it made dozens of recommendations, including determining which pathogens migrating sockeye are being exposed to and gauging the effect of fish farms on wild salmon. The commission also called into question the DFO's credibility as a steward. Because the DFO is mandated to both conserve wild fish and promote marine businesses, its "divided loyalties" could undermine its scientific operations.

Hutchings sees those same divided loyalties in the DFO's policy of allowing transfers of fish infected with PRV-1A. The scientific reports underlying that policy, he told me, show signs of cherry-picked evidence that are "entirely reminiscent of the northern cod scenarios."

ALEXANDRA MORTON believes vested interests are at play. An independent biologist, she moved to the BC coast in 1980 to study orcas. Her research efforts shifted to probing the critical state of the orcas' main food source — salmon — after local fishers began alerting her to the potential impact of fish farms.

In 2013, she was tipped off that a Norwegian company was transferring PRV-infected salmon into a fish farm off Vancouver Island. The virus was very likely introduced to BC by Norwegian fish farms in the late 1980s. In fact, it was first identified and studied in Norway, where many of the big fish farm companies are from. Morton quickly launched a court challenge against the DFO's licences for these transfers — the first of a series of lawsuits the DFO would face against its policy.

Morton's argument was straightforward: the DFO is legally barred from permitting the transfer of fish with a "disease or disease agent," and PRV is a disease agent. Recent research had indicated that it caused heart and skeletal muscle inflammation (HSMI) in Atlantic salmon, which stock many BC fish farms. As the DFO insisted in court



A rusting fishing boat sits parked in front of a home in Ucluelet, BC.

that the transfers were safe, it emerged that the department had not developed an official scientific position on PRV's safety. In 2015, the Federal Court sided with Morton and quashed the parts of the licences that allowed for the transfer of PRV-infected fish. Justice Donald Renne noted that the DFO had defended the licensing policy by making "unequivocal statements of science" that were "without evidence."

After this rebuke, the DFO asked its scientists to assess the potential impact, if any, PRV-infected fish pose to wild salmon. Similar assessments—the DFO initiates over 100 of them a year—are conducted whenever bureaucrats need information in order to formulate

for consensus is especially problematic. In principle, doubts are meant to be reflected in the document, but in practice, they often aren't. If there are competing views, important objections can end up being sidelined by an industry-aligned majority.

One dissenting DFO scientist who worked on the 2015 assessment was Kristi Miller-Saunders. Head of molecular genetics at the DFO's Pacific Biological Station since 2008, Miller-Saunders had already developed a reputation as a gifted researcher who made DFO bureaucrats uncomfortable by speaking candidly about the impact of pathogens on wild salmon: in 2011, she testified at the Cohen Commission that the DFO

these conclusions by claiming that there weren't enough clinical symptoms to indicate disease. The DFO, in other words, was ruling out apparent proof of HSMI due to a requirement much of the world deems too questionable to trust. Why did the DFO demand clinical signs? At the time, it contended that, without them, it could not tell HSMI from three similar diseases that also afflict salmon. This stance isn't supported by researchers like Di Cicco, who argue that HSMI's lesions are often distinctive enough to identify. In fact, in the assessment, right before it insists on clinical signs, the DFO cites a seminal 2004 Norwegian study—the first to describe the features of HSMI—that states HSMI *can* be

SHE WAS FACED WITH A DOCUMENT THAT WASN'T HONEST ABOUT THE SCIENCE AND THAT COULD HAVE FAR-REACHING CONSEQUENCES.

policies. The task is entrusted to the Canadian Science Advisory Secretariat (CSAS), an internal organization that recruits a committee of department scientists to write the initial assessment, which is then reviewed in-house. A larger group of DFO scientists, which can also include several outside experts, then debates the assessment until a consensus is reached. A DFO-appointed chair makes the call about what goes into the final draft.

In this case, the DFO requested a fast-track assessment, usually done in moments of urgency. Certain aspects of the conventional process, however, are already cause for concern, says Stan Proboszcz, a conservationist who has participated in the CSAS assessment process on several occasions. The organization, in his experience, does not require disclosures of potential conflicts of interest despite the fact that DFO scientists regularly collaborate on research partly funded by the salmon-farming industry. Even without outright conflicts of interest, those close relationships can cause DFO scientists to adopt the industry's general reluctance toward identifying disease risks linked to aquaculture. "The industry voice dominates the room," Proboszcz says. In this context, the push

had forbidden her from speaking to the media about some of her research.

That same candour is on display throughout drafts of the 2015 assessment, where we can see her frustrated comments as she collaborates on the document. (Miller-Saunders declined to be interviewed for this story.) In one section, she challenges how the DFO diagnoses HSMI primarily by clinical signs. The approach runs counter to how the disease is detected by the international scientific community, which deems clinical signs—external, observable symptoms, such as lethargic swimming—unreliable: fish can be sick with HSMI and still behave normally. "Clinical symptoms are not required for the simple reason that clinical signs don't necessarily occur," said Emiliano Di Cicco, a veterinarian who has researched PRV-associated diseases for the DFO in Nanaimo. Instead, researchers look for distinctive lesions—and, when it came to BC salmon, they found them. The 2015 assessment recounts how pathologists discovered lesions "consistent with HSMI."

That alone should have been enough to suspect PRV as a disease agent. But it wasn't. Instead, the DFO dismissed

distinguished from two of those three diseases by the location of the lesions. Miller-Saunders was thus faced with a document that simply wasn't honest about the science—a document that could have far-reaching consequences for the wild salmon.

The conclusions of the 2015 assessment, argued Proboszcz in *Policy Options*, reveal a classic DFO strategy: exploit the uncertainty surrounding the available science. That meant twisting the lack of categorical evidence that PRV is harmful into evidence that the virus is safe. This is especially problematic because the DFO is legally required to follow the precautionary principle: if there are sufficient grounds for concern but a lack of full scientific certainty, it cannot carry out policies that can feasibly cause, according to the courts, "serious or irreversible harm"—in this case, authorizing transfers that could expose endangered wild salmon to a potential pathogen like PRV. Last December, the First Nations Leadership Council, a political advocacy group composed of First Nations leaders from BC, called on the DFO to—in the words of one chief—implement the principle "at every level of policy, programs, and management."



Miller-Saunders's comments on the 2015 assessment tried to steer the DFO toward exercising precaution. The DFO decided otherwise. When the assessment was completed, in September 2015, the document declared that PRV's "lack of clear association with disease" in the laboratory meant the virus was unlikely to have "a significant impact" on wild salmon. This gave the department the cover it needed to grant a transfer licence to a fish farm company—even before the report was officially approved. The department maintained this licensing policy up until February 4, 2019, when

the Federal Court struck it down a second time. Morton and others had challenged it, and won, again. In her ruling, justice Cecily Strickland found that the DFO's PRV policy does not adhere to the precautionary principle "and fails to consider the health of wild Pacific salmon."

The ruling required the DFO to create a new licensing policy. But, by this time, it had become much harder to use uncertainty around PRV as proof that the virus was harmless. Evidence of PRV-1A as a disease agent had progressed significantly since the 2015 assessment—Miller-Saunders herself, along

A male sockeye salmon swims in the Adams River, located northeast of Kamloops, BC.

with a team of international HSMI experts, had not only diagnosed HSMI on a fish farm but linked it to PRV-1A.

Following the 2019 ruling, the DFO requested that its scientists complete a form to try to determine whether PRV-1A was a disease agent. Classification would depend, in part, on whether there was a significant die-off of fish due to a disease associated with the virus, such as HSMI. But the bar that the DFO set for this die-off was nearly unattainable: it required that more fish die from HSMI within five days than would typically die from the disease over several weeks or even months. Miller-Saunders pushed back. The DFO was, in effect, avoiding the problem by defining it away. The department's criteria, she argued in her comments, would make it impossible to declare HSMI a disease anywhere in the world. It would be like if Health Canada recommended doctors use an onerous, Canadian-specific method to call something lung cancer notwithstanding how the international medical community diagnosed it. When I asked Hutchings about this, he said that it exemplified the DFO's "extremely problematic" habit of using idiosyncratic definitions that result in policies that put wild fish at risk.

Miller-Saunders revised much of the form, drawing on fieldwork, international research, and the DFO's own studies, to provide a comprehensive picture of PRV-1A as a disease agent. But the DFO concluded that it wasn't one anyway, relying on that form to reaffirm the transfer policy the 'Namgis are now challenging in court.

LAST DECEMBER, Norwegian researchers published a breakthrough study that used purified PRV-1A from BC. Scientists routinely inject animals with a suspected pathogen to see whether it causes disease—using purified samples is considered conclusive proof since no other microbe could be responsible. In the study, the purified PRV-1A caused HSMI lesions in multiple Atlantic salmon, one of the scientists told me in an email; one salmon developed lesions as severe as those seen in fish infected with a more virulent variant of the virus. "That completely confirmed what

we have been saying all along," says Di Cicco—PRV-1A is a disease agent.

PRV-1A, however, isn't the only pathogen threat. One of the Cohen Commission's most important recommendations focused on the Discovery Islands, an archipelago off the eastern coast of Vancouver Island whose waters are a critical route for sockeye migrating from the Fraser River. The DFO was charged with removing all fish farms from the Discovery Islands by September 30, 2020, if it could not guarantee that the farms posed "minimal risk of serious harm" to the sockeye. Sure enough, two days before the deadline, the DFO declared that the Discovery Islands fish farms cleared the bar.

One risk assessment the DFO had to conduct to reach this conclusion was for the bacterium *Tenacibaculum maritimum*, which recent research indicates may be causing large-scale losses among wild salmon populations—including the Fraser River sockeye. The densely packed farmed salmon are believed to incubate the bacterium and, in turn, infect passing fish. In a 2020 report, the DFO discounted the bacterium as a threat.

But the assessment contained a fundamental error in how it calculated that threat, says Andrew Bateman, a mathematical biologist at the Pacific Salmon Foundation. This error, according to Bateman, caused the risk of passing sockeye being harmed by a *T. maritimum* infection to appear lower than it actually was. Bateman was an external participant in the drafting of the report. He says that, in the drive for consensus, his concerns were dismissed throughout the process. "These assessment meetings get contentious," he says. "They're awkward and strained situations." Hours after the final review, he emailed DFO scientists and offered a detailed explanation of the "critically important" error. The response? "Crickets," he says.

When reached for comment, the DFO wrote in an email, "This follow-up received by the Department after the meeting had been dealt with during the process itself." When I passed along this reply, Bateman retorted, "If the DFO wants to hide behind consensus reached in error, that's its decision."

