



## Anti-Capitalist Decolonization and the Production of Racialized Masculinities in Noam Gonick's *Stryker*

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*My essay examines the production of racialized masculinities in Canadian director Noam Gonick's 2004 film Stryker. Stryker draws on the crossover politics of hip-hop to indicate promising forms of alliance and resistance to colonization. The portrayal of Indigenous and Asian/Filipino youth gangs in Winnipeg, Manitoba illustrates how racialized masculinities are unevenly produced under neoliberal multiculturalism. Stryker also demonstrates how the sexual regulation of Indigenous women upholds the twin projects of settler-state colonialism and late global capitalism. I argue that drawing attention to subjugated Indigenous women's narratives remains imperative in theorizing radical models of citizenship, nationhood, and sovereignty.*

Always present, Native eyes watched each wave of newcomers—white, black, or Asian—establish themselves on their homelands. Histories of racist exclusion facing people of colour must detail the removal of Native peoples.

—Bonita Lawrence and Ena Dua, “Decolonizing Anti-Racism” (2005, 134)

### Introduction

In Canada, strategies of decolonization are necessarily varied and complex. Joyce Green contends:

Decolonization in the Canadian context requires, first, the understanding of the historical colonial process. Then, it requires substantive power sharing to ameliorate the inequitable, unjust, and illegal appropriation of indigenous people's territories, resources, and political autonomy. Decolonization implies fundamental change in the Canadian federation, constitution, and political culture (“Decolonization” 54).

Although critical scholars often conflate the politics of anti-racism and decolonization in Canada, a growing body of scholarship argues that, under settler-colonial rule, anti-racist strategies can and must be distinguished from practices of decolonization (Lawrence and Dua 2005; Tuck and Yang 2012; Walia 2012). My essay contributes to this effort by examining the production of racialized masculinities in Canadian director Noam Gonick's feature film, *Stryker* (2004).<sup>1</sup> *Stryker* features a young Indigenous male protagonist and offers overlapping representations of non-Indigenous racialized masculinities. The film depicts present-day tensions between Indigenous and Asian youth and signals how the settlement of Asian diasporic communities intersects with the ongoing theft and colonial occupation of Indigenous lands. *Stryker* is thus relevant for analyzing how diasporic and Indigenous masculinities are constituted *relationally*.



Contemporary anti-racist and Indigenous feminist scholars problematize the difficulties of creating meaningful and sustained political alliances between Indigenous and diasporic communities in Canada (Amadahy and Lawrence 2009; Haig-Brown 2009).<sup>2</sup> These discussions are significant given the ongoing negotiation between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state over claims to land and national sovereignty. Recent public debates have involved the process of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Prime Minister Stephen Harper's controversial promise to redress the historical harms and institutionalized violence against Indigenous peoples caused by residential schools (Regan 2011). These debates are linked to emerging research on the social movement known as Idle No More, which signals the growing support of non-Indigenous people who wish to honour the political and ethical concerns of Indigenous peoples regarding land claims, public education, treaty rights, environmental protections, and violence against Indigenous women in Canada (Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014; Walia 2013; Dobbin 2013). As a movement for social and environmental justice, Idle No More urges activists to examine their relationships to land. It uses Indigenous feminist epistemologies and the framework of relationality to guide political action and efforts at decolonization.

Despite the now axiomatic recognition that race, class, gender, sexuality, age, dis/ability, religion, language, and nation intersect, there remains a dearth of scholarship that theorizes identities as *relationally* lived and produced under the conditions of settler colonialism (Wolfe 1999; Kaur Sehdev 2011). Building on feminist theories of intersectionality, relationality acknowledges that individuals and collective groups are differently situated within the settler-colonial logics of white supremacy, capitalism, and heteropatriarchy (Smith 2006). A relational analysis problematizes the ideological opposition between marginalized/subordinate and privileged/dominant identities (Friedman 1995; Shohat 2001). It examines how differently marginalized people are invited to participate in related but distinct modes of oppression, including practices of Indigenous genocide, anti-black racism, Orientalism, and environmental destruction (Smith 2006). The analytic power of relational theory lies in the recognition that strategic political alliances among different social groups are most powerful when they are not based solely on shared victimization, but rather when they acknowledge that any group can be complicit in the victimization of another. In this way, resistance strategies more effectively challenge interlocking systems of oppression by keeping all subjects accountable. Correspondingly, my essay suggests that an Indigenous feminist and relational analysis of racialized masculinities in *Stryker* offers helpful insights for (re)imagining practices of solidarity among Indigenous and diasporic groups in North America.

