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FROM SEATON VILLAGE TO GLOBAL VILLAGE: METONYMIES OF EXILE AND GLOBALIZATION IN JUDITH THOMPSON'S *SLED*

As in other settler/invasor colonies that artificially invented and inserted themselves as nation-states in regions where they did not naturally belong, the collective feelings of estrangement and the reassessment of Canada's history and national identity have been ongoing. Inspired by recent theories of globalization, this study proposes the understanding of Canadian colonialism as a form of macro-globalization, taking place during the second stage of historical globalization, and of official multiculturalism as a type of micro-globalization, which foreshadows the third and more intense wave of globalization that started in the second half of the twentieth century. This perspective dismantles the myth that Canada's multi-national nature is determined by its so-called "exceptionalism," which Irene Bloemraad explains as the result of the economic selection of immigrants, geographical location, and most of all the world-praised tendency to welcome ethnically diverse immigrants because of its "immigration-as-nation-building paradigm" state policy (7). Using this theoretical frame, this essay argues that the metonymic depiction of 1990s Canada in Judith Thompson's *Sled* asserts exile as a shared identity marker determined by globalization. The first part of this study analyzes how the combined legacies of colonialism and Pierre Trudeau's multicultural policy generate the characters' collective exile. The second part investigates some of *Sled's* characters as metonymic representations of Canadians' ethnic diversity and examples of exile determined by globalization on an individual level.

Comme dans d'autres colonies de pionniers/envahisseurs s'étant inventées et insérées en tant qu'États-nations dans des régions où elles n'appartenait pas à l'état naturel, le sentiment collectif de marginalisation et le besoin de réévaluer l'histoire du Canada et son identité nationale existent depuis toujours. Inspirée par des théories récentes sur la mondialisation, Manole propose dans cet article d'envisager le colonialisme canadien comme une forme de macro-mondialisation qui se serait déroulée durant le deuxième stade d'un processus historique de mondialisation et d'envisager le multiculturalisme en tant que type de micro-mondialisation qui présage un troisième stade, plus intense, dont les débuts remonteraient à la deuxième moitié du vingtième siècle. En adoptant cette perspective, Manole démantèle le mythe selon lequel le Canada doit sa nature multinationale à son « exceptionnalisme » qui, selon Irene Bloemraad, est le résultat d'une sélection d'immigrants faite en fonction de critères économiques et géogra-

phiques et, plus que tout, une tendance louangée de par le monde à accueillir des immigrants de diverses ethnies en raison d'une politique étatique liée au « paradigme de l'immigration comme construction nationale » (7, traduction libre). À l'aide de ce cadre théorique, Manole fait valoir que la représentation métonymique du Canada des années 1990 dans la pièce *Sled* de Judith Thompson souligne le rôle de l'exil comme marqueur identitaire commun qu'impose la mondialisation. Dans un premier temps, elle examine comment le legs du colonialisme et celui de la politique multiculturelle de Pierre Trudeau ont été à l'origine de l'exil collectif des personnages de la pièce. Dans un deuxième temps, elle analyse quelques-uns des personnages en tant que représentations métonymiques de la diversité ethnique des Canadiens et en tant qu'illustrations de l'exil lié à la mondialisation à l'échelle de l'individu.



Motto: "I have nothing to do with those people...
No! No! I am this now, THIS" (Thompson 88).

The Globalized Nation

As in other settler/invader colonies,¹ which artificially invented and inserted themselves as nation-states in regions where they did not naturally belong, the collective feelings of estrangement and the reassessment of Canada's history and national identity have been ongoing. At the beginning of his position paper, "World Famous across Canada, or Transnational Localities," presented at the 2005 TransCanada conference, Richard Cavell identifies "a critical crux that has plagued the literature [of Canada] especially since its post-World War II period of development, a crux that was energized by the centripetal pull towards the land, regionalism, and locality, and the centrifugal one towards the cosmopolitan, the international, and what we now call the global" (85). Inspired by Kwame Anthony Appiah's concept of a "rooted cosmopolitanism" (89), Cavell proposes "an engagement with globalization as a historical and situated phenomenon [which] has the advantage of addressing our present political context while acknowledging a significant aspect of Canadian history—including literary history—which is that Canada is the product of not one but two empires, and thus that we were international before we were national" (90-1). This perspective also leads him to the understanding of "globalization as colonization" (91), echoing similar international views, including Ashutosh Sheshabalaya's "three rounds of globalization" theory with the second corresponding to European imperialism.

Cavell also highlights the globalizing nature of official multiculturalism, which “by valorizing something called difference [. . .] put[s] a positive spin on the question of national identity—the fact that we weren’t a nation was a good thing because we were really many nations” (87).

