

**Functions of Care, Community, Motherhood, and Language in Canadian Women's
Literature**

By

Natalie M. Comfort

A thesis submitted to the Department of Modern Languages, Literatures and Cultures
Mount Allison University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Bachelor of Arts degree with Honours

April 11, 2022

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

À ma maman, qui m'a donné le goût de lire à un jeune âge et qui m'a toujours encouragée de me dépasser dans mes travaux académiques and a special feeling of gratitude to my dad, who, even with a different academic background, provided me with never-ending support and encouragement throughout this process.

To my supervisor, Dr. Kirsty Bell, and the entirety of the Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures department because without their help, this project would not have come to life. It is with their guidance and support that I was able to understand the importance of world literature and languages.

Most of all, I would like to acknowledge and thank my family, friends, and loved ones who never doubted my capabilities and motivated me during the writing of this thesis as well as in my undergraduate studies.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION.....	1
CHAPTER 1: DECOLONIZATION OF COMMUNITY, LOVE AND THE SELF IN <i>MANIKANETISH</i>.....	5
<i>STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP</i>	6
<i>MOTHERHOOD WITHIN THE COMMUNITY</i>	7
<i>DECOLONIAL LOVE AND CARE</i>	10
<i>INDIGENOUS TEACHING AND EUROCENTRIC EDUCATION</i>	12
<i>LANGUAGE USE AND INTERTEXTUALITY</i>	14
CHAPTER 2: REDEFINING THE PERSPECTIVE OF ACADIE IN <i>ALMA</i>.....	17
<i>LA LANGUE IN ACADIE</i>	17
<i>FORMING A RELATIONSHIP THROUGH LANGUAGE</i>	19
<i>INTERGENERATIONAL CARE</i>	21
<i>FINDING ALMA</i>	23
<i>SELF-CARE</i>	25
CHAPTER 3: PLURALITY OF LIFE EXPERIENCES AND CARE IN <i>AND A BODY TO REMEMBER WITH</i>.....	28
<i>INTERTEXTUALITY</i>	30
<i>INTERCULTURAL BOND</i>	31
<i>MOTHERHOOD AS STRENGTH</i>	33
<i>FINDING AN IDENTITY</i>	35
<i>GRANDMOTHERS AS PILLARS OF COMMUNITIES</i>	36
CONCLUSION	39
BIBLIOGRAPHY	41

INTRODUCTION

In the Canadian literary context - where authors most often work in one of the two official languages - how do women writers navigate other languages and non-standard forms of language? And how do these minority language contexts influence themes of community, care, and motherhood? Being a Modern Languages, Literatures, and Cultures student who has benefited from learning and analysing literary works in both Spanish and French, I have come to realize that Canadian literature is much more than writing in “standard” French or English. This project is rooted both in my literature studies in specific languages and in comparative literature; I am particularly interested in how Canadian women who work outside “standard” French and English address the interconnectedness of care, community, motherhood and language, with a particular focus on the works of Naomi Fontaine, Georgette LeBlanc, and Carmen Rodríguez. These particular themes were chosen because they are often present in women’s writing and language often underpins how authors explore them. Indeed, in a minority context, questions of care, for example, go beyond care for others or oneself and extend to care for the language itself.

These themes are defined by literary scholars such as Marie Carrière, Joëlle Papillon, and Lori Saint-Martin. Scholar Marie Carrière defines care in her article “Du métaféminisme et des histoires au féminin” as something that takes place within personal, social, and political contexts. She expands by adding that care is linked to metafeminism as it disrupts the hierarchies and dualities of gender, the self, and the social (206-207). In her analyses of Indigenous literature, Joëlle Papillon defines motherhood as something physical, something that becomes a part of you, something that gives one strength (2019, 47). As for Lori Saint-Martin, her book *Le nom de la mère: Mères, filles et écriture dans la littérature québécoise au féminin*, situates motherhood in contemporary literature as a gateway to creation and subject status in writing by women (252). The term community is also explored in Papillon’s article: she defines how fraternity and empathy make up a community (2019, 41). Finally, with respect to language, much has been written on minority languages in the Canadian context. For example, critic Francis Langevin defines minority language as something to normalize in mainstream literature while Carol Stos defines language as a connection between cultures and countries (Langevin 41; Stos 143). These definitions are a starting point and part of the foundation for the analysis of my primary sources.