I propose three lines of discussion and analysis. First, *Stryker* draws on the crossover politics found in the contemporary hip-hop cultures of Indigenous and black youth to indicate promising forms of alliance and resistance to colonization. Second, *Stryker*'s vivid portrayal of contemporary Indigenous and Asian/Filipino youth gangs in Winnipeg, Manitoba illustrates the uneven production of racialized masculinities in neoliberal multiculturalism. *Stryker* not only reminds viewers that Indigenous peoples have consistently challenged white supremacy and land theft, but also gestures to the ambivalent relationship between Indigenous peoples and newer non-white ethnic groups in Canada. Finally, *Stryker* demonstrates how the sexual regulation of Indigenous women upholds the twin projects of settler-state colonialism and late global capitalism. Overall, I argue that drawing attention to subjugated Indigenous women's narratives remains imperative for theorizing radical models of citizenship, nationhood, and sovereignty.



## Racialized Masculinities and the Crossover Politics of Hip Hop

The *Stryker* is a gritty and at times exuberant fictional portrayal of a present-day racial gang war between Indigenous and Filipino youth on the streets of Winnipeg's North End, a poor neighbourhood where much of Winnipeg's Indigenous population resides. The film follows one *stryker* (Kyle Henry), or prospective gang member (Gonick 2004), an unnamed "fourteen year-old Native arsonist from a northern reserve whose arrival in the city serves as a catalyst in this fierce battle" (Gonick 2). After setting fire to an abandoned church on Brokenhead First Nation Reservation, the *stryker* flees the scene of his crime and travels aboard a freight train, winding up in the North End of Winnipeg. Upon arrival, the *stryker* witnesses a violent car jacking where an Asian Bomb Squad (ABS) gang member loses a large cocaine shipment to a group of Indigenous teens from the rival Indian Posse gang. In the film, Omar (Ryan Black), the leader of the ABS, controls the North End's illicit drug and prostitution trade. Omar and the ABS lose control of the North End when Omar's nemesis, the "girl thug" Mama Ceece (Deena Fontaine), returns to lead the Indian Posse and reclaim her North End turf after serving time in prison. Throughout the film, the *stryker* is a silent, emblematic witness to the intense battles between the two rival gangs.

Layered over a powerful hip-hop soundtrack, the opening photo-montage of *Stryker* depicts some of the political history that shapes the current social realities of the characters in the film, including archived images of Treaty One (Anishinaabe) territory, herds of wild bison, Indian residential schools, and portraits of Indigenous children and families being escorted by white Christian reformers onto newly established reservations. The images overlay illustrations of Indigenous uprisings, including the Red River Rebellion of 1869-1870, led by revolutionary Métis leader and Manitoba founder Louis Riel. The images are chronologically sequenced and transition into present-day photographs of Indigenous youth handcuffed by police.

*Stryker*'s opening montage is reminiscent of African-American hood films that were popularized in the 1990s alongside the commercialization of hip-hop, such as *Boyz N the Hood* (1991, dir. John Singleton) and *Menace II Society* (1993, dirs. Albert and Allen Hughes). As a genre, hood films originated in the United States and detail coming-of-age hardships for young black men in the inner city. The films incorporate hip-hop music alongside themes of urban poverty, street gangs, drug use and trafficking, racism, and violence in African-American neighborhoods. Hood films rely on the Hollywood cinematic metaphor of the cityscape as "both a utopia—as a space promising freedom and economic mobility—and dystopia—the ghetto's economic impoverishment and segregation" (Massood 88). In this way, hood films not only portray destitution and racial containment but also "[celebrate] the continued existence and the possibilities of African American communities and African American cultural production" (Massood 94). *Stryker* draws on this genre to explore Indigenous community dynamics in a poor urban landscape. Winnipeg-born film director Noam Gonick, who is white, queer, and Jewish, describes the political imperative that guided the film:

After generations of genocide at the hands of this place we call "Canada," I saw the surfacing of Native street gangs in Winnipeg as an army of resistance. During the arson epidemics of the last few years, when the city was being burnt to the ground, I cheered these kids on—the gangs pushed back at an impossible situation thrust on them by birthright. It's the oldest story in Canada, and one which we rarely admit to ourselves—but there is an apartheid in effect here—gasoline sniffing, teenage prostitution, crack use, are all symptoms of this system. Native teens are told how to make it on white middleclass terms, told that it's the only way to transcend their situation. But away from this evil coercion, within the gang underworld, I have



found an amazing sense of camaraderie and a belonging to something pure and raw. Gang family life mimics the abusive ways of the superstructure, yet as misguided as it can be, I admire the impulse to resist. (5)