Cavell’s views attest to what Thomas Hylland Eriksen identifies in his overview, *Globalization: The Key Concepts*, as the most important aspects of globalization: “increased interconnectedness [among different nations] and increased awareness of it” (4). First, this perspective makes it possible to acknowledge British imperialism as a form of macro-globalization, which is usually associated with “expanding the boundaries [of] locality as well as making some local ideas, practices, institutions global” (Khondker 4). Second, it allows for the understanding of official Canadian multiculturalism as a type of micro-globalization, also known as *glocalization*, which consists of “incorporating certain global processes into the local setting” (4). In Canada’s case, the ethnic diversity of local communities and direct interaction among members of different nations, which define the third stage of globalization in the mid- to late-twentieth century, not only accelerated after the Second World War through the introduction of more inclusive immigration policies, but also became part of the new definition of the nation through official multiculturalism. Himani Bannerji identifies Canada as the first country where multiculturalism “has been pronounced by the state as a part of its administrative apparatus” (8), as an attempt “to manage a colonial history, an imperialist present, and a convoluted liberal democracy” (10). This contrasts with the American “melting pot” principle and the aggressive assimilation policies introduced in other former settler/invasor colonies, which aimed to erase ethnic and cultural differences. In this way, Canadian citizens have been officially allowed and even encouraged to preserve the consciousness of belonging to specific national minority groups and, implicitly, maintain cultural affinities with their countries of origins. At the level of the Canadian imagined community, macro- and micro-globalization converged and made it possible for its members to experience daily exposure to people from other nations earlier than in other countries, not within a so-called shrinking world but through physical proximity within the borders of their country.

Numerous playwrights, including Michael Hollingsworth, Judith Thompson, Morris Panych, Jim Garrard, Rick Salutin, Sharon Pollock, Guillermo Verdecchia, Wajdi Mouawad, Drew Hayden Taylor, and Monique Mojica, combine the critical rewrit-

ing of colonial history with the depiction of dramatic characters defined by multiple national allegiances in the attempt to define and re-enact Canada as a particular type of nation in a world of nation-states. Though many theatre scholars have examined the work of Mojica, Verdecchia, Taylor, and others from the perspective of postcolonialism, few have studied Thompson's work in this way. However, her play *Sled*² critically engages with some defining aspects of the colonial and multicultural legacies and, implicitly, of the nation-building project. Developed and produced in the late 1990s, which numerous cultural theorists and historians, including Charles Taylor, Allan Smith, Eva Mackey, and J. L. Granatstein, consider the peak of the English Canadian identity crisis, *Sled* depicts events that span almost a century, employing a magic realist style that combines elements of naturalism and fantasy in a non-linear but clearly articulated dramaturgical structure. The stories are partly re-enacted in front of us and partly retold by the elderly Italian-Canadian Joe, the *raisonneur* of the play, who, in Craig Stewart Walker's words, "carries all the history of his multicultural neighbourhood in his memory" (407).

The tales focus on three families, whose members have different national identities.³ From the perspective of their national identity, Canadians can trace their origins in one of four ways: to Canada's first peoples, the Aboriginal nations; to English and French settler-colonists; to people from all over the world, including slaves, Loyalists, and twentieth-century immigrants; to any combination of the above. As they embody specific variants of these ethnic paradigms, *Sled's* community of characters can be viewed as a metonymy of Canada's imagined community.

Although the perception of this aspect of the play is rather common, the readings are usually centripetal. In his "Foreword" to the printed version of the play, Duncan McIntosh, the director of the 1997 Tarragon production,⁴ notes that most of the audience members interpreted *Sled* "as a metaphor for Canada; a prayer for the dying; an exposé of the hypocrisy of life in the comfortable Northern hemisphere in the late twentieth century; a lament for the loss of our natural language" (8). From a similar perspective, Walker finds in *Sled* "a path traced from the savage and mystical Canadian wilderness to the confusing multicultural reality of Canadian urban life" (409), while Sherrill Grace acknowledges Thompson's epic attempt "to create her image of Canada, from its assumed beginnings to its present precarious position as a nation at the end the twentieth century" (60). In addition, Grace focuses on Thompson's "discursive formation of 'North'" (59) as an

essential part of Canadian identity. Analyzing the first of two emblematic spaces in *Sled*, she identifies the “highly particularized, densely populated, familiar, and historied” (64) neighbourhood where the urban scenes take place, as a metonymic setting, the masculinized “part that represents the whole, where the whole is understood as Toronto, which, in turn, is offered to the audience/reader as representative of civilized, urban, southern Canada” (60). In this context, Grace argues that Thompson’s metaphoric rendition of the North functions as “the Other, a vast, empty, undifferentiated space lying somewhere up there and bearing whatever fantasies and values southerners project upon it” (60). However, Grace’s dual metonymy-metaphor reading of *Sled* indirectly reinforces the paradigm of the colonizer-colonized, assigning the power position to the Western urban culture and the subaltern position to the Native culture.

Integrating the centripetal and centrifugal perspectives suggested by Cavell, I argue that *Sled*’s metonymic depiction of 1990s Canada asserts exile as a shared identity marker determined by globalization. To this end, I distinguish three specific types of exile. First, exile with no qualifiers refers to the physical and cultural displacement of persons who relocate to a country different from that of their birth, including first-generation immigrants. In Thompson’s play, Joe’s Italian-Canadian parents embody this type of exile. Second, internal exile commonly describes the experience of “an individual or group [that] is removed from the immediate surroundings but not expelled from the country altogether” (Forsdyke 7). The internment of Japanese-Canadians during the Second World War and the forced enrolment of First Nations children in residential schools are Canadian examples of internal exile. In *Sled*, Evangeline experiences this type of exile, as the biological daughter of a Cree man who was denied access to her father’s culture and raised by an English-speaking family. The third type is inner exile, which does not imply any physical separation from the geographical territory where one was born. According to Sara Forsdyke, twentieth-century literary critics use this category as “a way of describing the alienation of a writer or artist from his native community” (8). However, it can apply to all those “who, even while present, suffer a sort of internal exile due to their loss of certain abstract attributes of community membership. This condition may entail loss of belief in communal norms or loss of political rights of community membership [. . .] without physical separation from it” (8). Employing a similar perspective, I use inner exile to designate the

