

THE HAWEATERS

By

Giovanni Capriotti

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ABSTRACT

“The Haweaters”

“The Haweaters” examines the development of Manitoulin Island, ON, as a colonial micro model upon which Canada and the genealogy of its multicultural archetype were shaped. This is reflected through the country’s modern neoliberal establishment, which advanced first through colonialism, then the industrial revolution and capitalism, and eventually a set of immigration policies, which were redefined by Prime Minister Pierre-Elliott Trudeau’s notion of state multiculturalism. This seven-year photographic endeavour embodies a visual poem under the guise of a photobook – a cautionary tale of a common plight across numerous countries built upon the methodic transmogrification of their colonial legacies. Inspired by Michel Foucault’s notion of historical genealogy, the photobook blends photographs and collages as a key strategy to allegorize the deep relationship between Manitoulin’s unspoken past, traumatized present, and the questionable origin of Canada – too often romanticized through the pioneering epic of “settle and prosper.”

KEYWORDS: *Manitoulin Island, Colonialism, Multiculturalism, Indigenous, Photography*

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

FAIL
WE MAY
SAIL
WE MUST

Andrew Weatherall (1963-2020)

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In loving memory of Simona Boatta and Cristiano Vinciguerra.

GRAZIE
CHI-MIIGWETCH
NAM MYOHO RENGE KYO

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1. SUBJECT DESCRIPTION

i. A Cyclopean Monument of Genealogy I: First Contact

More than two centuries before the official birth of the Canadian Confederation in 1867, when several clusters between the Europeans and Indigenous nations had already started to flourish across “Turtle Island,” the romanticized encounter between a group of brave Jesuits led by Father Joseph Poncet, and Indigenous islanders of Manitoulin, a freshwater island off Lake Huron’s northern shore in Ontario, sanctioned the ideal incipit of a reoccurring and layered pattern of interests and human mobility – a whirlwind of multiple truths picked selectively according to the dominant narratives of the main colonial interlocutors involved. Eventually, spanning multiple sediments of Eurocentric acculturation, the insular outline began, on a smaller scale, to reveal the methodic genealogy that pieced together the Canadian archetype, “progressive creed,” and “moral exceptionalism” praised worldwide.

If at the dawn of the third millennium the “Haweaters oral tradition,” a local legacy, symbolically represents the flap of the butterfly’s wings that caused the perfect storm in a “Nebulous North,” as W.R. Wightman defined the Huronia region in his tome *Forever on the Fringe - Six Studies on the Development of the Manitoulin Island*,¹ the same inheritance was whitewashed through the course of several Eurocentric eras that shifted from colonialism to capitalism – a form of colonial capitalism – under the push of the industrial revolution, and

¹ W. R. Wightman, *Forever on the Fringe: Six Studies in the Development of the Manitoulin Island*. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 3.

ultimately towards neoliberalism – an inherent consequence of the aforementioned macro-genealogy of Canada.

When the emaciated French priests reached a mysterious lake island, known to early Ottawas as “Ekaentoten or Caintonton,”² they quickly renamed it “Isle de Sainte-Marie.”³ Eventually, the now glamorized survival of the missionaries by virtue of Indigenous wisdom, which advised them to consume local haw-berries to prevent scurvy, not only generated the “Haweaters” moniker and legacy, but also became a manifesto for the compassionate nature of Indigenous ancestral teachings and the Jesuits’ historical reputation of adaptability to the traditions and lifestyles of the people they encountered throughout their journeys of redemption.

Indeed, if we replace the epic lens with a factual one, and refocus on Wightman’s “Nebulous North,” all the genealogical Eurocentrism, alongside early traits of Indigenous adaptation, emerge in all their might, to depict the Jesuits essentially as hybrid clerks of the fur trade.

In 1672 Louis de Buades, Comte de Frontenac, Governor of New France, asserted that the Jesuits were more interested in converting beavers than souls.⁴ Truthfully, as stated by Bruce G. Trigger, there was a tripartite relationship between priests, fur traders, and Indians which constituted the foundation for the Huron missions.⁵

² Wightman, *Forever on the Fringe*, 4.

³ Wightman, *Forever on the Fringe*, 4.

⁴ Bruce G. Trigger, "The Jesuits and the Fur Trade," *Ethnohistory* 12, no. 1 (1965): 32. doi:[10.2307/480866](https://doi.org/10.2307/480866).

⁵ Trigger, "The Jesuits and the Fur Trade," 33.

According to Trigger, as the fur trade penetrated west, the sheer size of the Huron confederacy made it apparent that it would dominate this trade, within which, French corn became a critical trading asset for its ability to prevent northern peoples from winter starvation.⁶

Gradually, the Jesuits, through the diplomacy of Samuel de Champlain and in light of the Hurons-French relationship, replaced silently the “coureurs de[s] bois,”⁷ the true clerks of the fur trade – “connoisseurs” and allies of Indigenous nations – with the hope that the priests could fulfil the commercial venture, and possibly assimilate locals into French society. Indeed, the desire to convert an Indian nation, rather than to turn Indians into Frenchmen, was foremost in the Jesuits’ minds.⁸

In the complex picture of a “Nebulous North,” Father Joseph Poncet’s 1648 mission to Manitoulin Island realistically enacted one segment of a ramified acculturation mayhem. However, by 1640 the Huron confederacy was already threatened by the Iroquois league, which had exhausted the supplies of furs in their own territory and began to look around for sources elsewhere, armed with the guns obtained from other southern European colonies.⁹ If we link these belligerent times to the strain of epidemics that affected the Huronia region including Manitoulin, between 1636 and 1640,¹⁰ most certainly the oral tradition recounting a massive fire that burned the entire island assumes an interesting connotation.

⁶ Trigger, "The Jesuits and the Fur Trade," 36.

⁷ Trigger, "The Jesuits and the Fur Trade," 37.

⁸ Trigger, "The Jesuits and the Fur Trade," 39.

⁹ Trigger, "The Jesuits and the Fur Trade," 42-43.

¹⁰ Trigger, "The Jesuits and the Fur Trade," 40.

In 2017, the late Chris Pheasant, an educator and community leader from Wikwemikong First Nation, mentioned to me how several local Indigenous “keepers” classified the island’s epic fire as an act of self-defence against the Iroquois incursions. Nonetheless, Trigger, in his ethnohistory of the Jesuits in Huronia, argues that several groups of priests were blamed for the epidemics (which they most likely carried over from Québec) and accused of witchcraft by the Indigenous nations.¹¹ The Canadian archeologist also validates a radical shift in the fur trade hierarchies favoured by the southern Dutch settlements.¹²

Perhaps a combination of these events allegedly left Manitoulin deserted for almost two centuries, after one last attempt from the missionaries to relocate some of the Hurons fleeing the Iroquois onto the island.¹³ Truthfully, it would be hard to demonstrate the complete absence of humans on Manitoulin for such a significant period of time – perhaps, the unsuitability to agriculture of the island’s swampy and alkaline soil directed much of the early colonial immigration towards more profitable ventures in the Huronia region, shaping one of the first migratory patterns from Europe.

The imagery I have been producing over the course of the past seven years aims to visually allegorize the modern outcome of Manitoulin Island’s development and its layers of acculturation in the elaboration of the framework of the Canadian colonial and multicultural archetype. The scope of this paper is to contextualize those sediments of forced assimilation within a specific macro-pattern – across a genealogical process that, as stated by Michel

¹¹ Trigger, "The Jesuits and the Fur Trade," 41.

¹² Trigger, "The Jesuits and the Fur Trade," 42-49.

¹³ Trigger, "The Jesuits and the Fur Trade," 49.

Foucault, “is gray, meticulous and patiently documentary, and operates on a field of entangled and confused parchments, on documents that have been scratched over and recopied many times.”¹⁴

Soon after Manitoulin’s purifying fire that caused the island’s abandonment (as recounted by Indigenous oral tradition) the fur trade rush reached its peak. French traders were left without their main Indigenous commercial partner, the Hurons, as the Iroquois league partnered with British and Dutch settlers. Interestingly, several Indigenous sacred stories from the Huronia region comprise the history of their people among five main fires, with the fourth one marking the advent of the long-knives and black coats, early trappers, and missionaries, and the fifth corresponding to the nineteenth century period of white settlement, massacres and Indian uprisings, treaties and territorial loss, environmental degradation, removal policies and religious suppression.¹⁵

In order to better determine how the colonial development of Manitoulin Island seemingly epitomizes a reoccurring meta-narrative in the making of the Canadian multicultural ideology, we need to look at the European influx to the Huronia region between the fourth and fifth fires of the Indigenous tradition as a prehistoric form of forced multiculturalism at the expense of Indigenous nations. An era that saw the island officially uninhabited. However, the “Nebulous

¹⁴ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, in *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews*, edited and translated by Donald F. Bouchard (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1980), 139.