The three texts together demonstrate how themes and experiences can be interconnected. Naomi Fontaine's novel *Manikanetish* (2017) follows the life of the narrator, her departure from her northern Innu community at a young age in search of a different, so-called "better" way of life, and her return 15 years later to teach at a school in Uashat. Fontaine uses Innu words throughout her novel, specifically terms that indicate the interconnectedness between her language and her community. As we will see, the use of the Innu language is mostly used for kin terms which demonstrates the connection to her family. It also shows an emotional identity attachment to her language and how it brings her closer to the themes of care and community. The author highlights the importance of community while revealing her own approach to indigenizing history, literature, and education. She also touches various aspects of care, as the protagonist takes on a mothering role to her students as well as facing her own pregnancy.

The long narrative poem (or poetic novel) *Alma* by Georgette LeBlanc (2008) approaches themes of motherhood and care in a post-WWII Nova Scotian Acadian community in order to explore both an individual life and the collective experience of Acadians. The protagonist-narrator, Alma, routinely questions her identity as a woman and mother, wondering if things could be different. The use of Nova Scotian Acadian French highlights the importance of the language for the author, and how it connects her to her community, family, and heritage. Themes of care can be seen throughout the plot through the unconventional relationship between the protagonist, her husband, and others surrounding them.

Finally, Carmen Rodríguez's collection of short stories *and a body to remember with* (1997) describes the life of immigrants, largely women hailing from countries in Latin America. Her collection is divided into different stories following the life of various female characters. They are all from different cultural background and histories but all face similar challenges, in particular how identity is challenged by immigration to a new community. Themes of cultural identity, language barriers, and female autonomy are also explored. *and a body to remember with* was published in English, with a preface stating that the author could not express her feelings the same way in Spanish. That said, there are interesting connections to Spanish and the words she uses in Spanish are specific to contexts where she creates links back to the character's home communities as well as to their newly found autonomy in Canada.

My analyses of the interconnectedness of language, care, community and motherhood, aim to respond to these four objectives:

1. To situate the works of Fontaine, LeBlanc and Rodríguez in relation to theories and definitions of care, motherhood and community by such feminist critics as Marie Carrière, Dian Million, Lori Saint-Martin and Joëlle Papillon;
2. To understand why Fontaine, LeBlanc and Rodríguez develop themes of care, community, motherhood and language in their works;
3. To understand why identity and language choices are fundamental and how the authors use these choices to express care, community, motherhood, and language;
4. To articulate why these themes are particularly important in contemporary women's writing in Canada more broadly, again drawing on theories and analyses by Carrière, Saint-Martin, and Papillon.

My project will also allow me to explore how these authors describe their own lived experiences of care and motherhood within their communities that do not subscribe to dominant white, anglophone or standard French perspectives. It will also allow me to explore how language shapes their texts in the contexts of women's literature, decolonial discourse, and Latino-Canadian literature. These specific works were chosen because they have a personal connection to the authors themselves, something that adds to the literary analysis of the works. Personally, I believe that these works are important to Canadian literature as they make the reader aware of the plurality of literature within Canada and how they add to different Canadian perspectives. As a francophone Acadian woman, I value having my culture and language represented in the literary world, one reason for selecting Georgette LeBlanc's work *Alma* for this analysis. Furthermore, as a language student with a background in sociology, I also understand the importance of having other cultures and languages valued besides my own. Therefore, this is why it is important for me to highlight Indigenous and Chilean works, *Manikanetish* by Noami Fontaine and *and a body to remember with* by Carmen Rodríguez. They are as important as Acadian works and yet they narrate a story that is not mine to tell, but rather which I can amplify. This is also why some words or phrases cited will not be translated, as they are specific to the author's or critic's interpretation or choices. Language integrity is something that I value, and the main reason for retaining quotations in their original language of French, Spanish, and Innu-aimun.

In sum, the following analysis will uncover the themes of care, community, and motherhood present in the works of Fontaine, LeBlanc, and Rodríguez. In addition, the interpretation of these topics will be supported by the works of other literary critics. Therefore, this project will explore

the literary significance of these works in a Canadian literary context and through Acadian, Innu, and Chilean-Canadian perspectives.