experience of individuals who perceive themselves as being exiled, even when they still live in their birthplace and may even be part of the ethnic and cultural majority. For different reasons and to different degrees, all of *Sled's* characters experience and become increasingly aware of this type of estrangement, matching Yana Meerzon's definition of the exilic self "as a temporal and psychophysical venue where cultural contexts intersect" (83). The first part of this study analyzes how colonialism (understood as macro-globalization) and multiculturalism (identified with an official form of micro-globalization) generate the characters' collective exile. The second part investigates some of *Sled's* characters as metonymic representations of the distinct ethnic origins of Canadian citizens and as examples of exile determined by globalization on an individual level. This reading of Thompson's play dismantles the myth of Canada's so-called "exceptionalism."⁵ According to Irene Bloemraad, Canada is one of the very few countries, if not the only one, that welcomes ethnically diverse immigrants because of its specific "immigration-as-nation-building paradigm" (7) supported by its state policies. The ethnic diversity and the exilic condition of *Sled's* characters and implicitly of postcolonial Canadians appear as the unavoidable consequence of globalization, foreshadowing the impending similar state of individuals and groups all over the world as more and more people from different cultures are exposed to each other on a regular basis.

The Northern Lights of Exile

In this analysis of Thompson's re-enactment of the colonial legacy, I identify globalization as one of the main sources of collective Canadian inner exile, because it perpetuates the encounter of cultures whose shared history of imperialism makes them incompatible. Attempting to counterbalance the Western perception of postcolonial Canada, Thompson inscribes the play under the sign of the Native cultures. The selections from *Aurora* by Candace Savage, which preface *Sled*, explain several Aboriginal beliefs, including the myth that the Inuit shaman would travel on a magical sled to reach "the land of the moon, [where] he might meet dead relatives or watch spirits playing ball in the northern lights" (qtd. in Thompson 10). By referencing this story in the title, Thompson frames the play as a bridge between the dead and the living, the native and the foreign, as well as a trans-historical globalized medium where characters, and implicitly audiences, have a chance to

reconsider the colonial past and multicultural present. In the same text that precedes *Sled*, Savage describes the Iroquois legend, according to which the Northern Lights are the spirits of the people who died violent deaths and the aurora is “the entry point into the Land of Souls” (qtd. in Thompson 10). As the Northern Lights appear at the end of the play, welcoming Evangeline’s spirit among them, Thompson retroactively associates the death of her twentieth-century characters with the violent deaths of Aboriginal people, many of whom were victims of colonization. In this way, she resignifies the Northern place where *Sled* starts and ends as the metonymy of the Aboriginal culture, which is once again invaded by white Canadians, repositioning the Natives as internal exiles on their own lands.

Furthermore, the stage directions specify that Volker, the owner of the Pickerel and Jack Lake Lodge, where the characters first meet, has “a German accent” (Thompson 16). In this way, Thompson draws attention to his non-Canadian and specifically non-Native identity. As an immigrant or a foreigner who owns a tourist establishment in Northern Ontario, Volker implicitly performs an act of neo-colonization, which is also consistent with the business strategies of Western-based multinational corporations that open shop in remote parts of the world. In addition, he advertises the place as the “Snowmobiling Mecca of North America!” (29), echoing the homogenized perception of the continent, with Canada shadowed by its Southern neighbour, but also the USA’s position as the major term of comparison in the globalized world. From this perspective, *Sled* depicts the Pickerel and Jack Lake Lodge as a site of neo-colonialism and economic globalization, which intensifies the inherited inner conflicts and alienation, postponing the postcolonial redemption of the past.

However, *Sled* dismantles the stereotypes of the weak colonized and aggressive colonizer. As I will show in the last section of this study, instead of being subdued, the wilderness retaliates, makes the Western intruders, Annie and Kevin, feel alien, and allows and even determines their death when they seek solace or refuge. By insisting on their specific national ancestries, however, Thompson deconstructs the generic image of the colonizers and colonized, reinscribing colonialism as the encounter between Aboriginal and settler cultures, which continues to generate the exilic feelings of their descendants.

Sled also reasserts the heterogeneous ethnic makeup of Canada’s non-Native population as another source of collective