¹⁵ Deirdre Keenan, “Stories of Migration: The Anishinaabeg and Irish Immigrants in the Great Lakes Region,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 64 (2007): 358. https://www-jstor-org.ezproxy.lib.ryerson.ca/stable/25472951?seq=5#metadata_info_tab_contents.

North,” depicted by Wightman,¹⁶ remained in constant turmoil fueled by French and British explorers, fur-traders and pioneers making their way out west while laying the foundation of what would become known as the “Metis society.” A very first expression of “diversity,” which according to Indigenous author Jesse Thistle, formed at Red River after 1818.¹⁷

Across roughly 150 years of fairly obscure colonial history, Michel Foucault’s words about genealogy as a practice that requires both knowledge of details and patience to (re)construct those “cyclopean monuments” apparently based upon insignificant truths,¹⁸ become critical, especially if the final goal is to examine a micro pattern such as the development of Manitoulin Island and connect the dots with the present.

Deirdre Keenan writes: “In Wisconsin where I teach, for example, few students know anything about the conditions under which their immigrant ancestors arrived; few know anything about the eleven Indian tribes in this state. Their education has provided only fragments of American Indian history or culture, and rarely does it include local tribes.”¹⁹ I feel confident to support the same statement for Canadian students, where multiculturalism, especially the one fed by humanitarianism, often obfuscates the questionable origin of the country and its colonial legacy.

¹⁶ Wightman, *Forever on the Fringe*, 3.

¹⁷ Jesse Thistle, “Canada: We are a multicultural nation.” Facebook, 18 May 2021, 12.09 p.m., <https://www.facebook.com/thistlejesse>. Accessed 18 May 2021.

¹⁸ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, 140.

¹⁹ Keenan, “Stories of Migration”, 355.

When we scale this paradigm down to Manitoulin, we may observe how the current demographic, roughly half Indigenous, reflects nearly four centuries of forced “sedentarization” and Anglo-Franco acculturation. While “modern settlers” undeniably represent the peak of an arc that moved from “colonial mobility,” through postwar immigration, and has culminated into the multicultural framework ultimately named so by Pierre Elliott Trudeau in his liberal credo.

ii. A Cyclopean Monument of Genealogy II: Manitoulin Island and the Canadian Pangea

If there is one practical reason for which the Canadian Federation exists, that can be ascribed to the War of 1812 between the newly born United States, its Indigenous allies, and the British Crown supported by the Indigenous Nations of the north. The same conflict was critical for the development of Manitoulin Island and its first treaties. Moreover, Indigenous chief Jean-Baptiste Assiginack, also known as “Blackbird,” one of the most celebrated “war heroes,” would later become pivotal in the signing of the controversial McDougall treaty, that opened up the island to European settlement. Departing from this point, my goal will be to scrutinize the role of conflicts, alliances, and rewards to Indigenous nations, in defining Manitoulin’s treaties and more broadly the shaping of Canada, its creed, and immigration policy.

In 2012, then Prime Minister Stephen Harper honoured the bicentennial of the War of 1812 through the following words:

*The War of 1812 was a seminal event in the making of our great country...
June 2012 will mark 200 years since the declaration of the War of 1812—a war
that saw Aboriginal peoples, local and volunteer militias, and English and French*

*speaking regiments fight together to save Canada from American invasion.
The War helped establish our path toward becoming an independent and free country,
united under the Crown with a respect for linguistic and ethnic diversity.
The heroic efforts of Canadians then helped define who we are today,
what side of the border we live on, and which flag we salute.*²⁰

The War of 1812 was able to unite Wightman's "Nebulous North"²¹ against the American invaders – a tripartite Canadian alliance based upon linguistic and ethnic diversity, at least according to Stephen Harper and his conservative government's need for a solid national identity.

Frankly, as stated by Turenne Sjolander: "It had to be difficult to identify the War of 1812 as one of Canada's enduring symbols when the vast majority of Canadians were unaware of the war or why it might be important."²² There are several reasons that prompt us to believe this statement is true: for one, the systematic waves of immigration realistically naive about Canadian history and for another, the seemingly voluntary lack of a school curriculum to address the colonial legacy. Manitoulin Island and its relationship to the War of 1812 become critical to build one of those genealogic monuments cited by Foucault, made by more or less insignificant truths.²³ At the same time my visual work and its supporting research represent perhaps one of the few European voices outside the monotone chorus praising the Canadian multicultural ideology.

²⁰ Claire Turenne Sjolander, "Through the Looking Glass: Canadian Identity and the War of 1812." *International Journal* 69, no. 2 (2014): 152–153. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24709498>.

²¹ Wightman, *Forever on the Fringe*, 3.

²² Turenne Sjolander, "Through the Looking Glass", 155.

²³ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", 140.

When the Treaty of Paris was signed in 1763 following years of conflict, it saw France cede its claim to colonial territories on Turtle Island to Britain.²⁴ The first land surrendering acts were promulgated as a result of the 1783 American Revolutionary War, that caused roughly 30,000 Loyalist soldiers to seek new lots for settlement, alongside the dispossessed Indigenous nations allied with the British.²⁵ The Crown's initial plan necessarily revolved around fostering a solid and peaceful relationship with Indigenous nations. This built upon the bond reinforced through the War of 1812, where Indigenous fighters valiantly distinguished themselves on different battle grounds. However, with an increasing colonial immigration, the pace of land surrenders spiked after the conflict, beside a change in the strategy of the Crown more and more inclined towards transforming Indigenous peoples to a new way of life.²⁶ By the 1830s, only a few pockets of land were still available, including Manitoulin Island, nominally left to Indigenous nations that fought in the war as a reward, practically a place for which to relocate them, since the high demand of cultivable land for new settlers.

Right before the final ratification of the 1836 treaty that sanctioned Manitoulin as an insular Aboriginal refuge, lieutenant Francis Bond-Head warned several Indigenous leaders in the Huronia region:

In all parts of the world farmers seek for uncultivated land as eagerly as you my Red Children hunt in your great forest for game. If you would cultivate your land, it would then be considered your own property in the same way as your dogs are considered among yourselves to belong to those who have reared them; but uncultivated land is like wild animals, and your Great Father, who has hitherto protected you, has now great difficulty in security it for you from the Whites, who are hunting to cultivate it.²⁷

²⁴ Government of Canada, Upper Canada Land Surrenders and the Williams Treaties (1764-1862/1923), accessed October 10, 2021, <https://www.rcaanc-cirnac.gc.ca/eng/1360941656761/1544619778887#uc>

²⁵ Government of Canada, Upper Canada Land Surrenders and the Williams Treaties.

²⁶ Government of Canada, Upper Canada Land Surrenders and the Williams Treaties.

²⁷ Government of Canada, Upper Canada Land Surrenders and the Williams Treaties.

The paternalistic tone of Bond-Head's request to his Indigenous "Children" reveals the very beginning of a colonial attempt to orient Indigenous people towards a sedentary lifestyle, while creating something that plausibly was the precursor to the reservation system. A consolidated practice of the Crown that became the norm in 1850 with the ratification of the Robinson Treaty,²⁸ and eventually culminated in the 1876 Indian Act.

Arguably, Manitoulin Island became the pilot project for years to come, inaugurating a trend of questionable agreements, often manipulated and dishonoured by the Crown itself, eager to fulfill the growing demand for cultivable land to sell or grant to a variegate mix of British farmers. The initial idea, though, was to let the island assume a prominent position in the "Indian order" of the Upper Lakes, as stated by W.R. Wightman, in order to create natural barriers between Indigenous islanders and the evils of white society, so that the missionaries could slowly turn them to Christ.²⁹

Unfortunately, the patriarchal words of Sir Francis Bond-Head turned into facts in 1862, when Manitoulin opened up for settlement after a controversial treaty signed by new lieutenant William McDougall, who envisioned the island "as an agriculturally based stepping-stone, on one hand helping to provision new lumbering and mining areas of Algoma, on the other hand acting as part of a direct transport link between north and south."³⁰

²⁸ Indigenous Foundations, "Reserves," accessed October 11, 2021, <https://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/reserves/>

²⁹ Wightman, *Forever on the Fringe*, 20.