Gonick's first short film *1919* (1997) was awarded at the Toronto Worldwide Short Film Festival, and his subsequent feature film, *Hey, Happy!* (2000), debuted with much acclaim at the 2001 Sundance Film Festival (Scott 2006). *Stryker* premiered at the prestigious 2004 Venice International Film Festival and was featured in a New York City MoMA exhibit in 2010. Given his success as an emerging Canadian filmmaker, Gonick received several state-funded artist grants to produce *Stryker*.<sup>3</sup> As a white filmmaker, Gonick's privileged access to arts funding and exhibition contrasts starkly with the institutionalized barriers experienced by Indigenous filmmakers.<sup>4</sup> Gonick acts as both an advocate for Indigenous resistance and an agent of state multiculturalism.<sup>5</sup>

With regard to the former, *Stryker*'s reception has been overwhelmingly positive among Indigenous audiences and communities, particularly Indigenous youth who reside in Winnipeg, many of whom Gonick consulted while directing the film. Several of *Stryker*'s cast members are Indigenous rap artists and musicians with no prior acting experience, such as the Beat duo "REZOFFICIAL" from the central Alberta Four Nations Reserves. *Stryker* also integrates an original hip-hop score by Alberta-based Indigenous MC HellnacK (Karmen Omeosoo). *Stryker*'s slice-of-life representation of gang culture in Winnipeg's North End clearly resonates with Indigenous youth audiences in Canada.

Its popularity also gestures to the cultural influence of hip-hop more broadly. Jenell Navarro explains that since the late 1970s, African American hip-hop has been a musical genre that has responded to racism, classism, and state violence. In the 1980s, Indigenous hip-hop transpired to address related concerns and "continues to be one of the latest culturally specific forms of hip-hop that uses music and culture as a means to voice opposition to structural and environmental racism, poverty, and oppression in the United States" (Navarro 102). Many scholars investigate the increased global circulation of African-American hip-hop in various national contexts. Patricia Hill Collins argues: "The music of hip hop culture [...] follows its rhythm and blues predecessor as a so-called crossover genre that is very popular with whites and other cultural groups across the globe" (300). Among others, Collins underscores the contradictory position of African-American youth as both commodities/suppliers and consumers of hip-hop in emerging global markets. Similarly, George Stavrias maintains that the postmodern tropes of hybridity and multicultural diasporic flows that are characteristic of hip-hop's globalized forms "can be adopted or adapted to express the concerns of ethnic minorities everywhere" (45). Although the cultural expressions of hip-hop vary widely in different locales, Cristina Veran enthusiastically discerns: "Into this polyglot gumbo of aesthetics and performance, presentation and expression today, Indigenous youth are rocking the planet anew, fusing hip-hop's expressive elements of MCing, DJing, b-boying, and aerosol graffiti art with their own traditions of oratory, music, drumming, dance, and the visual arts" (278). Generally speaking, hip-hop is a mode of self-expression with a powerful impact on Indigenous youth. *Stryker*'s portrayal of Indigenous masculinities testifies to this contemporary urban aesthetic movement, which comprises part of Indigenous people's ongoing social activism and global political organizing. Canadian film critic Ioannis Mookas comments that *Stryker*'s incorporation of Indigenous hip-hop parallels the situation of black youth in the U.S.: Recognising that Indians occupy the same structural underclass position in Canadian society that blacks do in the US, *Stryker*'s key innovation is to situate native youth as authentic subjects of, and shareholders in, this transnational hip hop culture (n.p.).



Although the cultural histories of Canadian Indigenous and U.S. black youth cannot be conflated, the clothing styles, music, beatboxing, deejaying, breakdancing, emceeing, and graffiti art presented by Indigenous youth in *Stryker* signify Indigenous adoption of hip-hop lifestyles that are largely inspired by African-American oppositional politics. The urban and poor Indigenous youth in the film critically appropriate and modify these cultural forms to express personal and collective political concerns. Stavrias remarks that both African-American and Indigenous “traditions” are blurred in Indigenous hip-hop:

Negotiating relations between traditional cultural practices and modernity, Aboriginal culture is actually a culture in the making and hip-hop is a powerful tool in helping Aboriginal youth with this negotiation...The rap itself enacts traditional knowledge through storytelling (52).