IT REMAINS to be seen whether the dysfunctional dynamics inside the DFO will lead BC salmon the way of Newfoundland cod. In June, minister of fisheries and oceans Bernadette Jordan announced a "transformative" \$647-million plan to rebuild Pacific salmon stocks. Brian Wadhams, however, has little faith in the DFO. "For well over thirty years, [we've been] trying to get the government to pay attention," he says. "They seem to turn a blind eye when it comes to corporate businesses and industries."

But the tide may be turning. In 2018, BC premier John Horgan struck a deal with the 'Namgis, Kwikwasut'inuxw Haxwa'mis, and Mamalilikulla First Nations to phase out some fish farms near Wadhams's home of Alert Bay. And, last December, in a surprising twist, Jordan announced that she would not renew the licences of the nineteen fish farms in the Discovery Islands—just three months after the DFO had vouched for their safety. The decision was based on consultations with seven local First Nations. The fish farms must now be free of salmon by June 30, 2022, and cannot restock in the interim. The BC Salmon Farmers Association, an aquaculture-industry lobby group, released a statement saying that nixing the licences would devastate communities on northern Vancouver Island.

Fish farming companies immediately took legal action to overturn Jordan's decision. Two of those companies have since successfully challenged the restocking prohibition—in April, a judge overruled it. It was the DFO's flawed reports that ultimately thwarted Jordan: the judge considered her decision unreasonable because her department's own assessments proclaim fish farms to be harmless.

Wadhams was pleased by Jordan's announcement, but he does not think it reflects a deeper departmental change of heart. After all, the DFO is still arguing in court that PRV-1A is not a disease agent. "The government is ignoring the real science," he says. "That's the battle that we're up against." ☞

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A fish farm sits within the Clayoquot Sound. Farmed Atlantic salmon has become British Columbia's largest agri-food export, and the province consistently ranks as the world's fourth-largest producer.



HISTORY

Slavery's Ghosts

Canada remains haunted by a past it hardly acknowledges

BY ESI EDUGYAN

ILLUSTRATION BY ASHLEY FLORÉAL



MY FRIEND'S PARENTS retired to a homestead in northern Alberta, a great rambling estate of some hundred acres with bright rolling grasses and a handsome barn-style home. One summer, he invited me up for a weekend. We spent sun-filled days racing on ATVs; eating fresh apricots, plums, and wild strawberries pale with dust from the brambles; and swimming in the artificial lake in the clear hours before the mosquitoes thickened. In wintertime, that same lake hardened to a gleaming blue sheet that drew skaters from as far, he

swore, as Edmonton. Through the snow-glazed kitchen window, you could hear the brisk hissing sounds of their blades striking the ice.

But summer was the most beautiful season. Our weekend was one of lazy contentment, as if we knew we were exactly where we were meant to be. We sat around dinners laced with overripe tomatoes, the sun sweet in their flesh, talking late into the night about other places, other times.

Years later, I was surprised to hear that the property had been sold.

"Did your parents miss city life?" I asked.

But that wasn't it. What had happened was altogether stranger.

It has been years since I first heard this story, years since I've spoken to my friend, but I will always remember the awe in his voice that day. The problems at his parents' home had started simply, incrementally. After a morning in the city, they had returned in the late afternoon to discover that the furniture in the living room had shifted slightly. They could just make out the impressions of the furniture's feet in the carpet's pile, an inch to the right. They thought nothing of it, simply nudged everything back into

place. But then it happened again, and then again. They called in a friend who worked in construction; he could find nothing awry with the house.

Then events started occurring when they were home. My friend's mother was in the habit of marking her page in a book with her reading glasses. Rising to pour herself a cup of water at the sink, she turned to discover the glasses gone. She found them in a far-off guest room she rarely entered. Picture frames on desks and dressers were often found overturned, lying face down. Once, as she sat in an easy chair with a crossword in hand, her back to the window, she heard the venetian blinds rise up two slats, slowly and deliberately. She lurched from the chair. The cord on the blinds was still swaying.

They tried to explain it away. Wind, tremors in the earth, forgetfulness.

But, one evening in February, their tolerance reached its breaking point. Returning from a movie in Edmonton, they parked on their snowy gravel drive and climbed the stairs. The hall light was not working. They tried another switch. Nothing. Another, and again, nothing. My friend's father made his way out to the garage, where, by flashlight, he flipped every fuse in the house. He went inside to find his wife still in the dark. He took her cold hand, went into the living room, and raised the flashlight.

Every light bulb in the house had been unscrewed and piled neatly in the middle of the rug.

THERE ARE THOSE for whom this story will always be fiction. The belief in ghosts has never been universal, coloured as it is by religious faith and spirituality, by culture, science, and even temperament. For some, a ghost cannot withstand its unlikeliness. To others, there exists the world of the living and the world of the dead and yet a third one, a nation in between, whose citizens are unseen but whose hold over us remains visceral; these are the ghosts of our primal terrors. But there are other, more crucial ways we are haunted, ways that require no deep belief in the occult.

And they are less easily shrugged off. One might argue that ghost stories are

trivial, merely something to entertain around a campfire. But I believe they are a central way we build our personal and cultural myths. The stories we tell about the dead act as clarifying narratives to explain what has shaped us and what continues to make us who we are. Part of their work is to establish context. They connect us to what has lived on the land before us, to people and animals, to all that precedes us. They lessen our sense of solitude in the world by offering the possibility that death is not death—that human life is so powerful and exceptional it can will its own continuance and populate an entire shadow world still intimately connected with our own.

Ghost stories are, at their core, repositories of our pasts—both our personal pasts and our public, collective ones. Though we tend to think of them as a compendium of our fears, of our terror at the many open-ended things that scare us, they are also a haunting of another kind. A ghost story is as much an inversion of the things we cherish in life as it is an exhibition of things that frighten us. It is, by its nature, an excavation. To acknowledge the existence of what has come before us is to burnish past lives with importance—it is to say, in effect, that people's passage through this world is of consequence and remains unforgotten.

FOR THOUSANDS OF YEARS, the city of Edmonton and the land just north of it was a region of vast lakes and forests, open plains through which passed the Cree, Tsuut'ina, Nakota Sioux, Niitsitapi (Blackfoot), and Saulteaux peoples, among others. It rested between the wildness of the prairie and the stark dry hills, its lakes and rivers leading all the way to Hudson Bay.

In the early years of the twentieth century, formerly enslaved people from Oklahoma and other southern American states made their way north to the Alberta prairie. Nearly 1,000 African Americans arrived, drawn by the possibility of liberation from the crushing Jim Crow laws of the South, and they tried, with much difficulty, to establish townships on the rock-strewn land they'd been granted.

The farm my friend's parents abandoned to ghosts lay in proximity to the lands the western Indigenous peoples passed through, and it lay also within range of the Black township of Amber Valley. After the frightening goings-on in her home, my friend's mother decided to try to seek out the source of their haunting. My friend told me that, in the genealogical logs of the Latter-day Saints, she uncovered Germans who had fled financial persecution in Austria and arrived in Alberta in 1889; she devoured histories about Ukrainians from the province of Galicia in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. She searched for murders among the Icelandic, for Mennonite and French Canadian suicides. Every wave of migration would surely have had its own deaths and burials. In this she was undoubtedly right. But I was struck by how little it seemed to have occurred to her that her ghosts—in whose existence she was fully convinced—might belong to one of the communities of colour whose presence also predated her own on the land. She didn't, as far as I know, bother with the stories of those who were not, like her, descendants of Europe.

It seems a strange thing to speak about race when discussing ghosts. But it is interesting to note how often such details get left out. Unless race itself was a factor in the death, the race of a ghost is presumed to be the same as that of the person telling the ghost story. This might simply be because ghost stories emerge from within cultural groups and act as a reflection of those groups. They are that group's private history. And, because ghost stories are really about the living, not the dead, they reflect the paranoias of our own age, the values of our own culture, the concerns of our own nation. If confronted, for example, by the ghost of a Roman soldier, we would likely imbue him with our own notions of good and evil rather than those of the old world to which he belonged.

There are two ghost stories my husband remembers hearing at his high school. By the time he attended, in the early nineties, it was a pristine university school catering to young men and women, but it had been founded, in

1906, as a school for troubled boys. One story takes place in 1948, and it is about a young rugby player, a prop, whose neck was broken when the scrum collapsed on top of him. He died later that night. Students began seeing him on foggy nights, wandering the pitch. Even during my husband's time, sightings of him were still being reported.

The other ghost is that of a Chinese cook who hanged himself in the bell tower during the Second World War. This would have been at the height of local xenophobia against the Japanese for their involvement in the war, and one imagines that any person of Asian

collective story? If, in fact, we will into being the ghosts we so desperately need, what does the omission of certain ghosts say about the value we place on communities outside the mainstream?

In Canada, where the population of people of African descent has never exceeded 3.5 percent, Black ghost stories are barely visible. This despite the fact that, all across the country, Black settlers arrived through all means of force and desire and necessity and built lives on the land. Many lived on and cultivated homesteads, and many died on them. And yet, ghost narratives that feature Black people are rare, left out of the official

IN VIEUX-MONTRÉAL, a woman in white roams rue Saint-Paul. A sign marked Arsonist hangs from her broken neck. She drifts up and down the street, it is said, seeking vengeance.

She is the ghost of Marie-Joseph Angélique. She has been commemorated in plays, in histories, and on a plaque set into the public square across from Montreal City Hall. The square itself has been renamed Place Marie-Joseph Angélique. Hers is the rare death with which we have attempted a reckoning, but that reckoning points to still greater silences.

Angélique was born enslaved in Madeira, Portugal, in 1705 and died enslaved in Vieux-Montréal twenty-nine years later. Her short life held little grace. She had been sold in her native land to a Flemish man, who brought her along with all his other possessions to the New World. How strange New France must have struck her upon arrival. The very texture of the air would have felt different, its smells, its ungovernable cold. She was sold to a French businessman in Montreal, and after his death, she became the property of his wife. Thérèse de Francheville was said to be cruel in a time when cruelty was so common that the fact hers bore remarking upon suggests the extent of her awfulness.

When we speak of slavery, what usually comes to mind are cotton fields, sugar plantations, coffles, and overseers striking raw backs in the sweltering heat. Canadian slavery was different—and this fact, I believe, along with a lack of cohesive legislation on the matter, has allowed us as a country to overlook it. Enslaved Black Canadians mostly worked as domestics in households, and Angélique's fate was no different. She performed her duties as a maid in the Francheville home, serving meals and airing sheets, washing windows and polishing floors, travelling occasionally into the countryside to work on the family's small farm. During these years, she bore three children, all of whom were rumoured to have issued from forced breeding and none of whom survived past five months. That was horror enough for one lifetime. But hers was an unmerciful life, hard to the point of ferocity, with no luck to temper it.