³⁰ Wightman, *Forever on the Fringe*, 57.

According to Statistics Canada, the British Isles were the main source of immigration to the newly-born federation, accounting for 83.6 percent of the foreign-born population in the 1871 Census, or close to half a million people.³¹ The same type of demographic was reflected across Manitoulin's first settlements, despite the conflicting reports about the island soil and subsoil profitability. Truthfully, the need to create a colonial hub and the lack of land for settlers down south, in what would later become southern Ontario, pushed several colonial administrators to inflate the accounts of the island's resources.³²

The arrival of another wave of British acculturation began shaping a new type of settler-Indigenous relationship. After the signing of the controversial McDougall treaty on Manitoulin Island, which was originally conceived as an Aboriginal refuge, the Ojibway and Odawa nations became a pressing issue. Displacement, according to arbitrary or religious principles in the newly born reserves on the island, befitted the norm – the same colonial conduct replicated scientifically throughout the federation at the time.

Wightman describes the two insular eras right after the McDougall Treaty, as “a matter of development.” A first period comprised between 1862 and 1880, saw “oilmen” almost surpass settlers, due to the speculation of black gold in the island's subsoil.³³ Whereas the decade between 1880 and 1890, earned Manitoulin the label of “the prosperous colony.”

³¹Statistics Canada, “150 Years of Immigration in Canada,” accessed October 18, 2021, <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016006-eng.htm>

³² Wightman, *Forever on the Fringe*, 57-72.

³³ Wightman, *Forever on the Fringe*, 72.

Indeed, between 1862 and 1890, Manitoulin Island began to epitomize what is stated in the introduction: the small-scale elaboration of the Canadian archetype, based upon an evolving poly-ethnic social fabric as a source of labour. Nominally, agriculture and lumbering became two colonial ventures to pursue at any cost, even in locations practically unsuitable for that, such as the island, which was sold to settlers as a rural paradise, though it was only acting as a mere naval hub in the Great Lakes region, to support the construction of a northern railway.³⁴ The practice of outnumbering Indigenous people with Britons first, and eventually with all sorts of Europeans, became the leading colonial strategy for that period and years to come, on Manitoulin and across an expanding Canadian confederation.

This age realistically corresponds to the fifth fire of Indigenous epic.³⁵ It was a dark epoch when rituals and ancestral culture went missing, alongside Indigenous languages forcefully replaced by English. The role of the Jesuits on Manitoulin Island was once again central. If first contact contributed to depict the missionaries as redemption explorers, two centuries later, the making of the McDougall Treaty saw them as strong allies of Indigenous islanders.³⁶ Moreover, this new phase rendered the priests virtually as the executioners of Indigenous identity in the name of God – the religious wing of Sir John Alexander MacDonald’s assimilation policies.

Since the early days of “long knives” and “black coats,” the boundaries of the “conversion landscape” were always blurred by the historical push for dominance in the new world between

³⁴ Wightman, *Forever on the Fringe*, 94-97.

³⁵ Keenan, “Stories of Migration”, 358.

³⁶ Wightman, *Forever on the Fringe*, 72-73.

the Roman Catholic and the Protestant churches – a rivalry that served for centuries to hide the triviality of colonial interests in the presence of a hyper religious European society. The advent of Canada’s first Prime Minister, Sir John A. MacDonald, instead set the foundation for a productive armistice between the two leading belief systems, in order to assimilate Indigenous youth into the core values of the old continent.

If the leaders of Wikwemikong, the largest Indigenous community on Manitoulin, refused to sign the 1862 Treaty, maintaining the status of unceded Indian territory to the present day, this is likely due to the work of the Jesuits on the island, and their concept of “Indianized Christianity.”³⁷ This approach initially fostered trust between the priests and the mostly Roman Catholic Wikwemikong inhabitants. Upon returning to Manitoulin after the 1648 stint, the Jesuits’ agenda was first to provide a good school, then a church, and, finally, a farm. According to the missionaries, farming was critical for Indigenous islanders to officially own property on the island.³⁸ Basically, it was the same paternalistic exhortation expressed by Lieutenant Francis Bond-Head, in the message to “his Indian children.”

The first cracks in the relationship between the missionaries and the community of Wikwemikong showed up fueled by the day school didactic and methodology, a universe that began manifesting a sidereal distance from Indigenous ancestral tradition. This, eventually, led to a malicious fire at the girl’s school in the village.³⁹ Finally, the ratification of the 1876 Indian

³⁷ Theresa S. Smith, "The Church of the Immaculate Conception: Inculturation and Identity among the Anishnaabeg of Manitoulin Island," *American Indian Quarterly* 20, no. 3/4 (1996): 517.

³⁸ Jennifer N. Harvey, “Landscapes of Conversion: The Evolution of the Residential School Sites at Wikwemikong and Spanish, Ontario” (Master’s thesis, Laurentian University, 2019), 109.

³⁹ Harvey, “Landscapes of Conversion”, 130.

Act, and the consequent inclusion of mandatory education in the treaties, pushed the Jesuits to move their pedagogical effort in the town of Spanish, on Lake Huron's northern shore. This was a sort of punishment towards the Indigenous islanders who did not appreciate their work, and the idea that removing Indigenous children from home would have helped to indoctrinate them better.⁴⁰ The decision certified the official beginning of the residential school system, with the Jesuits that abandoned the pursuit of an "Indianized Christianity" in favor of a full-blown assimilation of Indigenous youth into the European values, as envisioned by governmental policies. Once again, Manitoulin Island represented a significant pilot project for a strategy that would shape the future of Indigenous nations in Canada.

When society collapsed, as predicted by the five fires of the Indigenous epic, another was reborn, which was mostly composed of British settlers. The beginning of the new century saw Manitoulin slipping into a quiet backwater of public interest, with the attention moved to the far north and its spectacular mineral discoveries.⁴¹ Nevertheless, the implementation of mandatory European education among Indigenous children, and the systematic annihilation of their culture, began sowing the rotten seeds of intergenerational trauma, whose epigenetic markers still affect the social fabric of Manitoulin's Ojibway people, as well as many Indigenous nations across Canada.

As the winds of war commenced to blow on a young Canadian Confederation, much of the oppressed Indigenous population, then brutally classified as a faunistic minority by colonial

⁴⁰ Harvey, "Landscapes of Conversion", 134-135.

⁴¹ Wightman, *Forever on the Fringe*, 140.

standards, saw the act of joining the Canadian Expeditionary Force both as a chance to earn three guaranteed meals a day and a pair of boots, and to re-establish the importance of Indigenous nations for Canada.⁴² According to the 2019 Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs, around 10,000 Indigenous individuals served in the two world wars.⁴³ Manitoulin Island accounted for 208 units in the two conflicts.⁴⁴

Much has been debated about Indigenous soldiers, with the aforementioned report intended to address the federal-level injustice and disparity of treatment among veterans. The concession of Canadian citizenship to Indigenous nations, alongside the rigid application of colonial policies to deprive Indigenous fighters of their status, despite their loyalty, was a modest sop to the discriminations that First Nations combatants had to face. However, the federal government, with what looked like a strategic move in the grand scheme of assimilation, loosened up some of the restrictions on Indigenous ceremonies and gatherings imposed by the 1876 Indian Act. Wikwemikong, the only Unceded Territory on Manitoulin Island, hosted one of the first pow wows in Canada in 1961, after years of enforced prohibition.

Substantially, Manitoulin's current era began to take root in the years after World War II, with the agricultural dream virtually dropped in the first two decades of the new century, and the postwar depression that placed the final hit on an ever-overestimated venture on the island.

⁴² House of Commons/Chambre des Communes, *Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs*, by Neil R. Ellis Chair, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/ACVA/Reports/RP10301835/acvarp11/acvarp11-e.pdf>

⁴³ House of Commons/Chambre des Communes, *Report of the Standing Committee on Veterans Affairs*, accessed October 21, 2021.