The cultural currency of hip-hop also grants Indigenous youth access to public performance and airtime through their self-expressions of art and music (Ritter and Willard 2012). Although Indigenous articulations of hip-hop might be read as a form of American cultural imperialism provoked by global marketing pressures, a relational reading of racialized masculinities makes evident that the heightened visibility of black American youth culture enables existing and new possibilities for political solidarity between diasporic and Indigenous groups.<sup>6</sup> Additionally, the shared cultural expression of hip-hop signals a history of interconnection and intergroup struggle between Indigenous and black peoples, which is an important and emerging area of scholarly investigation (Amadahy and Lawrence 2009; Smith 2014; King 2014).

Of course, Indigenous hip-hop is not impervious to the messages embedded in commercialized hip-hop, including the idea that sexism and homophobia are endemic to authentic “thug” life. As Tricia Rose points out:

[H]ip-hop has become a breeding ground for the most explicitly exploitative and increased one-dimensional narratives of black ghetto life [that include] the gangsta life and all its attendant violence, criminality, sexual “deviance,” and misogyny. (3)

It is notable that no Indigenous female artists or characters in *Stryker* perform hip-hop, although in several scenes Mama Ceece nods appreciatively to the raps and improvised rhymes of the Indian Posse’s male beat boxers. The Indian Posse’s lyrics frequently celebrate and pay tribute to Mama Ceece, suggesting male reverence to Indigenous female leadership. In this manner, *Stryker*’s representations of Indigenous gang life subvert distorted stereotypes of Indigenous masculinities as, for example, “highly masculinized noble savage[s]...brutal animalistic warriors, or sad victims of Darwinian destiny” (Swanson 1). Nonetheless, not all aspects of Indigenous hip-hop expressed in the film are necessarily oppositional, “positive,” or politically progressive.

#### (Not) Our Home and Native Land: *Stryker*’s Relational Masculinities

Even though *Stryker* highlights many of the harsh social realities that comprise life in the North End of Winnipeg, it also incorporates elements of the fantastic and bizarre, reflecting Gonick’s foundational ties to queer cinema (Waugh 2006). More specifically, the film’s portrayal of



racialized queer and female masculinities troubles heteronormative models of settler citizenship in unexpected ways.<sup>7</sup> To complicate matters, the film designates Omar, identified as Métis, as the unexpected leader of the Asian Bomb Squad. The ABS consists mainly of young, second-generation Filipino men.<sup>8</sup> Omar is not a conventional “thug”; for instance, he once worked as an exotic dancer at a gay bar and his girlfriend, Daisy (Joseph Mesiano), is a transsexual sex worker.<sup>9</sup> *Stryker*'s portrayal of contemporary racialized masculinities—which include queer and female masculinities—both transgress and reinscribe stereotypical notions of urban Indigenous and Asian youth. For example, the hyper-masculine representations of the Indian Posse and the Asian Bomb Squad are inflected with suggestive moments of homoeroticism and queer sexualities. Throughout the film, Omar's ABS gang members don flamboyant and revealing costumes and they are sexually objectified as homoerotic eye candy in prolonged shower and body-building scenes. Several of the most colourful and amusing scenes feature a group of Indigenous transgender and transsexual sex workers who launch raunchy in-jokes and campy retorts. Stryker finds temporary refuge among these Two-Spirit women and establishes a friendship with Daisy, a Métis trans-woman and Omar's ill-treated girlfriend.

In a similar vein, Mama Ceece breaks from the standard male representation of gang leadership as a fierce, young, Indigenous, butch lesbian who has no qualms about beating up her unfaithful teenage girlfriend, Ruby (Nancy Sanderson), and castigating her all-male Indian Posse. Although problematic, Mama Ceece and Ruby's turbulent relationship represents a profound disruption to conventional (mis)representations of Indigenous women who either appear, in the heterosexual-fantasy style of Pocahontas, as a beautiful and virginal Indian princess—the willing yet innocent helpmate to white European men—or as a squaw drudge, a sexually licentious and ugly “beast of burden” (Stevensen 57). Both stereotypes serve to rationalize an Indigenous woman's servitude—she is a slave to men. The Indigenous lesbian is neither of these. By queering the portrayal of gang life in Winnipeg, *Stryker* complicates, re-imagines, and opens up new possibilities for the racialized, sexualized, and gendered dynamics of gang culture.