inner exile, which foreshadows the similar effects of globalization. Numerous theorists and historians perceive the ongoing identity crisis and feelings of estrangement of Canadians as the natural characteristic of a former settler/invaser colony and a so-called “country of immigrants,” defined by a “conflicting heterogeneity” (Bannerji 37). Conservative historians such as W. L. Morton consistently state that, “French, Irish, Ukrainian or Eskimo, can be a subject of the Queen and a citizen of Canada without in any way changing or ceasing to be himself” (85). This official attitude towards immigrants was contradicted by the views of both English-speaking Canadians and Francophones who “harboured deep fears about immigration” (Conrad and Finkel 101) from 1900 to the 1950s. According to Conrad and Finkel, this made it impossible for Canada to become “a ‘mosaic’ of different but equal peoples [the subsequent principle of official multiculturalism], or the ‘melting pot’ favoured in the United States. Rather, the nation became a battleground for many cultures trying to establish their place in a rigid social pecking order” (101). At the end of the twentieth century, Bannerji notes that multiculturalism, as an ideological state apparatus, has determined “fractured cultural communities [. . .] organized into competitive entities with respect to each other” (7). It also resulted in Canadian national minorities who look beyond the borders for the definition of their identity in contrast to ethnic groups that search within the borders of a nation-state for their reference. From a diachronic perspective, the so-called ethnic neighbourhoods are some of the most visible embodiments of these state policies. “Little Italys, Little Portugals, Little Budapests [. . .] Little Jerusalems” (Conrad and Finkel 364), and “Chinatowns” have existed since the end of the nineteenth century in Toronto, Montreal, and Vancouver, and became common in other cities after the Second World War. The frequent ethnic conflicts that occurred among communities of different national origins up until the middle of the twentieth century (101) attest to the fact that many first and second-generation Canadians treated and even defended their neighbourhoods as metonymic representations of their homelands. As Thomas H. Eriksen states, this is a common phenomenon among immigrants who even in a globalized world are still “forced to establish webs of security and trust independently of the state in which they live, creating stable minorities with distinct identities” (95).

Thompson evokes this period through a tragic accident in Joe’s family. When he arrived in Toronto, his father had to

renounce his Italian identity, which also meant burying his gun in order to avoid deportation, as a fellow immigrant had advised him: "He tells him if the cops catch you with a gun, you're on the next boat back" (55). However, when he decides "to scare some Irish fellows that were botherin' them at all hours, askin' for whores and for whisky" (49), he digs up the weapon from under the "climbing yellow roses" (49), a symbol of his new home in Canada, which he now destroys. While his uncle is cleaning the gun, it accidentally goes off and kills Joe's father in front of his family: "I saw my father killed by his own brother. Shot through the heart" (49). This tragic accident can be read as a symbol of the immigrants' inability not only to escape but also to retrieve their primary national identity, symbolized by the buried gun, and also of their strong feelings of being different from their fellow Canadian citizens. It also resignifies the Toronto neighbourhood as a distorted representation of a globalized world because, historically, it would have been unlikely for Irish and Italians to engage in direct conflict, as their countries do not border each other.

According to Warren E. Kalbach, the exilic feelings of Canada's population were amplified after the Second World War, when the new regulations for immigrants, refugees, and displaced persons gradually increased the country's ethnic diversity (17-24). Eriksen observes a similar phenomenon in today's world, which creates the need for an official redefinition of national identity: "As cultural similarity as a normative basis for society becomes unrealistic, social cohesion at the level of the territorial state becomes less likely, and the normative and cultural basis of the state needs to be redefined" (95). From this point of view, Pierre Trudeau's policy of "Multiculturalism within a Bilingual Framework" can be viewed as one of the earliest active forms of state intervention to integrate a diverse population into a new model of national identity. It replaced "Britain as a central symbol of Canada" (Mackey 65) and adopted the concept of the "cultural mosaic," in contrast to the American "melting pot," as an essential nation-building strategy.

However, according to Eva Mackey, critics of the new policy argued that it excluded Aboriginal Canadians and also defined acceptable forms of difference (66), implicitly perpetuating "the idea of British Canadians as the 'norm,' in relation to "'multicultural' Canadians" (67), the latter often including the French Canadians. As such, Canadian multiculturalism foreshadowed the third and more intense wave of globalization, which started in



Evangeline (Pamela Matthews) and her half-brother Kevin (Michael Mahonen) in the original Tarragon Theatre production of *Sled*.

Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann

the second half of the twentieth-century, with its simultaneous tendencies to acknowledge and erase cultural difference; unofficially enforce a Western model and economic domination all over the world; and heighten the feelings of exile some national communities start experiencing. Internationally, several critics of globalization perceive it as McDonaldization (Ritzer 100), Coca-Colonization (Wernick 293), or Westernization (Eriksen 5). In

Canada, Cavell ironically notes, “White, British, and liberal was somehow never multicultural, but, rather, just cultural” (87), while Bannerji points out that “these officially multicultural ethnicities, so embraced or rejected, are themselves the constructs of colonial—orientalist and racist—discourses” (9).

Sled exposes the increasing micro-globalization of Canada’s imagined community and subsequently its formal acknowledgment through official multiculturalism as some of the main sources of inner exile, especially in urban communities. At the beginning of the play, in Annie’s song, “Thursday in November,” her description of a walk past “Italian groceries, Korean fruit and flowers, Hungarian deli” (17) presents a multicultural Toronto neighbourhood as an example of globalization. The image of the so-called “ethnic shops” also recalls the belief that official multiculturalism has been eventually integrated into the urban landscape and majority culture mainly through what Mackey, among others, identifies as “folkloric and culinary remnants” (66). Annie’s attitude openly echoes the enthusiastic celebration of multiculturalism, but also its critiques, as her ghost describes how she imagines the future of her neighbourhood in involuntary discriminatory terms. In her imagination, “the kids will play road hockey” (39), an allusion to Canada’s national sport, whereas “the Sikh men will deliver flyers to our door every Sunday” (39), performing a minimum-wage job and relegated to the subaltern status of the “under classes” (Bannerji 42-6), where many of the non-white immigrants find themselves confined. In this way, *Sled* suggests that the so-called minority cultures in Canada are often reduced to exotic alternatives to the dominant Anglo-Saxon norm and placed in a subaltern position, which emphasizes their differences and exilic status.