⁴⁴ Jeff Schlingloff, *Aboriginal Veterans Tribute - Manitoulin Island*, accessed October 31, 2021. https://www.vcn.bc.ca/~jeffrey1/AVT_MI.htm

Nonetheless, immigration with the purpose of occupying land and reinforcing Canadian sovereignty, continued across the confederation assuming a different demographic connotation. According to Statistics Canada, immigrants from the British Isles led the way at least until the beginning of the 1990s, but a growing eastern and southern European stream paired arrivals from all over the world, with eastern Asians topping among the non-Europeans.⁴⁵

Manitoulin saw its non-Indigenous population grow from 8,000 to 8,500 in the years going from 1930 to the onset of Pierre Elliott Trudeau's time in office as Prime Minister. Whereas Indigenous islanders remained at around 2000.⁴⁶ Some newcomers reflected the eastern and southern European migratory trend; however, what was left on the island comprised only commercial fishing, limited cattle farming and a tourism industry that benefited from Manitoulin's summery rural oblivion but suffered from the long rigid winters. The transformation of Ontario, and eventually Canada, into an urbanized society, finally inaugurated the economic diaspora of the younger generations born and raised on Manitoulin, and paved the way for a "senior gentrification," of the island, currently more and more resembling a retirement community or a real estate paradise, while its underbelly sits lacerated by a depressed economy, chronic unemployment, an opioid crisis, educational challenges, and endemic Indigenous intergenerational trauma.

Countless versions of Manitoulin Islands are scattered across Canada. Such are the communities that served to occupy the confederation's territory while confining Indigenous nations in

⁴⁵ Statistics Canada, "150 Years of Immigration in Canada".

⁴⁶ Wightman, *Forever on the Fringe*, 175-176.

designated pockets of land. Areas that needed development and labour were eventually abandoned once deemed to be non-lucrative. Layers of acculturation have continued and continue to accumulate silently on top of what can arguably be considered the Pangaea of the country and its colonial legacy, wisely hidden behind a multicultural creed – Manitoulin, a broken island in the heart of a shattered Huronia region, where the Canadian archetype originated but fears to look back.

iii. Exploring the Plurality of Truth: A European Photographer’s Dilemma

Back in 2010, little did I know that a random deviation from the Trans-Canada highway would lead me into the veins of Canada’s worst kept secret. My knowledge of Indigenous cultures, most likely shaped by my Eurocentric upbringing, was basic and immensely overshadowed by the Canadian benevolent multiculturalism hype. It took a stop at an Indigenous-owned gas station, along the road that by chance led me to Manitoulin Island, where I encountered Indigenous culture for the very first time, and the colonial nomenclature that yet regulates it in Canada.

Several years later, my photojournalism background kicked in with all its might, fed by my genuine desire to possibly tell untold stories, or the ones that media generally overlook or sacrifice to the motto “If it bleeds, it leads.” Perhaps, this impulse was unconsciously the very first one fueling my photographic research. Moreover, my initial return to Manitoulin dressed as a professional image-maker, happened under the guise of an editorial assignment, for which I

had to spend time with an Indigenous family from Wikwemikong, the largest reserve on Manitoulin Island.

That was the gateway to the intricate network of connections I have built on the island throughout the past eight years. Undeniably, the very first steps of this long journey all revolved around the strenuous research of everything that could inform a Canadian perspective, while my embedded Eurocentrism involuntarily kept my focus away from those apparently insignificant truths that Michel Foucault cites as the basis of any genealogical project.⁴⁷

After a promising beginning, which met all the canons of photojournalism, I hit a snag in late 2015. Despite going to Manitoulin frequently, for nearly two years I felt I was unable to produce any photographs that would be relevant in terms of broader readability. Instead, I began organically cementing my relationship with several islanders whom I had always classified as contacts, while scratching the surface of a wounded social fabric. This fed my love and curiosity about the island, above and beyond its exoticism, rural charm, or Indigenous vs “redneck” stereotypes.

Italian filmmaker Gianfranco Rosi, in an interview with Emma Wilson obtained during Rosi’s residency at Cambridge University, stated that the purpose of his films is not to inform, as we have enough data about reality, plenty to crush our perceptions and emotions. Rather, he points out that “The twenty words of a poem, with their blanks, their silences, and the margins of

⁴⁷ Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History”, 140.

interpretation therein, can tell much more than the 20,000 words of an essay.”⁴⁸ I feel I can apply the same idea to my work on Manitoulin Island. Indigenous crises have filled pages of dailies and been run across all the main Canadian media outlets; yet the issue is not perceived as part of the multicultural equation by both generational and recent Canadians. The “collateral colonial damages” appear to be obliviously accepted as the necessary compromise that created wealth across the modern neoliberal confederation.

As an outsider, I have always been torn between taking a visual journalism approach, as opposed to a less linear one. Part of my insecurity arises from the necessity not just to make generations of Europeans accountable for colonialism, but at least render them aware of this legacy – whose consequences shaped disparity and White supremacy.

Since the summer of 2017, I have changed the approach of my photographic research on Manitoulin. The purpose was to deconstruct the island’s social dichotomy through mundane aspects, historical metaphors, and apparent contradictions while a silent assimilation advances inexorably. I deliberately refrained from the pursuit of a “crisis” narrative and the stereotypes often associated with Indigenous and economically depressed communities. Instead, I looked for images allegorizing the untold tale of coexistence on the island, and the common challenges along the blurred lines of neocolonialism, multiculturalism, and Indigenous blood thinning - as

⁴⁸ Emma Wilson, “From Lampedusa to the California Desert: Gianfranco Rosi's Scenes of Living and Dying,” *Film Quarterly* 71, no.3 (2018): 10-20. doi: <https://doi.org/10.1525/fq.2018.71.3.10>

the post-Truth and Reconciliation era continues to bolster the Canadian liberal reputation worldwide.

Within a visual narrative highly driven by a combination of imagery and direct testimonials, the genesis of the pictures emerges organically from the islanders' tales, who are always eager to share their perspective, but never fond of being interviewed. After long nights spent sleeping in the back of my car or the occasional couch in somebody's house, I realized I could sit in front of nobody with a voice recorder. Rather, I had to make myself vulnerable, acknowledge my default Eurocentrism, and genuinely experience the island's duality.

As the plot thickened beyond Manitoulin's romanticism, I was left with a fragile microcosm shattered by the past, seduced by modernism, and abandoned by dominant culture, within which I felt my purpose was to turn into visuals the words, thoughts, poetry, and documents that substantially compose a lyrical map of Eurocentric modernity.⁴⁹ In no way were the images created to inform or illustrate a linear and often desensitizing narrative, as Rosi explained about his work. Instead, each still aims to dig into the mundane inevitability of compromise and its alternating yin and yang.

Ultimately, the visual fragments that I have collected compose the smaller scale jigsaw puzzle of modern Canadian society, piecing together its religious and colonial beginnings with remnants of the industrial revolution and the rush of capitalism. The same process that, repeatedly renewing

⁴⁹ In this paper, the notion of modernity refers to *European* modernity first and foremost. A historical trajectory that unfolded through Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution and world wars, to culminate in the current synergy of politics, industrialization, and neoliberal socioeconomics, which regulates dominant cultures.

itself, fostered and nurtured the country. If the islanders' direct testimonial fueled the representation of the small-scale effects of some of the patterns in the development of Canada, the resulting images are nothing other than visual impulses to unveil the forced invisibility of its origins to contemporary multicultural Canadians and Europeans.

I am aware that within academia and the art of trialing, most of the time, the maker's purpose, my position into this multi-year exploration might be considered incredibly relevant from an epistemological standpoint. To clarify this aspect of my work, I refer to a passage from

Aristotle's *Metaphysics*:

All men by nature desire to know. An indication of this is the delight we take in our senses; for even apart from their usefulness they are loved for themselves; and above all others the sense of sight. For not only with a view to action, but even when we are not going to do anything, we prefer seeing (one might say) to everything else. The reason is that this, most of all the senses, makes us know and brings to light many differences between things.⁵⁰

The “desire to know” materializes the first appealing factor that drew me into this project.

Notoriously, Europeans have always held, by historical default, paternalistic feelings towards Indigenous cultures – an attitude that delves its roots into a blatant sentiment of superiority.

Magnum photographer and prolific writer, Stuart Franklin, writes in his book, *The Documentary Impulse*, that in many cases the colonized is viewed less as a person - a fellow human being, and more as a type commodified as curiosity.⁵¹ My purpose in this project is to de-commodify that curiosity and steer it towards the glitches of modernity, within which a poly-ethnic state, built upon imported labour, becomes the epitome of progressivism, while its ongoing development is still entrenched in a rooted colonial legacy and the systematic neoliberal abandonment of

⁵⁰Aristotle, *Metaphysics, Book I*, accessed November 13, 2021, <http://classics.mit.edu/Aristotle/metaphysics.1.i.html>

⁵¹ Stuart Franklin, *The Documentary Impulse* (London; New York, NY: Phaidon Press, 2016), 34.

exploited communities. The delight that I am taking in my sense of sight, to circle back to Aristotle's statement and my photographic endeavour, serves literally the purpose of bringing to light the difference in things.⁵² Especially those selectively picked by the dominant culture as pillars of truth. Purposely, my aesthetic aims to lyricize those differences, resisting the overpowering academic rhetoric that instead dismisses beauty and poetry as spectacular acts.