Ghost stories are repositories of our pasts — both our personal pasts and our public, collective ones. To acknowledge the existence of what has come before us is to burnish past lives with importance.

descent must have been a target. His story is less often told. His ghost is said to be much more threatening, caught in a loop of seething fury, haunting the kitchens with a vicious look in his eye. The serene, romantic figure of the tragic athlete; the angry, threatening Chinese cook—the discord between how each is viewed exposes how uncomfortably race plays a factor in the way someone is memorialized. In both the cook's actual story and the commemoration of it, the listener must confront unsavoury prejudices, hatreds still so pervasive today that they are both a living thing and a haunting.

F GHOST STORIES reflect to us our histories, our yearning for a connection across time, who is being forgotten, and why? If people who have been marginalized in life are also excised from our tales of the dead, what importance can they claim in our greater

record of ghost tours and local history books and podcasts and all of the other ways we go about commemorating the dead who live. A recent book of collectible Halloween stamps issued by Canada Post included the stories of Vancouver's Brakeman, Manitoba's Red River Resistance, Quebec's Marie-Josephte Coriveau, the Caribou Hotel in the Yukon, and Halifax's Citadel. An obvious attempt was made to represent the regions of our vast country; less was done to express the full breadth of our diverse communities (Red River being the exception).

At the heart of ghost stories are deaths, sometimes violent: accidents, suicides, executions, murders. The deaths are usually unnatural—sudden or retributive—or, when natural, freakish. Unnatural death has, sadly, been at the heart of so many conversations about Blackness these past few years. But this is no recent, modern phenomenon.

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The year before her death, Angélique fell into a romantic relationship with an indentured servant in the household, a man called Claude Thibault. Whether this was a love of convenience or a deeper one is not a matter of record, but she was attached enough to risk an escape. They waited until their mistress, not trusting them in her own home, left them at the house of her brother-in-law. They set fire to his home and fled across the frozen Saint Lawrence River to seek their freedom in New England. But the winter was vicious and unrelenting, and they were forced to take refuge in Chambly. They were captured some weeks later by a militia searching the area and were transported back to Montreal. Thibault was imprisoned. Angélique was seen bringing him food on her visits to his cold cell.

Angélique herself served no jail time, was simply returned, like a sweater or a book, to her mistress. But her transgression lingered in the mind, and Thérèse de Francheville had negotiated her sale to one of her husband's old business associates, who had bought Angélique for 600 pounds of gunpowder. She would be sent north to Quebec City as soon as the ice melted and the Saint Lawrence was passable by ships. As she looked with dread toward the spring, Thibault was released from prison and came to visit her several times when the mistress was away. They again made plans to escape, knowing that, once in Quebec City, Angélique risked being sold to the West Indies.

ON THE EVENING of April 10, 1734, the people of Montreal opened their doors to a sky apocalyptic with fire and smoke. Flames raged from rue Saint-Paul east to rue Saint-Joseph, the heat so intense that firefighters could not close in on it. People scrambled into the Hôtel-Dieu, but the winds surged westward, burning the hospital to ash in less than three hours. Panicked crowds ran through the streets; countless houses were reduced to their foundations. It was a scene of such shocking destruction that it had something of the biblical

about it, a quality of God's vengeance, of a smiting.

Almost immediately, rumours abounded that Angélique had set the fire. That she had done so to create a diversion so she could escape. These whispers were said to have originated with the slave of a neighbour, who claimed she'd overheard Angélique crowing that the widow Francheville would not "sleep in her house that night." By the time the embers died, nearly the whole of Montreal was convinced of Angélique's guilt. When local officials tracked her down, she was wandering the ruins of the paupers' garden at the Hôtel-Dieu. We do

by a lingering lack of answers, by the idea that one of their brethren might have been to blame or, worse, that it had been an act of God.

Angélique was found guilty. She was sentenced to walk naked to the gates of the parish church with a noose around her neck, carrying before her a torch to symbolize the fire she'd set. She would then be forced onto a cart used for transporting the city's garbage and driven to the doors of the high court, where, holding the sign reading Arsonist, she would kneel naked in the mud and confess. She was then to have her hands cut off and fixed on a stake in front of

When we speak of slavery, what usually comes to mind are cotton fields, sugar plantations, coffles, and overseers. Canadian slavery was different — and this has allowed us as a country to overlook it.

not know what she said in that moment, though she would later deny all responsibility. She was taken to jail to await the filing of a formal charge. A warrant was also issued for her lover, Thibault, but he had entirely disappeared.

French law at the time allowed for arrests to be made based on public testimony alone. Over the next six weeks of spring, several witnesses were called, but none had seen Angélique set the fire. They were all convinced, however, that she had done so. They gave statements about her terrible character and her penchant for arguing with her mistress.

Even a five-year-old girl, Amable Lemoine *dit* Moniere, stepped forward to testify that she'd seen Angélique hauling shovelfuls of coal up into the attic of her aunt's home just before the fire started. That a five-year-old's credibility went unquestioned speaks volumes about how deeply the townspeople wanted to avoid being haunted

the church. She would continue on in the garbage cart to the public square now named for her, where she would burn at the stake, her ashes tossed to the four winds.

In a terrible irony, she was sent north to Quebec City, the town she'd tried so fiercely to run from, where an appeals court reduced her sentence. She would no longer have her hands cut off or be burned alive but would be hanged, her body attached to a gibbet and burned afterward. As part of her lessened sentence, she was required to confess her guilt and name her co-conspirators through the use of torture. Returned to Montreal, she was delivered over to the seasoned torturer Mathieu Léveillé, himself Black and enslaved, who submitted her to what was benignly called "la question ordinaire et extraordinaire"—a structure of wooden boots to which an excruciating pressure was applied, crushing the legs. Angélique broke quickly under the pain

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and confessed, though she refused to name a co-conspirator, begging in the end only to be killed swiftly. She was hanged in the ruins of the city and then burned.

SOME YEARS AGO, when I was pregnant with my son, my husband and I travelled to Montreal as our final trip before the baby's birth. I remember standing in Place Marie-Joseph Angélique, hoping to experience something of her presence or, at the very least, to feel some inkling of her energy. The sun lay like a fine dust on the warm pavement, a smell of damp grass in the air. A flurry of birds dove into and fled the square; well-dressed people shuffled by, frowning at the phones in their palms. In the end, we felt and saw nothing.

The existence of Angélique's ghost is taken on faith as first-hand accounts of sightings are rare. The most comprehensive one I've come across is a single line in a Montreal student newspaper, which states that Angélique's "spirit has been seen walking from east to west in the alley adjacent to Place Royal, near St. Paul Street." But it does not tell us what this account was originally based on, who first told it, how many had seen her before or have seen her since.

Her ghost, it seems, is an absence we insist is a presence. I suppose this is the very definition of a ghost. But, in granting this particular woman a spectral after-life, in persisting with her mythology, we have made a point of wilfully remembering her. She is part of our cultural inheritance, someone we cannot turn from. But she did not exist outside of the society she inhabited, and we have been slower to make visible the failings of her era.

SLAVERY IS NOT one of the ghost stories of our nation, but it should be. Its history does not haunt us, and even today I'd argue that the average Canadian knows persistently little about it. When slavery does come up, for instance, in the curriculum, it is nearly always the story of the Underground Railroad, the guiding North Star, and the townships of runaway enslaved people who found

safety in our British territories. Please do not misunderstand me—our country's role as the terminus on that route to freedom is deservedly celebrated. But that particular narrative has always obscured earlier truths. Because of our privileging of that story and because Canadian slavery did not take on the familiar contours we associate with forced bondage—scorching days on a plantation, an economy based on the exploitation of indentured labour, essentially American and Caribbean contours—we tend to think it did not exist here. We feel secure in our role as the Promised Land, morally divorced from the ugly realities of racism and subjugation. But, as historian Afua Cooper points out, "Canada might not have been a slave society... but it was a society with slaves. It shared this feature with virtually all other New World societies."

It is difficult to quantify Canadian slavery, though we know that many people of African descent were transported to Upper Canada (Ontario), Prince Edward Island, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, and New France (Quebec) from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. There is a dearth of scholarship due mainly to the lack of primary sources, such as the manifests of merchant ships from the Caribbean (many of those ships built in our own eastern shipyards). Scholars of slavery have tended to focus on plantation economies, which arose in tropical or semitropical climates and in which slavery was undoubtedly more rampant, the backbone of the economy. Less attention has been paid to the evolution of slavery in temperate colonies where year-round agriculture was unsustainable. Add to this the fact that there was no across-the-board system of taxation that might have forced slave owners to account for their property, and the lives of enslaved Canadians slip easily from our collective imagination.

What we do know is that, in New France alone, the enslaved, including Indigenous people, likely numbered close to 4,000. About half lived in or around Montreal, the rest in small

towns beyond it. Because of this urbanization, few of the enslaved worked in the fields or in mines, though some did; they were more often, like Angélique, domestics. None had anything like the limited agency of white domestics; in effect, they were the northern version of house slaves, subject to the whims of their masters. Some were born on the land; still others arrived as cargo on merchant ships, stored in the holds with other goods like molasses, rum, and sugar. These foodstuffs from the West Indies would be traded on Canadian soil for salted cod and other eastern staples.

Our ideas of pioneer life rarely seem to include the people of African descent who, both enslaved and free, built farms, homesteads, and roads, who hunted and fished on the land and lived lives of spectacular diversity. Their deaths would have varied greatly in their means and in their commemorative rituals. For some who were enslaved, death was the only aspect of life over which they or their loved ones could exert any control. For this reason, funerals were often approached with the delicacy of an art. Ritual songs were sung, and great pains were taken with the body, wrapping it in a shroud and adding to the coffin special objects of remembrance. Death was a door opening onto the homeland of the free, the kingdom of God. This made Black burial grounds, inadvertently, places of fleeting self-government and therefore powerful sites of resistance. They offered one of the few means to establish a physical history that could not be refuted. The stories of the dead, too, are a graveyard, a monument of words. And yet, beyond Angélique, our slaves are not our ghosts. ☞

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ESI EDUGYAN is the award-winning author of *Washington Black*, *Half-Blood Blues*, *The Second Life of Samuel Tyne*, and *Dreaming of Elsewhere*.

Excerpted from *Out of the Sun: On Race and Storytelling* by Esi Edugyan, published by House of Anansi Press. This collection of essays forms the basis of the 2021 Massey Lectures, which will be broadcast on CBC Radio this fall.