CHAPTER 1: Decolonization of community, love and the self in *Manikanetish*

Indigenous storytelling and writing in Canada are important to the ongoing project of decolonizing literature. In particular, Indigenous women authors' voices are often undervalued in the literary world. Their voices can demonstrate the attachment to their home communities, the care they have for the people who live in them. Dian Million's "Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History" explores this communal experience for Indigenous writers. Her article explores how the silencing of their voices has led Indigenous communities to speak up for the care of their communities. They are more likely to speak about things such as alcoholism and poverty in order for their community to receive adequate treatment and support (56). Million cites the example of the Tobique Women's group: they spoke up about the unfair power imbalances for the rightful treatment of the women and children in their communities (57). Million's perspective on care aligns with that of Marie Carrière in "Mémoire du care, féminisme en mémoire", namely that care is used to balance political aspects of life and one's personal lived experiences (205). In other words, care is the support of one's community, surroundings and self. Million also describes the silencing of Indigenous voices as the silencing of care (56). Such silencing will ensure that no resolutions or conversation will get to the root of problems. Therefore, care is explored as a way to heal intergenerational trauma and injustices. Million explores the benefits of having empowered voices in Indigenous women's writing and states that Indigenous women writers "(...) denote important emotional knowledge that became available to individuals, families, and sometimes communities but that did not always 'translate' into any direct political statement" (64). This statement is reinforced by Arun Prabha Mukherjee, notably her article "Canadian Nationalism, Canadian Literature and Racial Minority Women." She questions eurocentric tendencies in Canadian literature and states that decolonization in and of literature happens when Canadian women authors who are part of a racial minority reject the traditional Canadian course of literature (166).

Naomi Fontaine, an Innu writer who publishes in French, demonstrates a number of these ideas of care and by doing so also questions a number of eurocentric ideas. Her second published work of fiction, *Manikanetish*, explores Indigenous womanhood and the decolonization of the Québécois school system through the story of Yammie, a recent university graduate who returns to her home community of Uashat to teach French after living and working in urban Québec for a number of years. In some way, Yammie is a reflection of Fontaine. The narration in the first person

acts as if Fontaine is speaking directly through Yammie. The similarities between Yammie and Fontaine are reflected in the places, people, and experiences discussed throughout the plot. As an Innu woman, Yammie faces obstacles and barriers put in place by eurocentric society, but Fontaine's novel suggests that she (and others) can disrupt certain colonial practices or expectations through various means of caring in and for her community. Fontaine's work focuses on lived experiences and the importance of care in this Innu community. This analysis will explore these topics while taking into consideration the interconnectedness of other themes such as motherhood and language.

STUDENT-TEACHER RELATIONSHIP

This first section will examine how language is used to explore the relationship between Yammie and her community. For example, terms of address and interpersonal relationships are important in the development of community and care in *Manikanetish*. The ways in which Yammie develops relationships with her students and even the words they use to address her demonstrate how maternal and mother-like roles help build and strengthen a community. In particular, when Yammie first starts teaching in Uashat, her students use formal terms of address to speak with her and do not feel comfortable sharing things with her (21). At first, Yammie is happy with this as she neither feels integrated into the group nor her community, something that changes over time. Conversely, critic Joëlle Papillon's article "La solidité des filles chez Naomi Fontaine" highlights how the girls of Uashat would later integrate Yammie into the community by ignoring the formal, eurocentric term of "madame" and choosing to simply call her by her name (51): "Sans que je ne m'en rende compte, mes élèves ont cessé de m'appeler madame. Ils disaient *Yammie, tu sais pas ce qui nous est arrivé!* ou *Yammie, faut vraiment que tu viennes voir les gars dehors, c'est trop drôle* ou encore *Yammie, pourquoi t'as pas d'amoureux, toi?*" (106). This shift happens during a school trip where the atmosphere was more informal, allowing for a more natural bond to form between the students and teacher. This gives the students the confidence and freedom to address her by her first name. In fact, terms of address and kinship terms have a particular place within Indigenous culture; their traditional meaning has been long replaced with Western terms such as *Mister* and *Mrs.*, or in French *Monsieur*, *Madame* or *Mademoiselle*, which displays authority and control (Dudgeon and Bray 1). The conscious choice of using informal terms of address creates an understanding that Yammie is welcomed into their community, that she is an equal. Eliminating

the authority barriers allows the teacher to become closer to her students, strengthening her position as an equal in Uashat. This choice of language highlights the development of the relationship between Yammie and her students.