⁵² Aristotle, *Metaphysics*.

2. DOCUMENTARY RELEVANCE

Over the years, I have increasingly questioned photographic practices that observe passively. If, on one hand, I would need several thousand words to dismantle Susan Sontag's "capitalist-Marxism," I must admit, on the other hand, that her reflections on the inaction behind the act of photographing is painfully true. However, retreat strategies or alternatives, at times bizarre ones, have not provided, in my opinion, a way to create value through the documentary photography medium other than that related to the newsworthiness or historical relevance of the projects – two factors often assessed selectively and revealing the tripartite relationship between power, truth, and communication. I wholeheartedly believe that much of the documentary relevance of this project revolves around the ability to conjugate my poetic imagery with the irregularity and fractures of history, which is reflected by the development of Manitoulin Island into the formation of the Canadian archetype.

If my purpose in this endeavor becomes to somehow elucidate the genealogy of the multicultural metanarrative, or the irregular path that led to the present, once I will input this lyrical research-creation into the world as a photobook, I am convinced that it will be able to offer a type of broader visual readability, that in many cases seems to have gone missing when solely watching effects over causes.

Unfortunately, the "breaking news culture" has generated several 'allegedly similar' projects around Indigenous-settlers' relationships, none of which digs into the ramified historical roots. Instead, the tendency is to contemplate the sublime inevitability of capitalism and its status quo.

It is therefore complicated for me, to find something I can relate to within much of the Canadian lens-based documentary scene.

Despite being Italian, I have only recently encountered Gianfranco Rosi's films. I remained fairly impressed with his Lampedusa documentary, *Fuocoammare (Fire at Sea, 2016)*. In several interviews Rosi reiterated how the goal of his films is not to inform. There is already a lot of information available about migratory fluxes transiting through Lampedusa, which is the topic of *Fire at Sea*. People have grown incredibly desensitized in the face of such an immense tragedy unfolding in their backyard. Yet, Rosi found a poetic way to depict a distant closeness of fellow humans in "different boats." The Italian filmmaker was indeed able to shape his strategy through long periods spent on the Mediterranean island, which fostered an in-depth relationship with islanders, and rather did not render him as an educated outsider, but as an active listener.

I feel there are several analogies between my work and that of Rosi, beyond the fact that we both fell in love with an island and its dwellers. If we look at the visual narratives about the origin of Canada, and its Indigenous nations, we tend to find an organic and often misinformed tendency to cover crises between settlers and Indigenous people. Little or no attention appears to be dedicated to the inevitable intersection of two worlds across a seemingly untold history and within a current mundane psyche of a trauma, both intergenerational and modern. These are the stories that nobody is interested in, the non-bleeding plots buried under the inevitability of compromise and the numbing effect of informational patterns.

As did Rosi, I sensed that I needed to lyricize the distant closeness between the Indigenous peoples and settlers on Manitoulin Island, in order to speak to Canadians and Europeans, which appear to be anesthetized by the progressive framework of the country – the same one that in an urbanized era persists in a collective amnesia with respect treaties, Indigenous reserves, and rural communities.

Most likely, the snag I hit in 2015 helped me turn into an active listener, a non-obtrusive one – like Rosi did on another island thousands of kilometers away. If the critique about his film revolves around the long screen time he dedicated to the islanders as opposed to the much shorter picturing of migrants, in my case I have often been asked: “Are you photographing only Indigenous people?” A legitimate interrogation, to which I replied by enunciating the purpose of my visual allegories and metaphors.

The idea of the photobook format derives in fact from my naive impression of allowing the viewership to access the tome more than once, making most of the object and its quick accessibility. Whereas in Rosi’s film, the symbolism is perhaps intended to leave each spectator with their own unique interpretation. Something that could happen with my book as well. I confess I rely heavily on the collectability of photobooks, to help viewers slowly decipher the visual codes that my imagery carries.

Some similarities with my approach, especially in terms of positioning and role within Canada’s post-nationalism, can be found in Ali Kazimi’s seminal film *Shooting Indians* (1997), made in collaboration with Six Nations photographer Jeff Thomas. Across the entire documentary, the

author brilliantly challenges his immigrant status on colonial land and the mainstream perception of Indigenous identity buried at the bottom of the multicultural pyramid.

I believe I had the same kind of impulse back in 2010, when I randomly discovered Manitoulin Island on an old paper map, and took a diversion on the Trans-Canada Highway, that, I must admit, profoundly influenced my direction as an image-maker.

More than everything else, my fortuitous stop at an Indigenous-owned gas station on the way to the island - when, ingenuously and jokingly, I flaunted my Italian heritage mentioning Christopher Columbus - in a less intellectual way, resembled what Kazimi declares at the beginning of his film: “I am one of the Indians that Christopher Columbus was supposed to discover, now I am taking advantage of Canadian multiculturalism on the ‘other Indians’ land.”⁵³

“I come from the land of the man that discovered all this,” I risked saying to the Ojibway lady at the gas station, after she had just finished explaining to me “a few details” about the Canadian colonial nomenclature. I could not afford to let that interaction go by without any reflection. So, I did not. As Kazimi, I started befriending both Indigenous and non-Indigenous islanders, in an exchange and bilateral learning process, and I felt I could translate into photojournalistic imagery. Eventually, while I was peeling off the many layers of acculturation piled atop Manitoulin’s identity, as the Indian filmmaker subtly did in his shots and sequences, I began thinking about each one of my photographs as paragraphs of an essay. A visual one that could

⁵³ Jafri Beenash, "Refusal/film: Diasporic-Indigenous Relationalities." *Settler Colonial Studies* 10, no. 1 (2020): 7.

generate inferences about Manitoulin's untold history and present, in a barrage of allegories inspired by the literary style of Dante, envisioned through a collaboration between me and the constituency of this endeavour.

In reviewing *Shooting Indians*, Beenash Jafri, in the contest of the relationality between Indigenous identities and diasporic ones, highlights a scene in which Indigenous photographer Jeff Thomas is filmed in Toronto, walking through a deserted Kensington market.⁵⁴ Kazimi purposely filmed Thomas in the early morning as he did not want the Six Nations man to be swallowed by the "multicultural vibe" of the location reflected by its daily crowd. This was intended as a metaphor for the reaffirmation of the land's true identity and a refusal of the logic that uses humanitarian multiculturalism as means to align with settler power.⁵⁵

Personally, I believe I did something similar in my book. I deliberately kept images of regalia and traditional outfits to a minimum, to avoid an essentialist depiction of modern Indigenous nations, or a representation too globalized, due to the American filmography of cowboys and Indians. Kazimi himself candidly admitted that his knowledge about Indigenous culture originated from Hollywood.

Indeed, I only used two images where the subjects wear regalia: the first one, featuring an elder that accompanied me in the bush to help me find a natural remedy for my kidney stones, and eventually felt he had to pay respect to his ancestors in an old cabin. The second one shows a

⁵⁴ Beenash, "Refusal/film: Diasporic-Indigenous Relationalities," 11.

⁵⁵ Beenash, "Refusal/film: Diasporic-Indigenous Relationalities," 3.

young woman associating a traditional jingle skirt with a Christian cross. Both images are metaphorically relevant and aim to push the viewership to reflect upon the intersectionality of identity, acculturation, and settler power.

From an aesthetic point of view, instead, several affinities and common visual languages can be identified in the work of fellow Italian photographer Davide Monteleone, who, in his hard-to-find book *Dusha*,⁵⁶ allegorically documented the intricacies of remote Russian provinces struggling with identity. Similarly, Magnum Agency member Carolyn Drake also used metaphors to address the multifaceted central Asian past and its political manipulation through her influential work *Two Rivers*.⁵⁷

The use of visual allegories, for years deemed a sacrilege by the linearity of photojournalistic standards or employed by artsy photographic practices to support a questionable aesthetic, becomes crucial in my practice as a method to shape the readability of images. As an avid photo bookmaker and collector, Keith Smith's notion of "random referrals"⁵⁸ is expanded in my process to include as many hints as possible in order to capture different levels of the viewership's imagination and facilitate discovery of new details with each viewing of the book - a physical object that makes up for a vehicle of reflection every time it is accessed. A strong and captivating aesthetic though, as in the case of Monteleone and Drake, serves to iconize and set the poetical tone of a narrative, too often swallowed by the urbanized development of Canada and its multicultural meta narrative. In a way, the same thing happens in Monteleone's rural

⁵⁶ Davide Monteleone, *Dusha: Russian Soul* (Rome: Postcart, 2007).