FICTION

Seahorse

BY ALIX OHLIN

ILLUSTRATION BY MICHELLE THEODORE



SKYE WAS the one who found the body. Because she was always first up in the morning, and because her mother had warned her that guests should under no circumstances be disturbed before breakfast was ready, she'd perfected a stealth routine: pad down to the kitchen, start the coffee, arrange the muffins on the platter. Quietly, she tipped the juice concentrate into the pitcher, diluted, stirred. A guest would enter the kitchen to find the table set and Skye, with her braids fuzzy from sleep, flashing a shy smile. She and her mother had worked on that smile

because its earlier incarnations, just after Skye's father moved away, were strained and hectic. "Smile like a normal person," her mother would say, an instruction Skye found unsustainably vague.

On this morning, Skye was pouring cream into the little jug shaped like a cow's head—an object she'd loved at eight and now, at eleven, considered anatomically confusing—when she heard a thump upstairs. She stopped to listen, but the noise did not repeat. Mr. Simbatye, their only guest, had arrived three days earlier, toting an old-fashioned brown suitcase belted with a red strap. He said he was travelling on business without

specifying what kind. Theirs was a Maritime village of lanky, weathered houses and damp motel rooms, too far off the highway to receive much tourist traffic, let alone to be a place where much business got done. Mr. Simbatye was not a tourist; he was not here to relax. He had made that much clear.

An hour passed and Mr. Simbatye didn't come down. Yesterday and the day before, he'd taken breakfast at 7:30 before departing for the day. Now, nine o'clock ticked by without any sign of him. Skye's mother was also asleep, but this wasn't unusual: morning light made her wince. She stayed up late each night,



working on the books—which Skye knew meant worrying about money—and the next day, she was always pale and irritable, their household a continuing problem she couldn't solve.

Still observing stealth protocols, Skye stepped upstairs and paused on the landing outside Mr. Simbatye's closed door. She heard no rustle, no voice. If she opened the door, it would squeak; she could predict every sound this house made. She slowly opened the door, which indeed squeaked, but it didn't matter. Mr. Simbatye lay on his side, on the floor next to the bed. He was wearing light-blue pyjamas whose pants were soiled.

His eyes were fixed, as if mesmerized, on the wall in front of him. Skye knelt down. She flashed her shy smile, but Mr. Simbatye didn't care how it looked. Skye put her hand on his arm, which felt like any other arm. You wouldn't have known it was the arm of a dead person.

She stood up and looked around. Mr. Simbatye's suitcase was on the luggage stand, open: pants, socks, shirts, underwear. There was nothing of note in the room except the body. A teacher had once told Skye that, at the moment of death, the soul ascends to heaven, and in its absence, the body begins to wither. When she reported this to her parents,

her mother said it was nonsense and her father said, "Of course you'd think that," and the air in the house turned heavy. Mr. Simbatye's body had not yet begun to wither, but she opened the window in case his soul required an avenue of escape. Also because of the smell.

MR. SIMBATYE'S family said not to call the police. They didn't want the body moved; they didn't want anyone near it. Skye's mother spoke to them on the phone, nodding as though they could see her, saying in her calmest voice, "But—yes—you see, it is awfully warm." They said it would take

them twenty-four hours to arrive. Skye and her mother spent the day quietly, as if noise might still disturb their guest. Skye put away the untouched muffins, the undrunk juice. They did all the usual chores, except Skye's mother moved all the fans into the guest room, turned them on, and closed the door. In the evening, they watched the news, the only television Skye's mother allowed. There were protests against the police in Florida, rising waters in Bangladesh. Skye fell asleep on the couch as the sun finally set, very late, reluctant to loosen its grip on the day.

WHEN SHE WOKE, it was morning and a girl was staring at her. She looked around Skye's age but with dark hair razored to the skull on one side and hanging down to her shoulder on the other. The ear on the shaved side held a row of silver studs, like an ellipsis. Skye sat up on the couch, its nubby weave indenting her skin. An afghan hung over the back cushions, but her mother wouldn't have draped it over her in the night, because it was summer and also because she wasn't that kind of mother. She believed that, if Skye needed a blanket, she should use her internal resources to get one herself.

"Where's your mother?" asked the girl.

"She's asleep," Skye said. "Are you checking in?"

A look of impatience, bordering on disgust, passed over the girl's face. "My mom and I came from Toronto," she said. "For Ed?"

Behind the girl, Skye noticed a thin woman lingering by the front door, wearing an elegant skirt suit and clutching a small boxy purse with both hands. The light from the windows was still dim. Skye, now more awake, understood who Ed was.

"Mr. Simbatye," she said. "He's upstairs. The second room on the right."

The girl turned and spoke to her mother, not in English. The mother nodded and made her way upstairs, her high heels smartly rapping the floor as she went.

Skye said, "I'll make breakfast." That same look flickered on the girl's face, but she followed Skye into the kitchen. She

was wearing a black T-shirt, cut-off jean shorts, and a plaid shirt tied around her waist. Skye poured the cream into the cow, nestled the spoon into the sugar. When the coffee finished brewing, the girl helped herself to a cup, holding the mug in both hands and blowing across its top like an adult.

"I'm Kate," she said.

"Skye."

"You found him?"

Skye nodded.

"What did he look like?"

Skye hesitated. "He was in bed," she told the girl. "With his eyes closed. Like

Her father had once told her that she was too much of a follower, that she needed to learn to make her life her own, to decide things for herself.

he was sleeping." She didn't say that her mother had stripped off his blue pyjamas, laundered them, and put them back on, or that the two of them had hoisted Mr. Simbatye into the bed and smoothed the covers around him.

Kate looked disappointed. She set the mug on the counter and faced the kitchen window, its view of the vacant plot where tall grasses swayed and flattened in the wind. If they'd been closer to the water, Skye's mother always said, they could have charged a lot more; as it was, the web listing showed a picture of the rocky coastline at sunset and noted underneath, in small font, *a short walk away*. That the short walk wended past a derelict gas station and the concrete foundation of a home that had been washed away decades earlier was left unmentioned.

"He's not my real dad," Kate said. "He met my mom in the Philippines when I was a baby and brought us to Toronto. My real dad died."

"Mine moved away," Skye said.

Kate grabbed a muffin, bit into it, and looked down at it. "Cranberries," Skye said. "They grow in a bog near here."

Kate took in this information without comment.

"My mom grew up here," Skye went on. "My dad came here to be an artist. He makes ceramic sculptures of the sea. Mom wanted to be an artist too, a painter. He's still an artist, but she isn't."

Skye's father had once said that, when they first met, her mother had been more free, dreamier and happier, less obsessed with the details of life. "Something happened to Joan," he would darkly intone during their fights. "What was it, Joan?" Skye's mother always refused to answer, but Skye knew: it was Skye who had happened.

"Do people buy the sculptures?" asked Kate.

"No," Skye said.

"You should sell these muffins. *These* people would buy."

Skye took one, chewed, brushed crumbs from her chin. "What was his business?" she asked. "Mr. Simbatye. He said he was here on business."

Kate frowned. "He didn't have any business."

Both mothers came downstairs. Skye's set the kettle on for tea and gave Skye a look that said, *Make yourself scarce*. Skye opened the back door and asked Kate if she wanted to see the water.

Now they were standing outside the derelict gas station, on the cracked pavement, sweating in the morning sun.

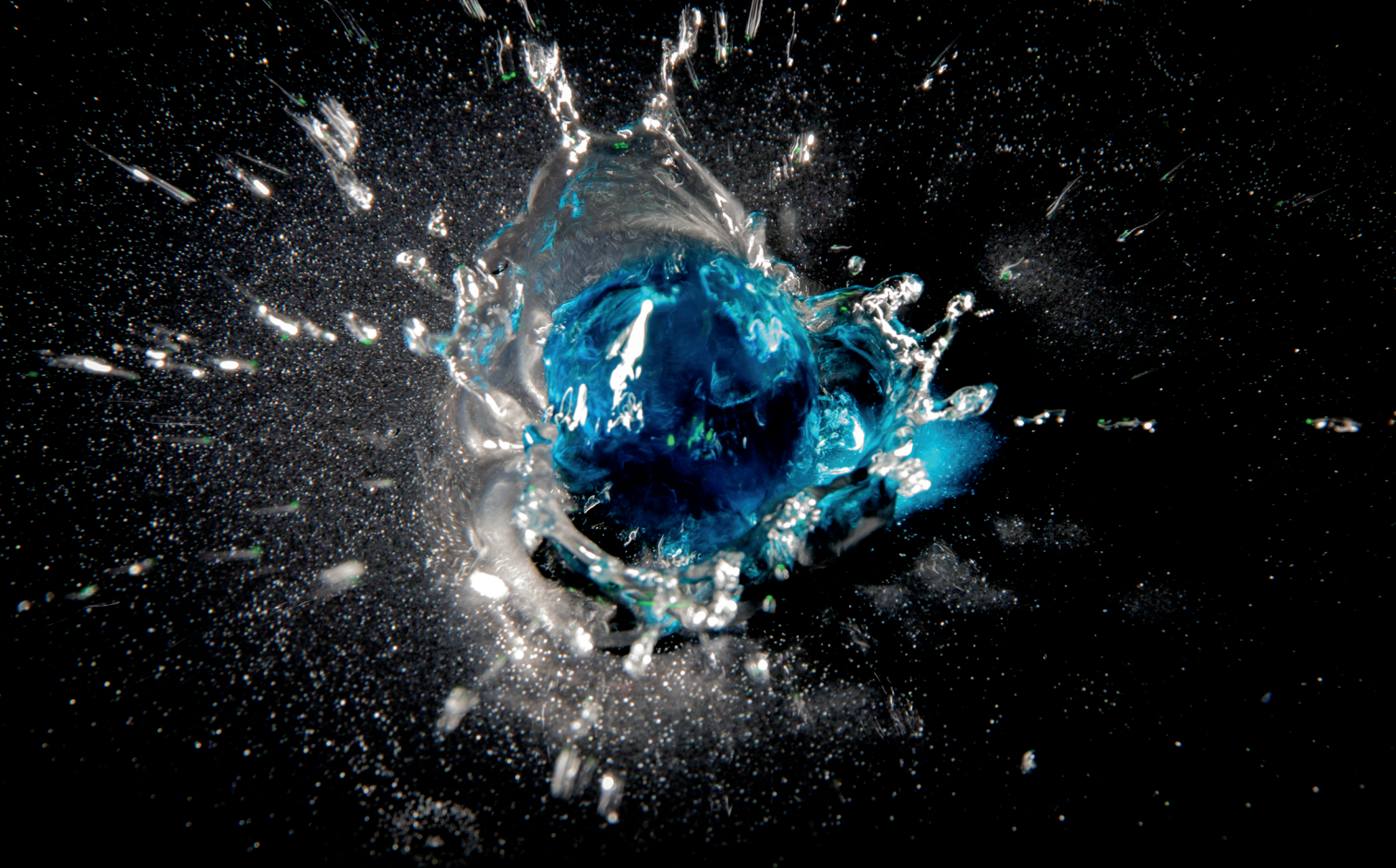
"Nice view," Kate said. "This must be on all the postcards."