Although, in the published version of the play, the multiculturalism debate is toned down, Thompson insisted on it during previous drafts. In a 1996 interview, she explains that the “Barbeque Dream” scene,⁶ Jack’s nightmare of a “Welcome Neighbours” party on Clinton Street, and one of the scenes eventually eliminated from the final draft, represents “the politics of the play” (qtd. in Fletcher). Analyzing this scene, Walker concludes that it “uses the Canadian political context to explore the disintegration of social goodwill [traditionally perceived as one of the distinctly Canadian identity markers] into the kinds of xenophobic hostility and violent self-protectiveness that destroy the possibilities of peaceful civilization” (408). The characters’ rejection or acceptance of multiculturalism resemble what Patrick

Loneragan identifies as the “question that dominates considerations of globalization: does that process lead to greater levels of understanding between [sic] societies or does it instead result in cultural homogenization” (5). The characters, who support multiculturalism, and implicitly globalization, perceive it as a solution to ethnic conflicts. The childhood memories of Italian-Canadian Carl, Joe’s son, a character who was eventually cut from the final draft, attest that the relations among Toronto’s so-called “ethnic neighbourhoods” still mimicked those between nation-states, two generations after his grandfather’s accidental death: “When I was young you couldn’t go into any other neighbourhood, other than your own. [. . .] Like, if I was sittin’ here, and my brother and I seen two Irish men walkin up the street, we’d say ‘what in hell are you doing on our street, get the hell off it,’ and we’d be on the phone to our friends and before you knew it ther’d be a fight” (qtd. in Knowles). In the present (late 1990s), however, Carl notes the gradual disappearance of Toronto’s internal borders and of its ethnic homogeneity. Although it could have been an extra source of inner exile for him (“This is not the country I grew up in”), Carl acknowledges the change as a positive development: “In most ways, it’s much better” (qtd. in Knowles). Annie also celebrates Toronto’s multicultural nature, “I love walking down the street and hearing fifteen different languages” (qtd. in Knowles), although, as shown later, she is unable to feel at home in Canada.

During the same scene, other characters aggressively reject the diversification and, implicitly, the micro-globalization of their local and national communities, which makes them feel exiled. As a descendant of the British settlers, Jack feels entitled to reclaim Canada’s cultural and ethnic purity and blames his inner exile on what he calls the “Balkanization” of Toronto: “It’s like Istanbul. My family has been here five generations, I feel like a stranger. A foreigner. I was walking by the Christie bus today and I looked and I listened and there was no English. It’s not my city anymore” (qtd. in Knowles). The results of a 1993 poll, which Neil Bissoondath quotes in his book, *Selling Illusions: The Cult of Multiculturalism in Canada*, confirm that at the time when *Sled* was developed most Canadians “[we]re ‘increasingly intolerant’ of demands made by ethnic groups, and [were] frustrated by ‘the lack of conformity’ in Canadian society” (1). The ethnographic research Mackey conducted in the late 1990s reaffirms the “anti-immigrant and anti-multicultural sentiments” (12) of some of the Anglo-Saxon “Canadian Canadians” (20) who “construct themselves as victims of multi-

culturalism” (20). The mixed feelings towards the multiculturalism of *Sled’s* characters mirror Canadians’ real-life attitudes and set them ahead of other nations in dealing with the increasing diversification of the ethnic make-up of the nation-states.⁷ Through its diversity, Thompson’s re-enactment of Seaton Village becomes a metonymy of contemporary Toronto, which in turn is a metonymy of Canada’s fragmented cultural landscape, and subsequently of the globalized world, often perceived as an exilic place.



Kevin (Michael Mahonen) peers over Annie (Nancy Palk).

Photo: Cylla von Tiedemann

The Individual as an Embodiment of Globalization

Sled's characters metonymically represent the ethnic diversity of Canadian citizens and their conflicted allegiances. They are divided between the Old World and New World cultural legacies, the displacement of Aboriginal people and the guilt of settlers, and/or the estrangement of new immigrants and their cultural conflicts with their Canadian-born children. As I have shown, they are also torn by the transition during their lifetime from the colonial vision of two distinct but homogenous Anglo-Saxon and French collectives to the multicultural and subsequently post-colonial redefinitions of the nation and the daily coexistence with people from all over the world within the state borders of a multinational community. Accordingly, they experience specific types of exile, from the diasporic status of immigrants to the inner exile of Canadian-born characters, and the internal exile of the Aboriginal peoples, displaced on their own lands, determined, in Walker's words, by "a powerful element of human aspiration [that] reaches back, not forward, attempting to retrieve memory and ancestral heritage to complete personal identity" (411).