⁵⁷ Carolyn Drake, *Two Rivers* (Amsterdam: Carolyn Drake, 2013).

⁵⁸ Keith A. Smith, *Structure of the Visual Book* (Rochester, NY: Keith Smith, 1984), 5.

Russia and Drake's former soviet republics, both regularly forgotten and crystallized under perestroika winds, or revamped by independence claims and neoliberal exploitation.

If other image makers' similar approaches can result into a form of validation for the sense of documentary purpose of this project, the frequently non-empirical nature of these arguments, which seemingly blur the lines of philosophy and politics, leaves me oriented toward finding a societal *raison d'être* for my endeavour.

Judith Butler's notion of bioethics,⁵⁹ inspired by Michel Foucault's work on biopolitics, provides an experiential basis and the perfect grounding for my arguments. The blatant disparity of life's "grievability" is endemic across the planet. However, the neoliberal ecosystem of documentary practices and media tends, in my opinion, to manipulate the same concept through the habit of investigating issues further from the dominant culture's epicenter, while still classifying them in terms of importance and life's "grievability." This trend is somehow both an embedded communication artifice and a humanitarian exercise geared toward deceptively rebalancing the global value of life, nevertheless serving in many cases to rewrite history through the inevitability of compromise. North America, for example, holds several memorials of genocides and tragedies that happened abroad, but not even one about the victims of its colonial past – an oxymoron that leads us straight back to Foucault's theory about communication, power, and truth.

⁵⁹ Judith Butler, *The Force of Nonviolence: An Ethico-Political Bind* (London: Verso, 2020), 1.

Do we always need a far-reaching crisis to shed light on the ‘virtually unacceptable’ colonial legacy of a country still hiding behind its poly ethnic laborism?

3. METHODOLOGY

One of the main concerns I had in drafting this paper revolves around making it work in synchronicity with my photographic work. The concept of opening my book at a random page and yet making that point readable to everyone as the incipit of a comprehensible visual statement aims to be reflected even in this paper. Ideally, the words I write coexist with my work of seven years, rather than merely support it – acting as a joint venture that finds its roots in Natalie Loveless' notion of balance between research and creation,⁶⁰ while summoning up and visualizing Michel Foucault's genealogy process.

Research plays a major role in this multi-year exploration. Moreover, it provides a practical and intellectual grounding for the methodology used to develop this body of work. Without the collections of those partially “insignificant facts and events” elucidated in the description of “The Haweaters,” most likely all the visual effort would succumb to its aesthetic, or perhaps exotic charm. The leading purpose of the book is to generate open enquiries, as opposed to the closed ones that normally arise from the sublime contemplation of modernity.

Certainly, looking back at the dawn of my process, I did not know much about Michel Foucault's work, even if my meticulous collection of vernacular “off-beat moments’ of the island and its

⁶⁰ Natalie Loveless, *How to Make Art at the End of the World: A Manifesto for Research-Creation* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 1-18.

dwellers resembles the gathering of those meaningless details that the French philosopher considers as the basis of genealogy and its cyclopean monuments.⁶¹

What I was missing was the current scientific synchronicity between the development of the visual project and the discovery of new details. I was, however, silently absorbing the multilayered reality of Manitoulin Island's social fabric and history, which were astonishingly at the core of the Canadian Pangaea.

i. Photojournalistic Beginning

Back in 2011, I met Ocean Pheasant, a transgendered woman from Wikwemikong First Nation, Manitoulin Island's largest reserve, at an HIV research conference in Halifax, NS. I was immediately captured by Pheasant's larger-than-life experience. We stayed in touch and, in 2014, I asked if I could photograph them and pitch their story to the *Toronto Star*. As the idea got the thumbs up from *The Star*'s editorial team, I was invited to visit Pheasant and their family on Manitoulin. Relentlessly, I accepted the invitation and spent ten days in Wikwemikong, at the residence of Pheasant's older brother, Jerome. The middle-aged Ojibway man was immediately interested in explaining his culture and tradition to an Italian photographer. Furthermore, during one of our rides around the island, he drove by an islander of Italian descent named Gino Cacciotti. The man, who has proudly lived off the grid since then, invited us to his home, a

⁶¹ Foucault, "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History", 140.

former school from the 1960s, in the heart of Manitoulin's agricultural oasis. Cacciotti, a Sudbury native, bought the dilapidated building at the beginning of the 2000s, and with time created a family and adopted a child from Lithuania, while maintaining the same lifestyle.

It would feel reductive to classify Jerome Pheasant and Gino Cacciotti as two "contacts"; however, at the beginning they acted as such. As time went by, they became the point of access to Manitoulin's social dichotomy and intersectionality of cultures. I began photographing extensively with both, always following the same pattern, riding on the island's less travelled roads, or going in the bush while engaging in long conversations about Canada's origins. My idea was to render these exchanges into images, on the spot or later. In fact, it was not uncommon for all of us to go back to the same place repeatedly or because of my specific request. Every time I felt a location meant more than its physical space, I would revisit the spot to make a new "broader picture."

Much of this process, at the early stages, was still fed by the photojournalistic logic of finding and publishing as many stories as possible. This drive, paired with Gino Cacciotti's help, led me to the door of *The Manitoulin Expositor* editor and publisher Alicia McCutcheon, who accepted my proposal to intern at the paper in April 2015.

Once again, the editorial world opened wide several of the island's doors. Over the course of an intense month inside a tiny but bustling newsroom, I was able to grasp more deeply the fragile balance existing among islanders, and how to handle it from a communication and representational standpoint. However, I was presented to an unknown universe made of proud

“Haweaters” and modern settlers, with little or marginal interest in untold history. Everybody held their own epic motivation to inhabit Manitoulin. Honestly, almost every islander I have encountered harbors their own grand perspective on the island. A melting pot of cultural sediments, that continue piling on top of each other, burying Manitoulin’s true soul.

When I was allowed on board some local fishing boats owned by a family whose legacy on the island dates back to the late 1800s, the temptation to pursue the magnificent inevitability of compromise was high. I knowingly fell to it. I received a huge publication for this story epically titled “Last of the Great Lakers,” alongside a couple of awards. However, I was slowly becoming aware of the majestic historical iceberg that sat underwater. Something that would ideally unveil the true link between communication and power, repeatedly addressed by the complexity of Foucault’s epistemologies.

I truly believe we can all lie to third parties, but not to ourselves. As photographers our images reflect who we are and the individual perception of reality we might have. To this point, among the pictures that compose this photo story there is one, specifically, that represents a critical turning point in my methodology. At the end of one of those boat rides, as the crew was releasing fish guts into Lake Huron, a large flock of seagulls landed on the water to get its share. I was quick at making the picture. I would say one of the most iconic in my book.



Christopher Columbus sensed he was close to dry land when seagulls began flying around his caravels. I photographed that flock off the Providence Bay coastline. According to Manitoulin's oral tradition, Indigenous islanders used to call the bay Bebekodawangog, which translates as "where the beach curves around the water". In later years, after being shipwrecked offshore, survivors reached the beach and called the bay "Providence" in an act of pious gratitude.

ii. Understanding

If the mechanics of making that picture was unavoidably linked to my photojournalistic skills, my unconscious awareness of the island's intricacy emerged in all its might through that frame. I kept looking at it for months. Then, there was winter - both as a season of snow and a time of creative impasse. A sort of melancholic "spleen," as found in French literature, that unconsciously demanded one to look at those insignificant details, mostly left out of official

accounts. This is mainly because those details were often labelled as oral tradition, something that the colonial nomenclature of research practice has always resisted, and only recently has begun recognizing under the push of a liberal “Truth and Reconciliation Act.”

Between late 2015 and summer of 2017, I barely traveled to the island. Each time I did, my camera was not with me. I was instead spending more time listening to Gino Cacciotti’s accounts about the island. Those tales went far beyond Manitoulin’s fascinating vibe, to depict a divide running deep among islanders. A fraught relationship hardly acknowledged by the island’s non-Indigenous half, fostered by the patriarchal logic of “settle and prosper.” I was told to look away several times. I refused.

