

“Flesh, Form, Violence: Multispecies Approaches to Consumption and Relation in Indigenous Feminist Literatures”

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ABSTRACT

This paper ponders the impasses and possibilities that arise when Indigenous literatures are analysed through the emergent ethically grounded, queer, and feminist frameworks which trace the contours of what has been theorised as the “beyond-human ” and the “more-than-human” worlds. I focus on three intersecting motifs—the flesh, form, and violence—as they appear in North America Indigenous feminist fiction and their portrayals of traditional Indigenous foodways, narratives of consumption, and relationships with non-human entities. I read two genre-bending works, Eden Robinson’s Indigenous gothic, coming-of-age novel *Monkey Beach* (2000) and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s collection of experimental fiction, poetry, and songs *This Accident of Being Lost* (2017). I examine how both authors represent Indigenous food-gathering and spiritual practices which involve murdering and eviscerating fish peoples, murdering moose peoples, gathering berries, rice, herbs; and drilling into tree peoples’ bodies in order to create maple syrup. I analyse how these relational engagements are given texture through different mappings of the *flesh* (fish bodies, tree bodies, rice stalks, and human embodiments), *forms* (the embodied, the textual, the digital), and *violence* (those visited on Indigenous human and beyond-human entities). Drawing on Craig Womack’s, Billy-Ray Belcourt’s, and Max Liboiron’s Indigenous queer and ethically non-violent ecological theory, I contemplate the politics of upholding respect for all lifeforms, refuting colonial violence, and enacting and refashioning Indigenous cultural practices. I propose that Robinson’s and Simpson’s writing highlights the complex intersections between the desire to *consume* (for sustenance, pleasure, growth, renewal, and culture) as well as the anxieties about being *consumed* (by non-human entities, colonial violence, and negative affects). Additionally, I suggest that both authors theorise Indigenous femme experiences of encountering land, water, animal peoples, and plant peoples through cultivating emotional attachments and forms of connection that are made through the flesh and sensation. Yet, these fleshy assemblages always exist in relation to external threats of violence (colonial atmospheres of gendered and corporeal violence, ecological violence, psychological violence, and cultural violence). Thus, attempting to craft theories of ethical non-violence through reading Indigenous feminist literatures raise important questions about our connections to the more-than-human world and the possibilities for worldmaking outside of the dominant regimes of killing and ecological genocide.

Keywords: Flesh, Beyond-human, Indigenous Feminisms, Consumption, Decolonial Ecologies

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Name pronunciations

Ho’esta = *Ho-es-ta*

Mo’e’hahne = *Mo-e-ha-neh*

Pronunciations of nations

Sist-sist-stass (also written Tsistsistas)

Hey-no-no-eh (also written Hinono’ei)