By insisting on Annie's national identity conflict, Thompson emphasizes that her character's inner exile is the result of colonialism perceived as globalization. In spite of being a sixth-generation Canadian, she is unable to feel at home in this country or to recall English as her mother tongue. Annie's song, "Oh heavenly time of day" (13-4), opens *Sled*, invoking Maeve O'Hara, born in 1791, "my mother's mother's mother's mother's motherrrr" (14), who immigrated to Canada as a young girl. As we find out later in the flashbacks to her discussions with Jack, Annie has an obsessive desire to go back to Ireland, to "look at the graves" and "hear my natural language" (87). Her yearning for the Old World is an inherited exilic condition, which reiterates the similar feelings of many of the early nineteenth-century inhabitants of the British colony, which Richard Plant describes as a manifestation of the settler's "inbred, ever-present desire to return 'home' to the land of his 'parents'" (65). Jack, her husband, points out the fact that she shares it with "about three hundred thousand American tourists a year" (87), who go there for the same reason only to be perceived as foreigners: "They hate you over there. They have no interest in you whatsoever. They don't see you as family" (87). His cynical comments identify Annie as a representative of a North American and, implicitly, a global Irish diaspora,⁸ still longing for their European roots.

In addition, Thompson emphasizes Annie's efforts to integrate her European legacy and Canadian identity. During her walk through the Northern woods, she recognizes that she has never engaged with Canadian space but feels ready to connect with it for the first time: "I've never swam across Lake Ontario. I've never run across the 401. I've never driven across the frozen ice. But I am here" (30). She also has a vision of Maeve and imagines that one of the stars embodying the Iroquois dead ancestors is her spirit. From a postcolonial point of view, her efforts can be read as an expression of territorial nationalism. According to Anthony D. Smith, a nation "conceived of as a territorial *patria*" strives to appropriate the culture of "earlier civilizations [that lived] *in the same place*" (117) in order to compensate for lacking myths and an ancestral history of its own, and to define its colonial/post-colonial identity. Accordingly, Annie's attempt is depicted as a new act of aggression, against which the Aboriginal culture allegorically defends itself. In her dream, the fox she meets in the woods symbolically re-appears in the city, where it bites her, and then "it stands and it stares back" at her (17). Shortly after, Kevin meets and kills Annie in the woods, claiming that he confused her with a moose (31). From a postcolonial standpoint, Penny Farfan argues that "the individual figure of Kevin functions as a monstrous avatar of Canada's history as a settler-invader nation premised on violence from the earliest moment of European contact with the 'new world' and haunted by its violent past through to the present day" (99). From this perspective, Kevin's murder transforms Annie into a victim of colonization despite her European origin. Subsequently, she is not allowed to find peace and join the spiritual community of the Aboriginal ancestors and helplessly witnesses the rest of the play as a ghost. Although she is happy to be part of a multinational community, postcolonial Canada remains for Annie a space of exile in both life and death.

Jack is also a descendant of European settlers but he struggles with another type of alienation; Thompson depicts him as a metonymic embodiment of both the English and French Canadians and a site of their inherited conflict. He also experiences the pressure to embrace the Anglo-Saxon model of identity and renounce claims at cultural and political independence, which some Quebecers, such as René Lévesque, protested after the implementation of Trudeau's policy: "Multiculturalism [. . .] was devised to obscure 'the Québec business,' to give an impression that we are all ethnics and do not have to worry about special

status for Québec” (qtd. in Bissoondath 40). After he was bullied at school, Jack violently denied his French ancestry: “I wouldn’t talk French wouldn’t eat French, if my mother put tortière and sugar pie on the table I would throw ‘em on the floor, ‘You stupid bitch, I want a hamburger and a fuckin’ popsicle, not this frog shit” (42). As an adult, Jack is still unable to negotiate his double ancestry and continues to deny his inner conflict by aggressively identifying himself with the Anglo-Saxon majority: “I have absolutely no desire ever to visit France, or even Quebec. Just because my name is Prevost? And my grandfather grew up in Rimouski? I have nothing to do with those people... No! No! I am this now, THIS” (88; original capital letters). It is particularly relevant that he is not only denying his relationship to Quebec but also to France, indirectly revealing the consciousness of his European ancestry. His attitude points out that similar to globalization, colonialism has historically facilitated the coexistence within the same geographical space of people from different countries. As the site of the historical opposition between two empires, and of Canada’s “international” nature from its inception, to recall Cavell’s perspective, Jack is unable to overcome the desire to be like the dominant Anglo-Saxon majority. Although born in Canada, his attitude is similar to that of the exilic children, who, according to Meerzon, “are bound simultaneously to acknowledge and escape their origins, and perhaps even more seriously to refuse deliberately to accept them” (85). His inner conflict escalates as an adult and transmutes into his violent behaviour as a police officer, husband, and lover.

Whereas Jack and Annie fall victim to their inability to accommodate a dual national allegiance, Joe and Evangeline finds ways to accept it. Drawing on Suki Ali’s *Mixed Race, Post-Race: Gender, New Ethnicities and Cultural Practices* study, Meerzon states that narrative “functions as one of the devices of self-expression and identity maintenance available for exiles. [. . .] Furthermore, to re-establish her lost ties with the homeland, an exile composes a new narrative: the narrative of self as well as the narrative of her new space and times” (93). Joe’s stories of his multi-generational Italian-Canadian family show how its members negotiate their status as immigrants and how they relate to their new country. As previously noted, his father felt more Italian than Canadian. At the same time, his Italian-born mother represented the tendency of many of the early twentieth-century immigrants to conflate Canada with the United States, while landing here because they were denied entry South of the border.