David Patterson, the *Manitoulin Expositor*’s production manager, came to my rescue to resume the project. If only the walls of his Little Current home could talk about the multitude of heated debates we had, as he generously provided me with a bed almost every weekend for eighteen months. That is when the idea of creating photographic metaphors of the conversations I had with islanders from every walk of life and background, became central in my process. Once again, a small community newspaper proved to be an asset for my project, through its dense and ramified connections with Manitoulin’s social fabric. A network that I expanded and cemented by making myself vulnerable, while involuntarily recognizing the plurality of history.

This new beginning marked even an organizational shift in my methodology. In fact, I began developing my visual research by age groups. I focused on three main categories: elders, middle-aged, and teenaged islanders, to collect fragments of the intersectionality of cultures across past,

present, and future. To this purpose I connected stormily and productively at the same time with elder Leo Bebonung and through his advocacy I was able to reach out to other elders both Indigenous and non-Indigenous. This course put me in touch with the Madahbee family, whose youngsters got me into the secrecy of teenage life of Manitoulin, where alienation, stigma, and trauma overlap in the indifference of modernity. The same family opened the door of its home to an outsider like me, who not only showed interest and compassion for them, but for the island's unspoken past. Nonetheless, Scott Madahbee granted me access to the family's photo archive after his mom passed away. At first, I was unsure about incorporating old imagery in the project. Indeed, it sounded a trite strategy which has been "exploited" by several other contemporary image makers. I accepted the concession, mostly because Scott confessed that, according to the Indigenous ritual, all that material would otherwise be burned. I was kind of shaken at the thought of an archive being destroyed. Hence, I grabbed the old school suitcase and put it in the trunk of my Subaru. It sat there for several months. In the winter of 2019, I moved the luggage into my studio and began sorting through the material.

As I was organizing negatives and printed images, the value of the incommensurable treasure I had saved manifested before me. However, I was still reluctant to use the imagery the way it was. In the meantime, I came across the story of Matt Corbiere and Kim Pahpeguish, two strongman/woman athletes from M'Chigeeng First Nation, one of the island's most iconic communities. Tired of cliched and stereotypical visual cues, I was inspired by their Indigenous resurgence experience. That was the birth of one of the most significant friendships I have on Manitoulin. Beyond Matt Corbiere's supernatural force lies a desire to be in an anti-conformist conversation with somebody. Kim, his partner, had the same impulse. I spent two years with

them, recording interviews, wandering in the bush, or riding in Matt's 1985 pickup truck. The imagery I created with them sanctions both the collaborative aspect of my production, and the ongoing conversation I am having with the community at large. Furthermore, deepening my bond with Matt and Kim allowed us to share a type of sensitivity, further above the local context. Certainly, our connection was not immune to our personal weaknesses, which were used to create value through the image-making process and the birth of a friendship. That helped me realize how our lives are intrinsically related, although they unfolded through the fractured nature of history and personal circumstances, which all contribute to Foucault's cyclopean monuments of personal and historical genealogy.

When I finally encountered the work of Michel Foucault, I felt like Archimedes at the moment he exclaimed "Eureka"! The myriad of dots I had been tracing and connecting, apparently insignificantly, all of a sudden made sense to me. In a way, the description of this project turns into words the reasons for which "The Haweaters" is trialing the official accounts of history. At the same time, the imagery visualizes symbolically the multilayered epic of the Canadian Pangaea, questioning past and interrogating future, beyond the sickly rhetoric of positionality, which serves only to institutionalize and maintain the status quo of the sublime inevitability of compromise.

To fulfil this objective, the traditional imagery was mainly shot to tap into the emotional registry of the "settle and prosper" paradigm and its colonial legacy. The Madahbee family archive instead, was conceptualized around the creation of multiple exposures - obtained re-photographing the archival material and re-exposing it across Manitoulin's iconic locations and

present-day situations. The multiple exposure aims to represent the numerous layers of acculturation that accumulated on top of Manitoulin's original identity – a common pattern in the making of the Canadian archetype and its strenuous, yet current pattern, of imported laborism.



iii. The Photobook

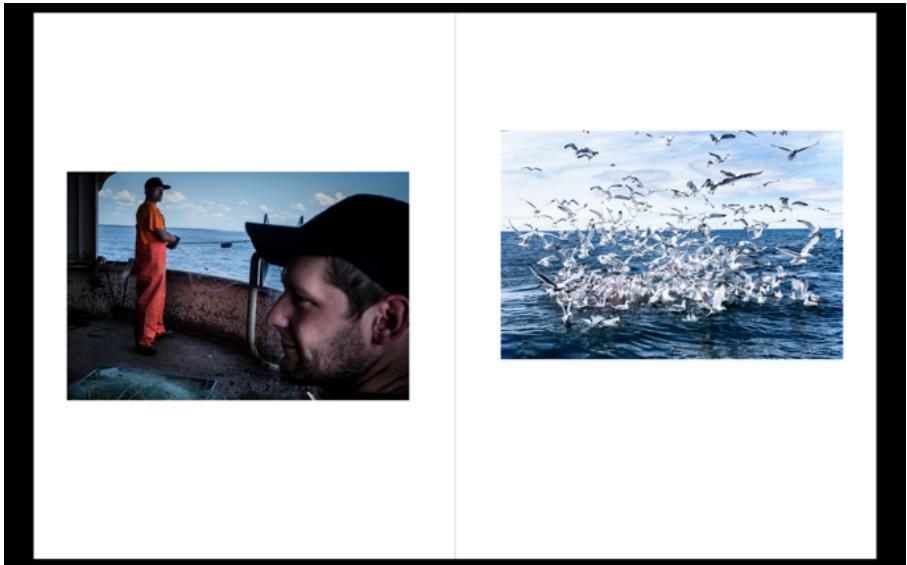
“The Haweaters” revolves around eight main chapters and a central appendix, which represents a further recollection of “insignificant” visual fragments in the form of black-and-white vertical images inferring to the Pangaea of the confederation, across territories initially defined as Upper and Lower Canada. Each chapter is thematically introduced by a photo collage cut out of the multiple exposure obtained by layering imagery from the Madahbee family archive and roughly a thousand photographs produced in the summer of 2021.

The opening chapter deals with oral tradition and “The Haweaters” legacy. This is linearly manifested through the very first picture of the “Hawberry House” under a starry sky. The image carries multiple allegories, ranging from cultural appropriation to the blatant act of rewriting history using a Eurocentric lens. The stars, instead, represent the “Great Spirit” Manitou, after whom the island is named both in English and Ojibway languages. Since first contact happened reasonably through the Jesuit missionaries and their desire to convert Indigenous people, the second page hints at the landscapes of conversion that shifted from “Indianized Christianity” toward an enforced assimilative model. Something that undeniably left deep wound in the Indigenous social fabric.



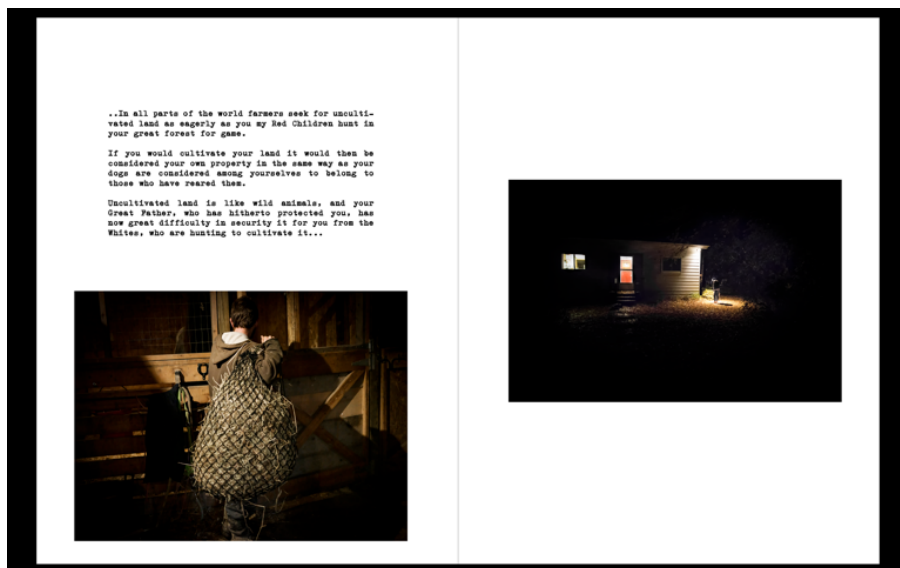


The second and third chapters address the mass arrival of settlers after the 1862 McDougall Treaty, and an assimilation process that has ever since revolved around the systematic addition of ethnical layers of acculturation. Within such a historical big bang, the “Norisle” shipwreck symbolically emphasizes the role of the island as a hub to develop Wightman’s “Nebulous North,” while the image of the seagulls, paired with fishermen reveals the multilateral relationship between the settle, exploit and prosper canons. Further on, the photograph of the dilapidated residential school and the flag, in the town of Spanish, serves to counter the celebrated cult of Canadian multiculturalism, which still refuses to address properly the plurality of history. To fulfill this purpose, even the multiple exposure that introduces chapter three is carefully thought around a faded frame of an Indigenous girl, and the overlay of echoes from the past and fragments of present.