*Stryker* also illuminates how the antagonistic colonial relationship between Indigenous peoples in relation to white settlers is far less ambiguous than that of Indigenous peoples vis-à-vis non-white groups. Indigenous opposition and resistance to white supremacy and settler invasion are resolute in the film, perhaps most blatantly expressed in a scene where the character of Gloria (Joy Keeper), an Indigenous elder, yells at three white women walking along a North End street, “Get the fuck off Native land! We're taking it back, you white bitches!” In contrast to conventional Hollywood representations, no white characters are portrayed with any sympathy in the film. For example, in addition to providing a degree of comic relief, the character Cody (Nick Ouellette), a young, white, homeless man, is portrayed as a foolish yet opportunistic snitch who delivers information between the rival gangs. Indian Posse members eventually beat Cody to death.<sup>10</sup> Likewise, even though the local police force contains both white and Indigenous officers, the sordid routine of the “starlight tour”—where policemen assault and drive an Indigenous person to the outskirts of the city and leave them to die of exposure in sub-zero temperatures—is perpetrated by a white male officer in the film.<sup>11</sup> *Stryker*'s most demonized character is the licentious Talia (Dominique Rémy-Root), a white, Eastern-European immigrant woman and foster mother to Omar and several Indian Posse members. The film suggests that Talia has had sexual relationships with many of the Indigenous boys who have lived in her care. Talia makes numerous explicit sexual gestures toward the reluctant stryker after he is placed in her custody.<sup>12</sup> Eventually, in a presumable act of revenge, the



stryker sets Talia's house on fire. Mama Ceece and the Indian Posse members jeer and watch in satisfaction as it burns down.

In contrast to *Stryker's* unforgiving portrayal of whiteness, relationships between Asian and Indigenous youth are not clear-cut. The Asian Bomb Squad members initially show respect and defer to Omar, their Métis gang leader. They party and share drugs with Omar and the Indigenous sex workers he employs. However, Omar steadily loses control over the North End as Mama Ceece recruits more members to the Indian Posse. Mama Ceece gains power by convincing boys from the Deuce Crew, a former enemy Indigenous gang, to join her posse, because "Native peoples gotta come together, take back what's ours." Once the ABS members realize that Omar is no longer in power, they abandon him. One ABS member justifies the betrayal by stating: "he's not even one of us." This refusal of loyalty and the racial gang wars between Indigenous and Asian youth reflect how the neoliberal multicultural state promotes a divide-and-conquer strategy that pits one cultural group against another to deflect attention away from the shared but uneven effects of colonialism and capitalist exploitation. Rather than operate as an inclusive framework, *Stryker* suggests that multiculturalism functions as an official tool of the state to reproduce racial inequalities.

The post-1970s liberalization of immigration and citizenship policies, reinforced by Canada's 1988 *Multicultural Act*, is often regarded as a significant advancement for race relations; Canada has since been upheld as a global model for intercultural pluralism and governance (Kymlicka 1996). Nevertheless, liberal multiculturalism not only reproduces essentialist understandings of group identities, but also generates hostility among different marginalized groups as they compete for state recognition and material resources (Bannerji 2000; Mackey 2002; Gunew 2004; Walcott 2000).<sup>13</sup> More recent scholarship reveals that diasporic and Indigenous groups are asymmetrically positioned within a framework of neoliberal multiculturalism and settler-state colonialism in the Americas (Lawrence and Dua 2005; Amadahy and Lawrence 2009; Jafri 2012). Multicultural policies privilege immigrant populations and distinguish Indigenous peoples as a group that requires special consideration. Yet specific government legislation in relation to Indigenous peoples has not emphasized the protection or celebration of Indigenous culture but has rather promoted the aggressive assimilation of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples (Bourgeois 2009; Todd 1990). Accordingly, multicultural discourse and its associated critiques deflect attention away from the decolonization struggles of Indigenous peoples, especially in relation to land claims and sovereignty (Walia 2012). Echoing the insights of many Indigenous scholars, Richard Fung clarifies:

Aboriginal protests aren't simply racial, but also national struggles. They are not primarily expressions of anger at discrimination...but a defense of land and historical rights against encroachment...Federal and provincial governments didn't so much attempt to appease as to squash such protests, precisely because the stakes are much higher—they challenge the legitimacy of the colonial state. (in Gagnon et al. 85)

Eve Tuck and Wayne Yang (2012) argue that homogenizing various experiences of oppression under the umbrella of colonization is a "move towards settler innocence" and a form of colonial equivocation that flattens out and undermines Indigenous sovereignty. Fung expounds: "Diasporic Africans and Asians in the Americas have different histories from each other and, in turn, from those of Native peoples: slavery is not indentureship is not internment is not head tax is not residential schools. The ways that we various 'others' are integrated into and excluded



from [Canadian] culture may be related, but they are also marked by crucial differences” (19). Multicultural conflicts over rights and inclusion are further exacerbated in an identity-driven and individualized era of neoliberalism and late global capitalism, which promotes ethnic, racial, sexual, and gender differences “so long as they do not fundamentally challenge the dominant economic order” (Gilroy 100). Himani Bannerji (2000) points out that ethno-racial communities in Canada more often engage in class politics with the intention of upward mobility rather than in the interest of social and economic justice.