"What was he doing in the Philippines?" Skye asked.

If the non sequitur bothered her, Kate didn't show it. "Ed? Who knows what Ed did."

She sighed. "My mom thought he would take care of us. She's so naive."

She picked up a rock and threw it at the gas station window, which was already broken. Skye had been inside it many



*“It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare,
it is because we do not dare that things are difficult.”*

~ Seneca, 64 AD Roman Stoic Philosopher ~



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times, had taken everything there was to take: rubber bands, grimy old jars, a wall calendar from Canadian Tire. Still, when Kate went inside, she followed. It was cooler, at least, out of the sun. Despite the open windows, the building smelled sulphurous and chemical. Kate listlessly opened drawers, closed them. She seemed like someone who walked into a room and forgot what they were looking for. Skye searched her brain for anything worth showing Kate, but there was nothing left.

Skye's father had loved the nothingness; her mother hated it; yet, somehow, her mother was the one who remained. Her father was in New York now, which he said was a place all artists should go. He'd promised that Skye could visit him, though specific dates had yet to be arranged. Once, on the phone, she had asked him if he missed the water, and he'd said, "There's water here too," but he hadn't described it and she found it hard to picture. As he'd spoken, a siren had risen, almost obliterating his voice.

Kate hummed, a high whine like a door hinge. "Well," she said, "this is a bust." She lay down on the oil-stained floor, placed her palms on her stomach, closed her eyes, and began to sing—softly but without self-consciousness. Skye didn't recognize the song. Perhaps Kate had written it herself. Her voice was throaty, almost phlegmy, though it hadn't sounded that way when she was speaking. A large seagull stalked inside, circled a wire rack whose pamphlets had rotted off, and left, dissatisfied. The wind picked up, an audible rush of accompaniment. Kate kept singing. Later, Skye would struggle to remember the lyrics. At the time, they seemed profound, even magical, but when she reassembled the moment in her mind, the words were diminished and ordinary. *You are... Love never...* The lines trailed off without rhyme or conclusion.

Skye lay down next to Kate. There was no point waiting to be invited. Her father had once told her that she was too much of a follower, that she needed to learn to make her life her own, to decide things for herself. She decided to follow Kate. She viewed the sky through a hole in the ceiling, a cloud-mottled block of colour

that grew stranger the more she looked at it, deprived of its context. She thought about what she'd tell her mother they'd been doing. But her mother, flustered, deep into arrangements for the transport of Mr. Simbatye's body, never asked.

ON AN AIRLESS MONDAY in New York City, Skye stood on a Seventh Avenue subway platform. All summer long, the trains had been messed up; now, the platform collected people until it seemed like it couldn't hold a single body more, then more arrived. Everyone squeezed endlessly

*What Skye
remembered later
was the collective
breath of the
crowd, so sudden
and unified that
it sounded like a
wave breaking.*

closer together. The station smelled of sweat and exhaled breath. A man nearby kept saying, "Man, I give up, I'm getting out of here" but didn't move. Skye couldn't imagine fighting her way out of the crowd. Plus, she'd been to Bed Bath & Beyond after work, and the heavy shopping bag sat like an anchor between her feet. She stared at the wall opposite her and then down at the tracks, where a few rats were nosing around. A woman down the platform caught her eye, then looked at the rats.

Skye's purse buzzed. Her phone showed a text from her father, querulous as ever: "Didn't you say you were coming?" She texted back, "On my way, trains delayed." The stuff she'd bought was for her father's room in an assisted-living facility in Sheepshead Bay. He was young for assisted living, but Parkinson's

had rendered life on his own impossible. When Skye first moved to the city, he was working as a custodian at a Long Island hospital, but his decline, once initiated, was rapid. Now, he didn't work anymore, though he still drew, unintelligibly shaky graphite sketches that looked like labyrinths or heart rate monitors and that were, in Skye's unvoiced opinion, stranger and more beautiful than anything he'd made before the illness took hold.

A line of sweat rivered down her back. A man jostled her, and she turned to scowl at him, but even that much movement was a strain. Skye thought of her first roommate in New York, a woman from North Carolina who had lasted exactly one week. On the 6 train one morning, a man had bumped her, and when she got off, she realized that he had masturbated onto her dress. She left the next day.

Skye had looked her up once on Facebook, her profile picture with a baby and a toddler and a husband, her life having accelerated into adulthood as it seemed to do for people who lived outside the city. Skye's mother always pointed out that Skye could get married and have children if that's what she wanted. "There's no reason you can't settle down with someone, even in New York," she'd written over email. She meant that Skye could settle down even if she was gay. Obviously, Skye knew this.

Joan herself had remarried, to a cardiologist who'd gotten lost looking for gas and wound up at the bed and breakfast. A childless widower, he had put Skye through school and given her the deposit for her first apartment. Skye had not visited them in three years. Her mother and stepfather deserved her visits; her father needed them.

"Maybe the train is just *never coming*," said someone behind her. "Maybe the subway is *cancelled*." Skye thought she felt a distant ripple of air. More people were coming down the stairs into the station, onto the platform, and Skye felt pushed forward, involuntarily stepping closer to the tracks. "Hey," she said, though she knew her voice wouldn't carry. "Stop it." She was at the yellow line—almost over it. She leaned in to the people behind her, and they pushed back.

Then, at last, the train: the glowing *B* advancing. It was almost at the platform. Skye stared at it, willing it to come faster, willing it to be air conditioned and empty, so she had a clear view of the woman who had met her eyes earlier, who had looked at the rats so intently, and who now stepped—with evident deliberation—in front of the train.

What Skye remembered later was the collective breath of the crowd, an intake of air so sudden and unified that it sounded like a wave breaking. This could not have been true. There must have been screams; there must have been the ear-splitting grind of emergency brakes; there must have been the sound of the collision itself. She couldn't find any of this in her memory. She couldn't locate the body as it fell. She could find only this ocean roar, this almost shapeless sound, so powerful a wind that it raised the hair on her arms.

WHEN SKYE finally arrived, her father served her a drink. Alcohol was contraindicated with his medication, but she'd given up talking to him about it. She didn't know where

he got it, but helpless in certain respects, he was endlessly resourceful in others. She took a sip, wincing; it was light red wine or maybe sherry, stickily sweet. On the wall opposite his bed, her father had tacked up his latest drawings, which showed the view outside his window: a parking structure and power lines, a landscape of cracked pavement and grey cement. Outside, trucks beeped in reversal. Somewhere just beyond the traffic was the bay. He still loved the sea, and when she first moved to the city, they sometimes walked there together. Now, they only ever sat in his room or on the balcony, pretending they could smell it in the air.

Her father set his drink down and lowered his mouth to sip from it, which was easier for him than trying to hold a glass. He was wearing a wrinkle-free blue button-down shirt and his hair was neatly wet combed. The aides called him Handsome Mr. Jerry, which was both condescending and apt. They shaved him every day. His face was getting thinner, sculpted into sharper planes. He nodded to the bag at her feet and she showed him what she'd

brought, making her way around the room, installing the purchases: shaving cream on his dresser, the soap he said was better for his hands, a lap desk so he could draw in bed. His right leg tremored, and his right hand. He was trying to learn to draw with his left.

"What did she look like?" he asked.

"Middle aged. Hair dyed that purple-red colour. Grey roots. I can't picture what she was wearing."

"You could draw her."

Skye smiled. "That's your solution to everything."

"Well," he said, looking around the room, "not everything."

She probably shouldn't have told him about the woman jumping in front of the train. He was prone to dark moods and would sometimes call her at one in the morning, yelling about some imagined betrayal: she'd brought the wrong soap, she came only out of pity, she changed her visit from Tuesday to Wednesday just to upset him. The next day, he always apologized, and she forgave. They both knew that she'd followed him to New York, that she'd patterned

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her escape after his, for lack of any other example. For a while, there had been Kate in Toronto, love letters Skye had illustrated with the house, the gas station, the sea, until Kate asked her to stop. “You just make me think about Ed,” she’d written. Later, Skye fell in love in college and then with a woman she met hiking in Banff and whom she still emailed sometimes. Each of them shook her off eventually, no matter how she tried to hold on, and now, she doubted the power of her grasp.

“Show me the latest,” he said. She flipped open her notebook and passed it over; she worked for a textbook company, illustrating medical diagrams. “What is it?”

“Embryogenesis.”

“Looks like an infection.”

“It’s cell division. In the early stages.”

What she’d drawn was not identifiable as human: eight small purple circles encased brown seeds, like tropical fruit. Often, Skye barely understood what she was drawing. Increasingly, the company was requiring 2D or 3D animation, which Skye felt even less equipped to render.

Yet she tried not to worry about the future. Her father had passed down the conviction that a job was what housed your life and not the life itself.

You and your father, her mother would say, *are two peas in a pod*. Skye knew it wasn’t true. She was more like her mother, and it was her life’s task to fight against the resemblance. She stood up and moved her father’s drink, setting the lap desk on his knees. It jiggled with him, with the quaking of his nervous system. He scowled.

“Let’s try this thing out,” she said. She brought him papers, his graphite pencils, and soon he was absorbed in his work, ignoring her. She finished her drink, then his. The block of sky outside his window was neatly bisected by power lines but still held some quality of mottled light, of sea-adjacent cloud, that reminded her of home. It began to rain, fat summer drops that would bring little relief.

The woman who’d jumped in front of the train had a name, which Skye would read tomorrow morning, in the newspaper, and then instantly forget. “Had the

woman struggled with mental illness?” Skye’s mother would ask. “Did she have a family?” Although Skye would have read a lengthy article about the incident by then, she would find she couldn’t answer, that the facts escaped her. Her mother, on the phone, would sigh impatiently. Her stepfather would come on, his voice warm with concern. He would want to know if she’d been to a counsellor. He would tell her to practise self-care, and Skye would laugh. She would tell him she felt fine, and it would feel true. At her desk, at work, she would sketch the pink geography of a fetus. The curved spine notched like a seahorse. The pale twist of umbilical cord. The huge, disproportionate head. The crouched form caught between weeks eight and nine of its existence. Bent to her work, rich with purpose, she would draw into life a body she’d never seen. ❧

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ALIX OHLIN’s most recent story collection, *We Want What We Want*, was published in July. She lives in Vancouver and is the director of the University of British Columbia’s School of Creative Writing.