The agricultural section of the book introduces a dream that literally never came true - hence the choice of the moody night photographs. The images of the young woman outside a home in Billing, one of the island's farming enclaves, alongside the picture of the barn, refer to Manitoulin's rural oblivion - which attracts countless visitors in summer, but somehow denotes the abandonment of the island in a merciless modernity.



A more elaborate visual discourse unfolds in the median portion of the tome, which, in a way, aims to reflect Foucault’s genealogical process of collecting “insignificant details.” This role is played by a number of aesthetically pleasant pictures, whose content at times might look meaningless. I am, indeed, requiring an effort from the viewership in reframing and rethinking details that a general numbness to the current “order of things” has rendered invisible. The overexposed image of an Indigenous young woman, paired with an x-ray of a skull, is an epitome to this, to subtly refer to intergenerational trauma; something rightfully addressed by medical science, but, at the beginning of my journey, hard to grasp for myself as well.

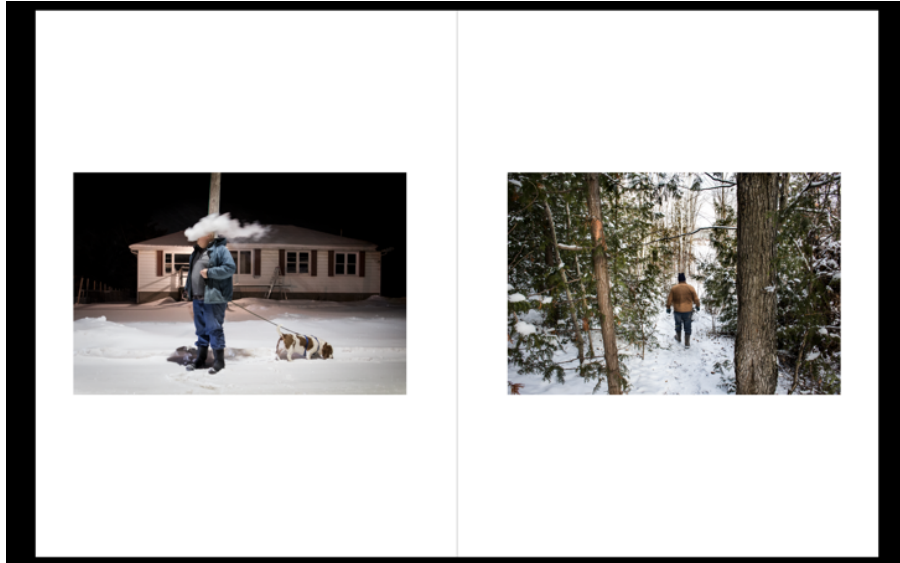


The volume, after the intermediate philosophical excursus, picks up again from the current condition of Indigenous islanders, who often find themselves suspended in midair, in many cases, unable to belong to their communities or to the country itself – a sentiment also common

among many other non-Indigenous islanders struggling with the same issue. The frame of the two Indigenous men hanging onto a tree in the bush, counter faced by one of the deer feeding off a home, are intended to raise questions about native identities and imported ones, within their contemporary limbo.



Finally, modernity shows up in all its might through several metaphors depicting the close-knit connection between colonialism, industrial revolution, and trauma, while the following pages focus on individual journeys and the younger generation of islanders. The image of the iconic papermill in Espanola, followed by the man wrapped in vape smoke and the trapper heading in the deep bush, inaugurate a boisterous alternance of visual analogies asking the viewers to intellectually move from the macro issue, often contemplated as collateral damages to achieve wealth, to the micro of the singular lives affected by it.



The closing chapter completes and draws correlations to the opening one, in a quest to sarcastically romanticize both the birth of the Canadian Confederation and the rise of its modern multicultural creed. However, a visionary image of a not-so-distant gentrified future graces the last page with the “Hawberry House,” one of the most emblematic images of the project and last landmark of “The Haweaters” legacy, as it is being torn down to make space for a new private residence.



Ultimately, the photobook I produced, vastly enthused by Foucault's genealogical reflections, invites each viewer to reflect upon the multiple truths allegorized by the images and collages, and the deep relationship between Manitoulin's unspoken past, traumatized present, and the colonial origins of Canada. My intention is not to criticize modernity, from which I benefit, but to question Canadian "political correctness" and "moral exceptionalism" in the context of its treatment of Indigenous populations. Rather, my photographic practice is more oriented toward probing the recollection of historical evidence, through an emotional and self-learning process. As a proud European, I must certainly recognize a recent past made of White suprematism, racist policies, and a contemporaneity based upon compromises. At the same time, I feel I need to contribute to a present built on a rule of law yearning to equalize what Judith Butler has called the "grievability of life." This is what Europe is about, a cradle of cultures and rights that learns from its mistakes, promotes libertarianism, and condemn any totalitarian form of power - be it historical, military, economical, medieval, and frankly even intellectual.

4. CONCLUSION

Amid two years of pandemic struggles, and my obligation to protect an endemically wounded microcosm such as Manitoulin, I found myself spending more and more nights on the island, in the back of my hatchback, mostly by the Janet Head lighthouse in Gore Bay. Immersed in my loneliness, Lake Huron's murmur became the organic lullaby to reflect upon the visual strategies that I have employed in the past few years – primarily to seek the crux of the insular pattern which indeed outlined the small-scale trajectory of the Canadian archetype.

As evenings eroded long summer days, I began realizing that although this search had drawn most of my energy, time, and resources, it had somehow expanded the readability of the images I had made and the ones I wanted to make or held in my unconscious emotional archive.

The peak of this epiphany happened through the encounter with French philosopher Michel Foucault, and his notion of genealogy not as a practice to retrace origins, but as a method to examine the plurality and contradictions of the past in order to assess their relationship with power and truth. The words were transformative.

Through Foucault's discourse, and Tina M. Campt's practice of "listening to images,"⁶² I was suddenly able to recalibrate, as Campt would say, seven years of vernacular imagery produced on the island into quite off-moments that could possibly draw the viewer's responsiveness into

⁶² Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

Manitoulin's shattered soul, through which these images enunciate several aspects of Islanders' psyche, mostly neglected by Canada's progressive reputation.⁶³ Something retracing Camp's practice when she refers to listening / looking at the photographic archive of precarious and dispossessed black subjects in the nineteenth, twentieth, and twenty-first centuries by "attending to the quiet but resonant frequencies of images that have been historically dismissed and disregarded."⁶⁴

In the case of the images I made on Manitoulin Island, those were neither dismissed nor disregarded. In many cases, those photographs were overlooked by the media, or culturally appropriated to serve neoliberal purposes. My practice to keep reshooting the same photographs over the years is intended to enrich the images with that multiplicity of visual frequencies that support and sustain Camp's theories. Moreover, I expanded this idea of visual frequencies or sediments, using a local Indigenous archive and multiple exposure to blend photographs from the past and present, as well as two different identities that coexist.

If in previous years my image-making revolved around a land-based elicitation process I pursued with locals, then Foucault's discovery expands this logic and introduces a more mature type of visual research methodology acknowledging the island's plurality beyond the rigorous and illusory canons of the Canadian multicultural creed.

⁶³ Camp, *Listening to Images*, 5.

⁶⁴ Camp, *Listening to Images*, 11.

Within this irregular framework, photographs are made to help the viewer tap into their affective registers, to articulate broader descriptions of Mnidoo Mnising's people, places, and tales – whereas my positioning as image-maker shifts into the fold as any other member of the project's constituency, in a joint venture made of shared responsibilities and outcomes.

Manitoulin, as already mentioned, embodies a broken place of multiple pasts in a divided country of numerous histories - where I, myself, discovered, as Foucault suggests, a few truths by chance, in an emotional partnership with the individuals who helped me shape this long-term endeavour.

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