Correspondingly, *Stryker* portrays marked class asymmetries between Filipino and Indigenous communities in Winnipeg and uneven degrees of social mobility among Filipino and Indigenous youth in Canada. For example, in contrast to members of the Indian Posse, the wealthier Asian Bomb Squad members drive sports cars, wear designer clothes and leather jackets, and spend leisure time working out at the gym.<sup>14</sup> No Asian youth are visible in juvenile detention. The film hints at internal class and gendered dynamics within the Filipino community in an early scene when Orville (Tri Cao), a member of the Asian Bomb Squad, is turned away by his mother after being beaten and robbed by members of the Indian Posse. In this scene, Orville’s mother refuses to let her son inside the house where she works as a domestic helper in fear of losing her job. Arguably, the reaction of Orville’s mother suggests his own family’s economic scarcity and poverty rather than a strategy of upward mobility.<sup>15</sup> Nonetheless, the mother’s response draws on constructions of Asians as dutiful, law-abiding, hardworking, and aspiring “model minorities.” Anti-racist scholars argue that Asians are only desired as immigrants, workers, and students when they benefit Canada’s socioeconomic imperatives and disavowed when they challenge the sociocultural status quo (Coloma 2013). The recent “Too Asian?” controversy in *Maclean’s* magazine concerning race and representation in Canadian universities exemplifies the paradoxical position of Asian diasporic subjects who are often regarded as perpetual foreigners and threats to the national body, but are simultaneously seen as domesticated “model minorities” who are ranked higher among black, South Asian, Latino, Indigenous, and other racialized groups (Gilmour et al. 2012). Asian Canadians thus occupy a conflicted position as marginalized citizens in a settler nation with global economic aspirations. *Stryker’s* portrayal of Asian masculinities signals this precarious positioning of Asian Canadians within a multicultural settler state. The film also suggests that it is untenable to blur or equalize the colonial struggles of Indigenous peoples and diasporic communities in Canada. However, Indigenous feminist theories of relationality offer radical and alternative ways to define and imagine citizenship beyond a nation-state framework.

#### Conclusion: Indigenous Feminisms and the Decolonization of Racialized Masculinities

Ironically, throughout the film, Mama Ceece shows a callous disregard for other females and queers. Mama Ceece appropriates the masculinist and chauvinistic fantasies of thug life; she is an abusive butch lesbian who hits her girlfriend and hurls homophobic slurs at her gang mates. Indeed, regarding the representation of Indigenous women in the film, Mookas purports: “Taken together, Mama Ceece and Ruby make for an unusually complex representation of young Indian womanhood” (n.p.). Chris Finley provocatively suggests that a way to decolonize the Indigenous body and dismantle the heteronormative Pocahontas myth that serves to justify imperial expansion and gendered colonial violence is to “recover the Native bull-dyke.” Finley elaborates: “if the Native woman were read as queer, her heterosexual desire for white settlers to invade her nation would not be for the universal truth of love, since the sexual desire for



white men would not exist" (35). *Stryker's* portrayal of young Indigenous lesbians engages with this decolonizing process and also underscores how Indigenous women are faced with some of the highest social stakes in Canadian society.

For instance, Mama Ceece's release from prison gestures to the escalating rates of Indigenous women's incarceration and the over-representation of Indigenous people in Canada's criminal justice system. Patricia Monture contends: "For Aboriginal women particularly, the rates of over-representation continue to climb, more than doubling in number between 1981 and 2002" ("Confronting Power" 26). Andrea Smith and Luana Ross further clarify: "the majority of Native women in prison are there as a direct or indirect result of abuse" (3). Moreover, Ruby and Daisy are sex workers who are vulnerable to physical, emotional, and verbal assaults that occur both on and off the job. Although *Stryker* depicts this violence as solely perpetrated by other Indigenous characters, namely Omar and Mama Ceece, "Native women are assaulted more often by white men than by men of their own group: 60% of the perpetrators of sexual violence against Native women are white" (Smith *Conquest* 28).<sup>16</sup>