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Explore Newfoundland with The Walrus

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The Walrus has a long partnership with Adventure Canada, an award-winning, family-run adventure travel company. As the new executive director, I'll be joining their **small-ship expedition Newfoundland Circumnavigation**, July 4-15, 2022.

My family has roots in Newfoundland, and I'm excited to return. This trip will start in St. John's and cover the island's northeast coast, L'Anse aux Meadows, Red Bay, Gros Morne National Park, Miawpukek First Nation (Conne River), as well as other beautiful spots. I'm looking forward to the colourful homes, whale watching, and breathing in the fresh, coastal air!

During this trip, I'll join you on our daily excursions and host a special dinner for supporters of The Walrus, where I'll share some insights from our work in 2022 to spark a conversation on the country Canada could be.

One of the things I've missed the most over the last year is exploring. Travel gives us a unique opportunity to **learn more about our country and ourselves**. I would love for you to join us!

Jennifer Hollett, Executive Director, The Walrus

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Soil

BY BERTRAND BICKERSTETH

Now let's look at
a field
in fall:

half living,
half leaving,
half outward,
half injured

quartered
section
of parcelled
land

legally sub
divided
as playground,

felled
to basic firmament.

Or

you just tell those
other
kids

no,

that
"black
is
beautiful"

warble
our parents
with worse-worn,
worn-out
words.

But, from here,
face to floor,
we see the molecular
sophistry of soil,

the *or*
of orthic,
the *no*
of chernozem,
the *black*
of dark brown

children

flat out,
face to ground.

Can we 'semble
this out?

A field is
just the fist side
of a fact

caught out
of season

and

found out in
words

and

in
jured

and

we swore we
would stop looking

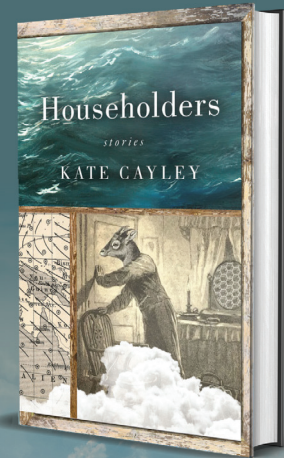
at fields

because they remind
us so much
of absence
of beauty

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VISUAL ART

Taken for the Team

Esmaa Mohamoud's installations capture the way professional sports profit from Black bodies

BY CONNOR GAREL

IT IS OFTEN ASSUMED by people who should know better that Esmaa Mohamoud is a man. On the opening days of the artist's exhibitions, which typically focus on the troubled relationship between professional sports and Black masculinity, those dizzied patrons will materialize, uninformed, to search determinedly for the Man Behind the Work. What happens instead is that they discover twenty-eight-year-old Mohamoud and often say something like, "Oh! You're a *woman*." Nonplussed reactions don't surprise her. "It's probably the subject matter," she tells me one April afternoon, visibly amused. "The work reads as masculine; I have lots of masculine energy."

Sometimes a gallery visitor will ask whether she's the artist and she'll say no, point out some poor unsuspecting man flitting about the crowd, and say it's him, *he's* Esmaa Mohamoud—partly because she's "super awkward and shy" but also because, despite her diffidence, she has a thing for the performative gesture. Like American artist Richard Serra, one of her artistic forebears, she creates installations with a certain grandeur: sculptures with gravity that engage the viewer's body and force them to walk around the works rather than past them. This explains their notably large scale and her proclivity for industrial materials. (She is, for example, currently working on a field of 500 "indestructible" black dandelions

that could probably fill a small bedroom; she sometimes tracks the progression of the installation on Instagram.)

Mohamoud makes sculptures about athletics, about Blackness, about gender, and sometimes about the ways those things rub up against one another to produce a social problem, if not a catastrophe. The spectre of bondage is sometimes raised: she frequently uses chains in her work. With these installations, Mohamoud draws an association between athleticism and historical forms of slavery. It's a relationship that may seem, at first, unlikely, until she begins to guide viewers through her subject. Then it's hard to unsee.

"I use sports in my work not because I love it so much but as a tool to trick people," Mohamoud says. "People are uncomfortable talking about race, but they aren't uncomfortable talking about sports." The subject is a Trojan horse. Sports bring people together—in boozy living rooms, in crowded bars, and in the streets. There's something special and irrepressible about all that mutual excitement: for a moment, the world falls away, and entire cities light up with mass euphoria. There's nothing quite like winning.

But artists ruin everything because they don't care about your comfort. They aren't in the business of consensus. Mohamoud wants to expose the monstrous underbelly of all that winning.



Professional sports, she argues, are not some bastion of simple pleasure and equal opportunity—they're all still moored to the same racial logic that warps the rooms these players must return to when they've finished performing in a stadium, basking in triumph and applause.

ESMAA MOHAMOUD grew up in London, Ontario, where she started boxing and playing tennis when she was nine. She was the middle child of four brothers who all played basketball though high school. Sports were at the centre of her suburban childhood universe, the grounding preoccupation that held everything together. They were a conduit for community and opportunity, a sacred foundation where upsets or defeats were resolvable because there was always another game to be played, another chance to be redeemed, another conversation to be had about statistics while a match played on the living room television. As sports informed her life, so they inform her art.

After school, she would rush home and descend into her basement, bag still strapped to her back, to catch a late-afternoon episode of *Art Attack*—an exuberant and mildly chaotic British TV series that taught kids, step-by-step, how to make art projects from materials like sponges and construction paper. When Mohamoud's parents recognized her talent, they enrolled her in a free after-school art program. By sixteen, she knew she was to be an artist; by seventeen, she had begun her BFA at Western University.

Less than a decade since, Mohamoud's work has been exhibited at the Art Gallery of Ontario, the Royal Ontario Museum, Montreal's Museum of Fine Arts, and in New York and Los Angeles. In February, she was the only artist chosen from Canada by American painter Kehinde Wiley, of Obama presidential portrait fame, to attend a luxurious seaside residency program in Senegal. And, in May, she was longlisted for the 2021 Sobey Art Award.

In 2016, Mohamoud held an exhibition called *#000000 Violence* at the YZ Artists' Outlet, in Toronto's Fashion District. She'd created an installation of sixty concrete basketballs, crafted to appear deflated and arranged in a grid on a black Plexiglas platform. (Each orb weighed thirty pounds and was designed to crack and fall apart as time passes.) That sculpture, Mohamoud has said, functioned as a kind of memorial for the young

Black men across North America who grow up being told and believing they'll someday make it into the NBA, that the NBA will be a long-awaited escape from poverty, and not warned that the odds are stacked against them—that the odds are always stacked against them.

"We nurture Black kids into being good at sports," she says, "and then we're surprised when things don't work out." Of the thousands of gifted players around the world vying to make their dreams come true, trading the fleeting pleasures of adolescence for late-night scrimmages and early morning practices, only sixty will be drafted into the NBA in any given year. "And, the next year," Mohamoud adds, "there'll be another set of Black men who've been conditioned to play in the NBA, to focus on only that, and they'll get cycled through too."

Looking at the sculpture, I remember feeling a bit deflated myself. I had, just over a year prior, quit soccer in the midst of a busy scouting season—partly in fear of putting too many eggs in one basket for a future that suddenly seemed, after a moment of embarrassing clarity, absurdly tenuous. I had been counting on a full-ride scholarship from an American university, had a reality check, changed course. "No pain, no gain," I learned, is just masochism moonlighting as philosophy. Disappointments like that are common in sports, but Mohamoud's work is far bigger and darker and more serious than any individual disappointment: she is talking about the disposability of Black people, who are everywhere integral for the sustainment of a rich social and cultural life but are eternally stuck with the short end of the stick.

The trouble, Mohamoud says, is that these athletes aren't regarded as human beings. They exist instead in a paradoxical state, dehumanized in the way they're deified and again dehumanized in the way they're treated as chattel. "Black bodies are made to be deteriorated for entertainment," she says, noting the abundance of Black players and the relative dearth of Black presidents or general managers. "When I think about the NBA or the NFL, it's like, these players wear their owners' names on their shirts. Like branding.... If players are traded, they just have to up and move their entire lives. Black people are farmed in and farmed out. And yes, I know they're getting paid millions of dollars to do that. Maybe they shouldn't complain.



PREVIOUS
Deeper the Wounded,
Deeper the Roots 2, 2019

ABOVE *Heavy, Heavy*
(Hoop Dreams), 2016,
 installation view

But it's just apparent to me that there are correlations between the ways Black bodies play for entertainment now and something like Mandingo fighting, for example."

Anyone who's seen the film *Django Unchained* may have learned the term "Mandingo fighting" by way of Quentin Tarantino's famously slanted, ahistorical narrative. But there is a kernel of truth at the heart of the filmmaker's cartoonish staging of slaves fighting to the death to earn small fortunes for their bored and greedy owners. Though it's still a largely debated practice among researchers, historian Richard Bardolph has said that enslaved people "were frequently set upon each other like gamecocks" while fevered onlookers made bets on the outcome. They weren't death matches, but because slave boxers were sometimes promised freedom in exchange for winning prize money for plantation overseers, there was incentive to conquer one another.

As for today's athletes, "They've been given so much power and so much affluence," Mohamoud says, "yet, at the same time, they have little to no power at all." One has only to invoke the name Colin Kaepernick—who was effectively blacklisted from the NFL for taking a knee during the national anthem—to find knowing faces wince in familiarity. Any athlete who dares strive to improve their social conditions hears the crack of an invisible whip. They're told to shut up and play, which, in any light, makes a salary look more like a gag order. Trying to echolocate your humanity against the surface of an institution that routinely disregards it, that prefers to instead trade your personhood for the profit it can mine from your body—Is this not a universal dimension of being a Black entertainer? "No one cares what these players actually have to say," Mohamoud says. "The league only really cares about making a dollar." Professional sports are businesses. There are owners, consumers, and products. It doesn't take much to discern which category the athlete belongs to.