She remained faithful her entire life to the Old World-New World dichotomy and never developed the feeling of belonging to a distinct country: “*America Bella! Si abbandonare a me!*” That’s what she used to say whenever things were fallin’ apart. My mother. I don’t think she ever said the word ‘Canada.’ It was always ‘America.’ ‘*America bella*” (15).

Although born here, Joe’s ties to Canada are not much stronger than his mother’s. He paradoxically perpetuates his mother’s feeling of being betrayed by America, not God, fate or Canada, as he repeats her cry several times, including when Jack tells him about Annie’s death: “*Si abbandonare ah [sic] me*” (59). In his case, inner exile is determined by his hybrid cultural identity but heightened by the xenophobic climate after the Second World War, when worries about the possible effects of a mass migration of non-English people made Prime Minister Mackenzie King openly state that Canadians “do not wish to make a fundamental alteration in the character of their population” (Mackey 52). Although he fought in the Second World War as a Canadian soldier, when he returns home, Joe experiences discrimination because he does not share the religion of the English majority: “You’ll never get a job if you’re Catholic. Not in Toronto. Not in Ontario” (94). His religious conversion has the desired result, “I got the job the next day” (94), but Joe perceives the change as superficial: “to tell you the truth, although I was an Anglican, I was still a Catholic. You always are” (94). This can be read as an example of how immigrants’ exile evolves into a state of inner exile for their Canadian-born children, who are still perceived as outsiders and forced to mask their cultural differences in order to be accepted. As Allan Smith explains, this type of social pressure eventually makes most of the second and third-generation Canadians deny their roots and regard the culture of their ancestors “as something to be brought out and dusted off, rather self-consciously, on special national occasions” (130). In *Sled*, Joe acknowledges his family’s gradual loss of the Italian cultural identity: “I don’t read Italian and I don’t write Italian. But I can speak it. Pretty well. I grew up speakin’ it. [. . .]. I speak Italian when I get together with my brothers and sisters, you know, a mix of Italian and Canadian [. . .]. My children, they don’t speak it at all” (55). Despite Joe’s acceptance of his family’s assimilation into the English-speaking majority, subsequent generations of Joe’s family might struggle with an unresolved, inherited inner exile, dreaming of Italy as Annie dreams of Ireland.

Thompson re-enacts an opposite self-defining process in Evangeline, who is portrayed as a metonym for Canada's Aboriginal communities and an embodiment of the inherited conflict with European settlers. Raised in an English-Canadian family, where she felt alienated (84), and was denied her Cree legacy, unaware of her biological father's identity, she stands as a reminder of the physical and cultural displacement of the Aboriginal children sent to white families and/or residential schools by the state in the attempt to assimilate them into the Anglo-Saxon majority. Unlike Annie, however, Evangeline regains access to the culture and beliefs of her father's ancestors, albeit through secondary sources and specifically Western means: "I studied the stars. The stars and some Cree Songs, a few phrases. I got books from the library" (100). Nevertheless, they suit her spiritual needs. To alleviate her pain and guilt after she kills Jack in order to protect her brother, she does not resort to her mother's Christian rituals, but sings "a Cree song of lamentation" (102) over his body. As Evangeline embodies the ongoing conflict between the descendants of the European settlers and Aboriginals, her choice shows that the Native culture remains stronger than the foreign one and is able to help her overcome both internal and inner exiles.

Annie takes refuge together with Kevin in the mythical space of the Canadian North, not coincidentally the same woods where Kevin killed Annie and Michael at the beginning of the play. Grace reads *Sled's* final scene as a "multiple return [. . . that] signifies reconciliation and transformation held out to us (albeit without conviction)" (62). Accordingly, she explains Kevin and Evangeline's predictable deaths in the Northern woods as a symbol of a "regression (a kind of return to the womb)" (64). In this context, the name Evangeline chooses for her unborn daughter, "Annie Northstar," is "a complex sign—of hope for the future, of reconciliation, perhaps of atonement for Annie's death, and of the verbal completion (and icon) of the play's troping on 'North' [. . .] a symbol of reunion for Evangeline with Kevin and with her Northern Cree roots and heritage, and of culture with nature" (63). To Farfan, however, the unborn child suggests "both a fusion of indigenous and settler cultures and the possibility of re-navigating the history that led to the child's conception, which Evangeline describes as an out-of control ride on a 'runaway sled' [84]" (103).

From the perspective of globalization, however, *Sled's* ending gains a different significance. First, it reveals that, as the result of

bullying, psychological rape, and incest, Annie Northstar would re-embody the colonizer-colonized abusive relationship instead of mediating a peaceful reunion. Second, it paradoxically conveys a sense of optimism. Kevin, Evangeline, and their unborn child are most likely going to die in the woods and be denied the possibility of redemption in real life. However, death means final liberation for Evangeline. She escapes urban Canada, where she is now an outlaw, and regains her symbolic place in the Aboriginal community, welcomed by the spirits of her paternal ancestors: “*Cheepyuk Neemeetowuk*. They’ve finally come for us. Oh. Dancing spirits. Yes. They’re every bit as lovely as you said, Kev” (109). Eventually, *Sled’s* ending also draws attention to Thompson’s own identity as a descendant of European settlers. By avoiding a celebratory or happy tone, she ultimately circumvents reappropriating Aboriginal culture while reaffirming that the peaceful coexistence of distinct nations is not possible if they share a violent past that is yet to be redeemed.