Daisy and Ruby are shown to be fully capable of defending themselves against Omar and Mama Ceece's attacks, but it is useful here to recount feminist analyses that link the sexual violation of Indigenous women's bodies and the overall disregard for sex workers to institutionalized racism, sexism, and heteropatriarchy. More specifically, feminist insights reveal that the sexual colonization of Indigenous women remains a crucial aspect of strengthening white male capitalist patriarchy in the Americas (Razack 1998; Smith and Ross 2004; Smith 2005; Jiwani and Young 2006; The Cultural Memory Group 2006). Smith and Ross elaborate: "If the women of a nation are not disproportionately killed, then that nation's population will not be severely affected [...]. The constant sexual violations of Native women demonstrate the colonial desire to control Native women's sexuality" (2). In another study, Andrea Smith suggests that Indigenous women who reside on lands rich in energy resources are particularly threatening to government and capitalist enterprises because of their ability to reproduce the next generation of people who can resist colonization (*Conquest* 78). Likewise, Bonita Lawrence identifies how Indigenous women and their descendants have been systematically disenfranchised by the Canadian state for over a century. Until 1985, the *Indian Act* forcibly removed tens of thousands of Indigenous women from their communities for marrying non-status or non-Indigenous men ("Gender" 15). By contrast, Indigenous men retained their Indian status, access, and privileges to land and resources despite marrying non-Indigenous women. By and large, this worked to divide Indigenous communities by denying land and other entitlements to certain Indigenous families. It also introduced and escalated conflicts between Indigenous men and women. These conflicting relations are only too well depicted in *Stryker*.

Indigenous feminists frequently articulate Indigenous forms of nationhood organized around a system of inter-relatedness and mutual responsibility rather than the individualized logic of rights-based citizenship. Patricia Monture explains: "Any hierarchical ordering of either the notion of collective rights or individual rights will fundamentally violate the culture of Aboriginal people. Such a violation, whether it favours or prioritizes the individual or collective, can only result in one thing—the further destruction of Aboriginal cultures" (*Thunder* 184). Indigenous nationhood is based on responsibility for the land rather than control of territory, fundamentally challenging Western legal concepts of land as property and commodity. The emphasis in Indigenous feminist theory on forming a responsible relationship to land rather than commodifying it radically counters corporate and state interests and reflects how decolonization struggles are linked to anti-capitalist movements.



In *Stryker's* closing scenes, Mama Ceece and the Indian Posse are shown at large party getting high, laughing, dancing, and celebrating their reclaimed territory and victory over Omar and the Asian Bomb Squad. Mama Ceece and Ruby cuddle affectionately in a corner while the hip-hop soundtrack blasts. The celebratory scene transitions to a close-up shot of the stryker as he awakens from unconsciousness. He finds himself among a herd of bison in a frozen field after being picked up by police, beaten, driven out of the city, and left to die. Dazed, the stryker walks up a snowy hill and gazes intently at the bright Winnipeg skyline as if ready to meet his future. The closing scenes suggest the powerful and enduring connection between land and Indigenous resistance.

*Stryker's* portrayal of Indigenous and Filipino youth gangs in Canada illustrates how the complex, contradictory, and shifting relations between Indigenous and diasporic communities are produced within a white settler state. Overall, Indigenous feminist perspectives highlight subjugated Indigenous women's narratives, which remain critical to theorizing radical models of citizenship, nationhood, and sovereignty. In this regard, placing diasporic and settler narratives in relation to Indigenous sovereignty movements enables a fuller and more complex understanding of how citizens of *all* backgrounds can participate in the ongoing process of decolonization.

#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> By "racialized masculinities," I refer to the social construction of race and gender and the historical, economic, political, and cultural processes through which modernist categories of race and gender are linked and (re)produced. The concept of racialization emphasizes that all designated racial categories are performed and historically produced. Racialization reveals the processes wherein, for example, Indigenous subjects become racialized subjects and other bodies become racially unmarked as white. For a salient discussion of racialized modernity and the white European invention of race, see Barnor Hesse (2007).

<sup>2</sup> I use the term "Indigenous" inclusively to denote First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in Canada. These concepts reflect the contemporary limits of colonial languages in regards to more accurate and respectful terms for the territory's First Peoples. Since the 1970s, Indigenous peoples in Canada have referred to themselves as "First Nations" to contest the Canadian Constitution's reference to the French and English as "founding nations" of Canada. However, "First Nations" does not include Métis and Inuit peoples, whom I include in my argument. For a discussion of competing Indigenous categories in Canadian legal discourse, see Joe Sawchuck (2001).