MOHAMOU'D's touring spring exhibition at the Art Gallery of Hamilton, *To Play in the Face of Certain Defeat*, brought together a sizable part of her work to explore the industry of professional sports as a “covert form of neo-slavery.” A three-channel film, titled *From the Ground We Fall* (2019), which has also been presented as a physical installation, documents two football players attached by a set of chains, fighting—and, inevitably, failing—to pull away from each other amid the sweltering heat. Mohamoud asked the men, one of whom is her brother, to “tear each other apart” for hours, and the video illuminates the ways an entertainment industry can be improvised from the degradation of the Black body, how an audience becomes complicit via its voyeurism.

Glorious Bones (2019)—a series of forty-six football helmets printed with colourful African textiles and impaled on steel rods in a bed of black faux soil—stands out. The protective interior padding of each helmet has been

carved out and removed, obliterating the functionality entirely. The sculpture takes on a score of sinister meanings. (A friend of mine said they look like severed heads on pikes.) In the early nineteenth century, evolutionary theorists and so-called scientists believed that people of African descent had thicker, denser bones that were less likely to break and rendered Black people impervious to pain. Back then, newspaper editors liked to publish fantastical stories, often about Black people whose skulls were brawny enough to withstand beatings and vehicular catastrophes without getting cracked; such research helped justify inhumane treatment and, later, influenced modern thinking about sporting prowess and potential. Black victory could then be excused as the result of physiology rather than of talent.

In the NFL today, nearly 80 percent of defensive players—who are more likely to become

ABOVE
Glorious Bones, 2019,
installation view

OPPOSITE *From the
Ground We Fall*, 2019,
installation view



concussed—are Black. “That tells you we’ve been trained to take pain,” says Mohamoud. Recent lawsuits allege that Black players are less likely to receive payouts in dementia-related league settlements since, for years, NFL-appointed neuropsychologists used race-based benchmarks to determine whose cognitive skills had declined because of football and whose were already low to begin with. (In June, the league promised to halt the “race-norming” practice, which began as an affirmative action effort and has roots in plantation slavery.)

On the other hand, 81 percent of NFL quarterbacks—who are considered the most important players on the field and who tend to make the most money—are white, even though most league players are Black. Modern rosters may not be consciously built on race. But, between 1933 and 1946, Black players were unofficially barred from playing in the league entirely because the Great Depression stoked an unsurprising racial anxiety among white Americans who felt that their jobs were being stolen by Black people. Quarterback was one of the last positions to be desegregated, possibly because race scientists had succeeded in convincing everyone that “thinking positions”—quarterback, centre, inside linebacker—ought not be filled by players who were genetically predisposed to being intellectually inferior, never mind that it was all untrue.

Sports possess an undeniable beauty and incalculable value far beyond the economic. Mohamoud isn’t trying to abolish anything. Her critique is an act of love. She’s only performing a clever magic trick of what scholar Saidiya

Hartman calls “defamiliarizing the familiar,” gesturing at the quotidian and peeling back its illusions to reveal the terror and violence underneath.

These games, for Mohamoud, are useful metaphors for how Black masculinity is performed and for the limitations imposed on that performance—on its tenderness or aggression, its vulnerability or edge, and the forced negotiation between each. It’s a way to think through how we

metabolize the sports stars we obsessively revere and to explore the complicated systems that produce them. It isn’t a new conversation so much as a historical and intergenerational one, a decades-long dialogue between artists like David Hammons (who in 1990 called basketball “a problem in the Black community”) and Awol Erizku (who often uses basketball ephemera in his work today) about athletics and race and capitalism. Mohamoud’s *One of the Boys* (2017) recalls Mark Bradford’s *Practice* (2003), a video the artist filmed of himself, dressed as a basketball player in a nineteenth-century-style skirt, trying to shoot against a violent gust of wind. And conceptual artist Hank Willis Thomas’s photographic series *Strange Fruit*, from 2011, features an astonishing image called *The Cotton Bowl*: a field bisected into a thriving cotton plantation and a lush football pitch, with two Black men, each their own sort of labourer, facing off at the centre.

Mohamoud’s greatest gift is to upend our conception of history and force us to reconsider how race comes to bear on all social relations, even and perhaps especially in those corners we treat as an escape from the world’s ills. She knows there is no area of social or cultural or political life, including professional sports, that can be divorced entirely from the problems of humanity. Escapism isn’t so different from dissociation. And, in the end, doesn’t it feel a bit dishonest to say it’s all just a game? 🏀

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CONNOR GAREL is the Cannonbury Fellow at The Walrus. He has written for *Canadian Art*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Vice*.

DESIGN

The Maximalist Home

In a time of fearful self-restraint, more is more

BY MIREILLE SILCOFF

ILLUSTRATION BY KATIE CAREY

LAST JANUARY, shortly before the WHO declared COVID-19 a pandemic, Sotheby's in New York put together what was supposed to be a modest auction of a dead interior decorator's things. Mario Buatta rose up in the 1980s as "the Prince of Chintz," having decked out the homes of some of America's wealthiest families (Doubledays, Newhouses, but also celebrities like Mariah Carey) in the manically floral, overstuffed country-house style of the early nineteenth-century English Regency. If the Regency had steroids and disco, it might have looked more like Buatta's version of it. At any rate, when he died, in 2018, he left no will, only five storage units and two homes stacked to the ceilings with the types of finds one might imagine belonged to a man who slept on a Chinese four-poster bed crowned by an Ottoman-style dome near columns carved to look like windswept palm trees.

The auction was expected to attract a small crowd of insiders: establishment interior designers, ancient gentry with subscriptions to *Town & Country*—

essentially, the sorts of people who might remember Buatta's era of more-is-more excess first-hand. Instead, the auction turned into a two-day international selling frenzy. There were feverish bidding wars for just about every item: a dolphin-shaped Venetian grotto stand, a painted tole shell-form purdonium on wheels. An imperfect porcelain tureen shaped like a bunch of asparagus, estimated at between \$2,000 and \$3,000, went for \$25,000 (all figures US).

"So much for minimalism," said attendee Blaine Trump, Donald Trump's ex-sister-in-law, to the *New York Times*. But the thing about the Buatta stampede was that nobody really knew where all these mystery bidders were coming from. Some were minor style bloggers. Many were, surprisingly, under fifty. Still, everyone at the auction seemed to feel the same thing: like a lid had been lifted, revealing years of pent-up desire for the full, the festive, the flagrantly jouissant. "Clearly, there's a lot of people fed up with monochromatic interiors," Sotheby's Dennis Harrington told the *Times*, "and newly excited by Mario's maximalist style."

STYLE IS A PENDULUM, and it likes drama in its swing. This minimalist-to-maximal shift is happening not just in New York but everywhere and at every price point. If, over the pandemic, you did any houseware shopping—be it at Walmart or a more high-end retailer—you may have noticed that the items you purchased had a bit more colour, a bit more pattern, a bit more eccentricity than the ones they were replacing. And you may have also noticed that this pop of energy *pleased* you.

The internet doesn't take a shift like this lying down. Over the past year, a new home-related polarization has also erupted online, with several publications pitting the decor styles against each other: "Minimalism Is Dead. Meet Maximalism," crowed one *Vox* headline while *Harper's Bazaar* asked, "Minimalism vs Maximalism: Which Is More Stylish?" Of course, no real war is raging between gaily tufted slipper chairs and sober Danish coffee tables. No Pythonesque general is demanding we choose between plain and patterned plates. But it does feel like the finger-wagging minimalism that informed the housewares and home design market



for over a decade—lining everywhere from IKEA to Ethan Allen with sober greige pottery and righteously untreated wood—is losing relevance while its opposite is gaining currency. For a few years now, the rooms featured on popular decor sites and the homes of style influencers like Aurora James or Cara Delevingne have been wilfully diverse, drunk on self-expression, and packed with *stuff*—places where messy bedrooms are displayed as a sign of life rather than a problem to be fixed.

The pandemic has had a deeply transformative effect on our relationships to our homes, wreaking as much havoc on our houses as on our hearts and health. We've been grateful for the sanctuary of our spaces and hateful for being cooped up; lulled into simplicity and family time by lockdown but also roused into states of suffering and discord. Our homes, like never before, have become the vessels in which we experience life's weather. So it's no surprise that minimalism, with its concentration on order and blank-slate perfection, has not endured COVID-19 in the best condition.

In a consumer culture, minimalism was always a somewhat fancyland ruse.

It was domestic anorexia sold as health; materialism repackaged as its opposite; perfectionism hawked as peace. It was the perversion of labelling a home curated down to zero the ultimate luxury or, worse, virtue. Some of these old ideas are trotted out in a new book by Montreal minimalists Laurie Barrette and Stéphanie Mandréa, *Minimal: For Simple and Sustainable Living*. Chapters feel distinctly pre-pandemic in their directives, littered with tips on how to make your own lip exfoliant, tie-dye old sheets with hibiscus water, or maintain open kitchen shelves with breakfast cereal decanted into glass jars. But, these days, there is nothing that feels "simple" about any of these propositions, if ever there was. The first thing I thought when I read the quote introducing the Family section—"Children don't need more things. The best toy a child can have is a parent who gets down on the floor and plays with them"—was *Not now, ladies!*

Not now—the world is too real. If you can get full lotus on the sisal matting and be your kids' only plaything, wonderful. But I am a forty-eight-year-old working mom, divorced, and at home with two

little girls and deadlines. It's not really possible to neutralize a chaotic life with homemade granola and a collection of jute shopping bags hung from beechwood pegs. And, increasingly, it feels dishonest to pretend otherwise.

This kind of aspirational simplicity was already attracting backlash pre-pandemic. Marie Kondo, the decluttering phenom who encouraged millions to "spark joy" by throwing out heaps of perfectly good things, was met with substantial ridicule when she began selling "essentials" like silicone head massagers and \$61 paperweights on her website. Then there was Kanye and Kim Kardashian West's "minimal monastery." The almost hilariously unlivable monochromatic renovation of their suburban California McMansion was completed last year and covered everywhere from *Entertainment Tonight* to *Architectural Digest*. Inside the reverse-bling all-white abyss, the TV was hidden in the floor, the sinks looked like marble mortuary slabs, and the furniture was spaced so far apart it assured that nobody could ever have a conversation. Now divorced from Kanye, Kim, who kept the property,

is said to be “redecorating” the home, using its extra space as a “warehouse” for all her stuff.

MAXIMALISM—a moreish style where overlap, accident, and letting your personality hang out are encouraged—comes as a relief if only because it is forgiving. Its current revival includes anything you can throw in: old, new, ugly, beautiful, useful, totally useless. This time around, in contrast to Mario Buatta’s extravagant era, it feels less about decadence, showiness, and riches and more about diversity,

The overarching idea seems to be an expressive, connective humanity — an intentional hot mess.

acceptance, and fun. There’s been interest in the 1980s *Pee-wee’s Playhouse* look of designers like Ettore Sottsass, in quirky flea-market finds, in DIY hacks, and for the first time in ages, in antique furniture, which had become so unloved during minimalism’s clean sweep that New York’s annual Winter Antiques Show was rebranded The Winter Show.