Sled’s metonymic depiction of 1990s Canadians shows that they have experienced the consequences of daily exposure to people from other national communities earlier than the rest of the world. The physical proximity within the borders of their former settler/invader colony anticipated the increasing time-space compression that took place in the second half of the twentieth century in the entire world, when the ethnic make-up of previously homogenized countries started to diversify. It also generated the well-known Canadian identity crisis and feelings of exile and displacement, which Thompson’s characters embody in *Sled*. In this context, the play’s violence becomes an expression of the frequent exilic feelings and fear of the *Other*, which in the real world has led to ethnic-based tensions, as well as civil wars and mass shootings in the name of ethnic purity.⁹ In turn, the real lesson of Canadian so-called “exceptionalism” does not consist of viewing “immigration as nation building” (Bloemraad 14), but of accepting an integrated multinational imagined community as the only way to survive together in a globalized world. ❁

Notes

- 1 In “Circling the Downspout of Empire,” Linda Hutcheon distinguishes between two postcolonial societies. According to her, English Canadian culture referred to as “post-colonial” is, in fact, the culture of the colonial settlers, in contrast to the cultures of the colonized Third World or developing nations because in countries

such as Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, which she identifies as settler/invader colonies, the English language and culture were transplanted to a foreign territory “where the indigenous inhabitants were either annihilated or marginalized” (173).

- 2 A shorter version of this paper, “From Missing Toddlers to Incestuous Sisters in *Sled* (1997) by Judith Thompson,” was presented at the 2009 Canadian Association for Theatre Research (CATR) conference. A much longer analysis of *Sled* is part of my doctoral dissertation, “Poetics of Denial: Expressions of National Identity and Imagined Exile in English Canadian and Romanian Dramas” (2010). My doctoral research was supported by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council. I am also grateful to Professor Richard Plant for his intellectually challenging but caring supervision.
- 3 *Sled* has three plot lines, which intersect periodically. Before the play starts, Kevin decides to return home to Toronto twenty-five years after his babysitter kidnapped him when he was only four years old and raised him as her own son. On his way to Seaton Village, a neighbourhood in Toronto, close to the intersection of Bloor and Clinton streets, he stops at Pickerel and Jack Lake Lodge in Northern Ontario. There, he has a fight with Jack, a policeman, and then, in revenge, kills Annie, Jack’s wife, whom he meets while on a sled ride in the woods. He also kills Michael, his friend who witnessed Annie’s death. Back home, he seduces Evangeline (his half-sister by a Cree man with whom their mother slept before marrying their father), gets her pregnant, and bullies her into a job as an exotic dancer. After Evangeline and Jack become involved, the widowed policeman accidentally discovers that Kevin is his wife’s murderer. Forced to choose between them, Evangeline shoots Jack and runs into the woods with her half-brother. Watched over by the ghosts of their mother and Annie, she peacefully awaits their death, confident that her unborn baby, whom she names “Annie Northstar,” will survive protected by the spirits of her Aboriginal ancestors.
- 4 The Tarragon production of *Sled* received mixed reviews. John Coulbourn of the *Toronto Sun* accused the show of “unfocused writing and lacklustre direction,” accompanied by an “orgy of overacting” (Coulbourn). In contrast, *Now’s* reviewer, Jill Lawless, admirably compared the play to a “contemporary Jacobean tragedy... gothic in its audacity, apt to follow up a murder with a song, the threat of violence with the hope of redemption” (Lawless).
- 5 Bloemraad argues that Canadian exceptionalism is determined by the economic selection of immigrants “through a point system that admits people with skills that are thought to contribute to the economy” (1) and Canada’s geography, which makes it difficult for illegal immigrants to enter and become “a drain on the welfare state” (1). However, she argues that the most important factor is the broader

understanding of immigration “as nation building, backed by supportive institutions and policies” (2). Although there are some Canadians who oppose immigration, according to the polls she analyzes, their numbers are smaller than in other Western countries and have continuously declined since 1975.

- 6 Ric Knowles published the “Barbeque Dream” scene from the Tarragon’s workshop script in *Canadian Theatre Review* 89 (1996) under the title “‘Great Lines Are a Dime a Dozen:’ Judith Thompson’s Greatest Cuts.”
- 7 According to Eriksen the diversification of urban communities has become a more general phenomenon: “While people from 179 countries were present in London according to the 2001 Census—an impressive number—as a matter of fact, 124 languages are spoken only in the southern Oslo suburb of Holmlia!” (94).
- 8 Irish immigrants/descendents are not the only transnational community engaged in this type of nostalgic tourism. Eriksen notes that in central southern Norway numerous converted farmhouses and newly built guesthouses offer an environment and services in an old-fashion style to attract tourists, most of whom are Norwegian-Americans “in search of ‘the authentic’” (99).
- 9 The coexistence of members of distinct national communities within physical proximity has always been challenging. The dismantling of Czechoslovakia in 1993 represents a peaceful solution to the decision of two different national communities to stop living together within the borders of a country, whereas the ethnic wars from former Yugoslavia are the violent alternative. More recently, Anders Behring Breivik, the author of the 2011 Norway terrorist attacks against the government, the civilian population and a Workers’ Youth League (AUF)-run summer camp, “denied criminal guilt, portraying the victims as ‘traitors’ for embracing multiculturalism and Muslim immigration policies” (Anders).

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