<sup>3</sup> *Stryker* obtained production grants from TELEFILM CANADA, Manitoba Film and Sound, Government of Manitoba, Manitoba Film and Video Production Tax Credit, Canadian Television Fund, The Canadian Film or Video Production Tax Credit, Centre for Aboriginal Resource Development, and the Manitoba Arts Council.

<sup>4</sup> For example, despite the development of the Aboriginal People's Television Network, a national, Winnipeg-based Indigenous broadcasting company, bureaucratic conflicts often prevent the production of feature films by Indigenous people (Mookas 2005). Mohawk scholar and curator Steven Loft comments: "Undoubtedly there will be those who question



Gonick's choice of subject (how dare this white, Jewish, liberal, etc., etc.), and that is as it should be. It is obvious that Gonick has invested a great deal of time and energy [...] with actual Winnipeg street gangs including the Indian Posse [that] serves to ground the film [...]. Cultural authority and appropriation are difficult and sensitive topics, but they need to be engaged if we are to get beyond simplistic notions of who is allowed to speak about what [...]. Gonick may have to deal with some of the fallout of these, but they should not divert from the accomplishment that *Stryker* is" (n.p).

<sup>5</sup> I give thanks to my anonymous *Feral Feminisms* reviewer for this astute and helpful point.

<sup>6</sup> Jenell Navarro draws on Audra Simpson's and Andrea Smith's (2014) concept of "theoretical promiscuity" to analyze Indigenous feminist land ethics and cultural resistance in Indigenous hip-hop: "Black Studies and Hip-Hop Studies [have] theorized particularized histories and the present conditions of colonization and considering these with, rather than against, Native scholarship leads us to multiple possibilities for enacting present and future change for everyone, not just for Native communities" (114).

<sup>7</sup> I rely on Bobby Noble's definition of female masculinities: "female masculinity references a range of subject positions—drag king, butch, female-to-male (FtM), trans man, both operative and non-operative, trans-gendered man, stone butches—simultaneously constituted by irreducible contradictions between (de)constructions of 'bodies' misread in a certain way as 'female' and yet masculine" (5).

<sup>8</sup> The urban gangs of Winnipeg are primarily comprised of Indigenous youth (Grekul and LaBoucane-Benson 2008). According to a 2006 census report, Winnipeg hosts the second-largest Filipino immigrant population in Canada, comprising roughly 5.6% of the overall population. Métis and "North American Indian" groups in Winnipeg account for 6.2% and 5.3% of the total population, respectively.

<sup>9</sup> Gonick wryly comments: "Omar is all about masculinity in crisis—a failure to live up to the archetypal movie thug. The idea of gangsters pimping for and carousing with other men dressed as women might seem like a stretch, but I've taken little artistic liberty here" (7).

<sup>10</sup> Gonick explicitly states: "in this script no Native people would die—a new-style cowboys and Indians movie" (6).

<sup>11</sup> For a critical analysis of the "starlight tour" phenomenon, see Joyce Green (2006).

<sup>12</sup> To an extent, Talia's presence in the film reflects a reality of post-war immigration history in Canada and the city of Winnipeg, and Stryker arguably vilifies a white Eastern European immigrant woman. However, the historical abuse that occurred in Indian residential schools (which continues in present-day foster homes) implicates white male religious and administrative authorities as the major perpetrators of sexual violence against Indigenous women and children (Razack 2002; Smith 2005; The Cultural Memory Group 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Daiva Stasiulis and Nira Yuval-Davis add: "Multiculturalism also constructs the various immigrant communities as internally homogenous in terms of class, ideology and politics.



State recognition is provided to a specific and usually male and conservative leadership within ethnic communities. As multiculturalism usually constructs difference in mutually exclusive terms, this can give rise to fundamentalist leaderships who are more easily perceived to be 'the authentic other'" (27).

<sup>14</sup> Gonick describes how race and class divisions informed his portrayal of the characters' differing motivations for gang membership: "My idea of the Asian Bomb Squad is that, after the allure of fast cars and fast girls wears off, they will, like many recent Filipino arrivals in Winnipeg, quickly ascend to the middle class and leave the ghettos behind. But these Indian kids are ten generations in, and few of them can ascend that way" (in Mookas 2005).

<sup>15</sup> Thanks to Gulzar Raisa Charania for raising this argument.

<sup>16</sup> For examples of the organized responses to the cases of missing and murdered Indigenous women across Canada, see The Cultural Memory Group (2006), "First Nations Women Remembered" in *Remembering Women Murdered by Men: Memorials Across Canada*. Contributors to this volume underscore that Indigenous women who are most often subject to racial and sexual violence are also women with the least access to the resources needed for public memory-making.

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