Unsurprisingly, the clutter-loving British—designers like Rita König, Martin Brudnizki, and Ben Pentreath—are leading the new maximalist charge. In her debut book, *Every Room Should Sing*, up-and-coming Swedish-born, London-based interior designer Beata Heuman writes, “I am endlessly putting paw feet on armchairs and embroidering eyelashes onto sofas. I suppose I am trying to get people to connect with seemingly inanimate objects, and see what I see when I look at furniture. The armchair may not be alive, but it is certainly not dead.”

During peak COVID-19, I did lots of room travel in my own home. Like many of you, I was left with an increasing detachment from the grand before—the memory of what was once normal was dimming. My recent divorce didn’t help, but my furniture did. Because, while my hallway looked like a cinematic cliché of marital dissolution—lined with empty picture hooks—most of my rooms were layered with things that had once

belonged to people I love: my parents, my step-parents, my grandparents. In my loneliness, my furniture felt like a reminder that life is an ongoing story. I have a set of modernist Breuer cane chairs, given to me by childhood friends from their parents’ home. And, every time I use them, I remember their old house, where I spent many latchkey afternoons, hammocked by a family that kept a kind eye on me when my own newly divorced parents could not.

This biographizing of decoration has a natural landing place online, with a new kind of hard-blogging, instagramming,

brand-collaborating guru weaving their own identities, families, and homes into everything they showcase. Notable among this cadre is Jungalow’s Justina Blakeney, who pins her Black and Jewish heritage at the centre of her California maximalism. Blakeney’s look is boho and multicultural, filled with tropical plants and globally sourced textiles. In her latest book, *Jungalow: Decorate Wild*, Blakeney’s oft-stated dedication to diversity and self-actualization translates into “magic in the mix” styles to which she gives (somewhat clunky) names like “Maroc-Cali,” “Turk-Xican,” or “New Mexi-Copenhagen.”

Within this frame, we see the therapeutic and virtuous qualities long held in the court of minimalism getting lobbed over into maximalism. In both Heuman’s and Blakeney’s books, the language of wellness is used freely, as if it’s a fait accompli that, for decor to be meaningful today, it must also be curative.

Interiors are, after all, our *insides*. But they are also places, like anything else subject to fashion, where our desires are worn on the outside. For several seasons now, runways have been veering toward the overstated. Gucci shows have been devoid of tasteful black and beige, which have been replaced by Cavalier King Charles Spaniel varsity jackets, bananas Elton John sunglasses, and cherry-red Mary Janes. Not long ago,

I tried giving a teenager a pair of skinny jeans and she pointed to the lilac wide-legged raver pants she was wearing and said she’d basically rather die. In trendy cuisine, we’re seeing plates that look lushly heaped and haphazard instead of tiny meandering dribbles beside single microgreens. In perfumery, clean florals are fading while cutting-edge perfumers like Byredo and Arquiste are presenting heady musks, patchouli, and what could easily be called BO notes. The overarching idea seems to be an expressive, connective humanity—an intentional hot mess.

If minimalism was about controlling the static and crashing of a world spinning too fast, maximalism may be more about filling in a void of loneliness and isolation. The number of people living alone in Canada has more than doubled over the last thirty-five years. In both Canada and the US, young people are having less sex than ever. Most millennials and Gen Zers do their dating through the internet and a good part of their socializing through their phones—and all this before COVID-19 made everyone’s lives even less tactile.

We all know that feeling after two hours of online shopping, scrolling social media, or streaming a work webinar—human experiences shorn of humans. It’s something like a cold empty bowl in your gut where the generative stuff would normally take seed. So perhaps it’s no surprise that, if one feels like a sexless husk living a disconnected, digitized life, getting a pink velvet settee can be just what the decor doctor ordered.

And if, in this extravaganza of muchness, you bash your shin on a slipper chair or a shell-form purdonium on wheels? At least you will feel something. And if, in a few years, the wallpaper and throw cushions become suffocating? Rest assured that your interiors will change again—because your insides have. *

MIREILLE SILCOFF is the author of the award-winning short story collection *Chez l’arabe*. Her work regularly appears in *The New York Times Magazine* and the *Guardian*. She is currently writing a book-length essay titled “On Illness” as well as a new novel. She lives in Montreal.

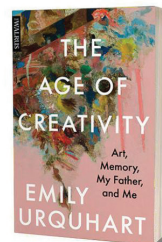
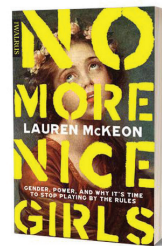
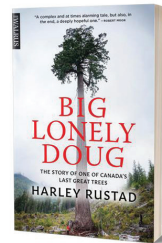
Myth

BY TERESE MASON PIERRE

Last week, there was a shooting at the mall. Ever bold, you claimed it would become one more talking point, our legs entwined at the back of the cinema, breath snatching. The heat squeezes, drips over us on the way home. Always a risk—walk on the field or the road, our prayers wiped away with the orange sky while animals grazed. Those people, you say, in their own heads, trying on dresses, buying school supplies—then some harsh red ending. I want a death as real as possible: old age, a shooting, falling from a cliff, my maroon frightening the sea. You'd rather die by myth, come upon the villains of your mother's bedtime stories: the loup-garou waiting at the opposite end of the bed. I always need to think about what part of me would be mourned—and, for that, you say we diverge. The moon has plans for us; the grass trips my feet. We cross the road and I lose my shoe. I am almost hit by a car. We kiss at the top of the hill. Fireworks go off somewhere but don't illuminate the sky. A dog barks. In the field below, a creature moves back and forth, drinking the blood of cows.

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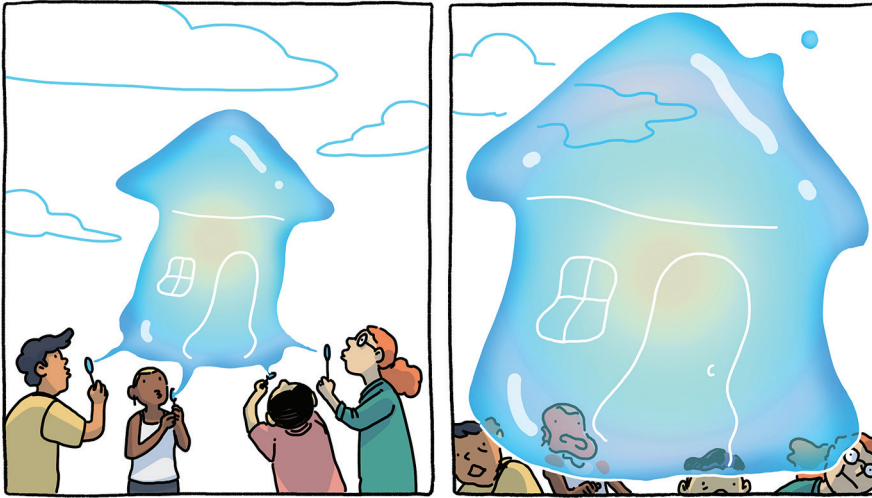


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CANADA'S CONVERSATION



THE FACTS

Ask a Real Estate Expert

What's next for the housing market?

BY DIANA PETRAMALA, AS TOLD TO SEAN WETSELAAR

OVER THE PAST YEAR, as Canadians have rushed to take advantage of record-low mortgage rates,¹ home sales across the country have surged. We asked Diana Petramala, a real estate economist, to weigh in on what this means for the future of buying and selling.

Historically, housing bubbles, when property prices far surpass actual property values, have eventually burst. There's been debate over whether Canada is currently on this trajectory. Is it? I identify a housing bubble by double-digit annual home-price growth for five years followed by a sustained decline for a much longer period. Right now, we've seen this level of national growth for only about a year, so there is still room for prices to run up.

How it turns out is going to depend on policy. There have been calls for higher interest rates to cool the market, but I believe that would lead to a crash. When rates increase, those who bought expensive houses and have to renew their mortgages may not be able to afford them and end up selling, likely for much less than they paid. This could put more households in a financially vulnerable situation.

For now, interest rates remain low, so I think that could create another acceleration in sales. What happens in 2022 will be determined by how many people decide to sell.

Canada's last housing bubble burst in 1989, following a boom in Ontario in the '80s. Does the pandemic real estate boom resemble that cycle? The 1980s boom was driven by a decline in interest rates and changing demographics. At the time, a lot of boomers wanted to be homeowners. Many of

them moved to Toronto² because that's where the economic prosperity was. The problem was that the supply couldn't respond fast enough to the demand, which is also what's happening today.

The difference is that, this time, the increase in prices is happening across Canada, and it's now millennials who are in the peak age group for first-time home-buying. This demographic had been accumulating less real estate than previous generations³ but more savings, so many had down payments that allowed them to jump straight into the market. At the same time, boomers are cashing in on their expensive houses and moving out. Everybody wants to buy and sell all at once, and nobody knows how that's going to play out. Now, we could be on track to beat the escalation in prices that we saw in the '80s in Toronto.

Real estate demand is so high that some experts are predicting a supply crisis across Canada.⁴ Is this preventable? The problem is that we're responding to today's demand with housing that isn't going to be ready for a few years. If interest rates go up, then you end up with a whole bunch of new supply but far fewer people who can afford it.

Also, as cities grow, there is less space to build, and housing prices rise because the cost of land goes up. For this reason, developers want to build more condos so that they can spread the cost of the land across more units. The real problem is the shortage of middle housing, like duplexes, townhomes, and courtyard apartments. It's really unprofitable to build it, but we need more of it.

Beyond the risk of a crash, do you think the hike in prices we're seeing now could have any other long-term effects on the economy? Part of Canada's success has been its ability to attract skilled immigrants. If it becomes harder to afford housing and even find rentals, it's going to be increasingly difficult to attract newcomers, who are vital for the long-term economic health of the country. 🏠

DIANA PETRAMALA is a senior economist at Ryerson University's Centre for Urban Research and Land Development.

1 Last December, for the first time in Canadian history, home buyers could get a five-year mortgage rate below 1 percent. In 2019, the average was 3.14 percent.

2 During the late 1980s, the average price of a Greater Toronto Area home more than doubled over three years.

3 According to Statistics Canada, at age thirty, 50.2 percent of millennials owned their homes compared with 55 percent of baby boomers.

4 Canada has the lowest number of housing units per 1,000 residents of any G7 country.

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