The development of the relationship between students and teacher also plays out in the ways Yammie interacts with her students. At the beginning of the novel, Yammie feels like an outsider in her community after being away for a decade: “Ils disent que le retour est le chemin des exilés. Je n’ai pas choisi de partir. Quinze ans plus tard, je reviens et constate que les choses ont changé” (10). The quote demonstrates Yammie’s internal debate because going back to her home community creates feelings of uncertainty and otherness. She fears that the “whiteness” she gained while living in the city has altered her Indigenous being, somehow feeling torn between being too white and too Innu¹. On the one hand, when Yammie lived in an urban area, she knew she stood out as a “(...) petite fille brune parmi tous ces visages blancs (...)” (10). On the other hand, when she returns to Uashat, this feeling is mirrored when she notices that even there, she is the only Innu teacher in a crowd of white teachers. She is both intrigued and scared by the prospect of teaching Innu children precisely because she questions her own identity as an Innu woman. She does understand that her reservation is indeed a community, but she does not feel as if she is accepted within it (13). Her connection to Uashat is not instant and it takes time for her students to embrace her.

MOTHERHOOD WITHIN THE COMMUNITY

In fact, Fontaine develops the theme of motherhood in order to underscore the extent to which Yammie and her students create a community of care. As Yammie gets to know her students, she notices that many students in her classroom have children; they are, in her eyes, children with children. She forms a friendship with many of the young mothers in the class, especially Mikuan, who is not much younger than her: “(...) Et parce qu’elle avait vingt ans et que depuis quelques semaines on a pris l’habitude de jaser après les cours” (50). Her relationship with Mikuan is not

¹ While the contexts are often different, other Indigenous authors express similar struggles and sentiments. For example, Justin Brake, whose identity is split between his Indigenous roots and his white upbringing, explains his uncertainties: “I received my Qalipu letter of acceptance in 2011 and was officially a ‘registered Indian’ under the Indian Act. But the questions had already started piling up, and my deep unease with suddenly identifying as a First Nations person was eating away at me” (Brake). Although Brake refers to receiving federal government approval of “Indian Status”, which is a different scenario than Yammie’s, their feelings of uncertainty and belonging regarding their identity are similar.

only one of a teacher and a student, but a friendly one, where they look out for each other. She admires the strength of the teen-aged mothers when needing to take care of their loved ones, as they do not only have to care for their children, but also their siblings who are close in age: “J’apprends également qu’elle vient d’une famille nombreuse. Que le plus jeune de ses frères a l’âge de son fils” (83). But contrary to what a typical eurocentric view might be, the young mothers in her class prove to her that they are the strength of Uashat; they go to school during the day and take care of their children as well as their families during the evening. In her discussion of Fontaine’s novels, Joëlle Papillon recognizes this strength when she describes Indigenous women and girls as pillars in the creation and reparation of Indigenous communities (43). What we can add here is the parallel change in relationship; Yammie sees herself as the students’ “mother”, as their unofficial caregiver. As an example, when the young women in Yammie’s class need to leave their children for a class trip, they turn to Yammie for the very care that they are used to giving. Indeed, while the majority of the young women in Yammie’s class are mothers, anxious at the thought of going to Nutshimit for a class trip and leaving their babies behind, it is during this class trip that the teacher-student relationship evolves into a relationship synonymous with care, friendship, and trust. They see her as a companion by making jokes: “Allez, madame fume, fume, m’a dit Marc en se moquant” (103).

Furthermore, Yammie’s admiration of her female students helps her with her own unexpected pregnancy. Following a nonchalant love affair with a local man, Stanley, the protagonist realizes that she is pregnant and is upset with herself: “Comment ai-je pu être aussi stupide? Aussi irresponsable? Manquer autant de jugement? Qu’avais-je donc fait à Dieu pour mériter ça?” (116). This series of questions and Fontaine’s narrative use of an unplanned pregnancy hint at the stereotype of the “easy” Indigenous woman who recklessly becomes pregnant and should be ashamed of her “dirtiness” (Papillon 42). Over the following weeks, Yammie poses judgement upon herself, but begins having a change of heart when one of her students, Julie, approaches her with her own pregnancy news:

J’suis enceinte.

J’ai senti un énorme coup de poing dans mon ventre. Malgré moi, mes yeux se sont couverts de larmes.

Oh, madame... C’est pas si triste. (123)

Julie's announcement and her comment that this is in fact "une bonne nouvelle" (124) alter Yammie's thoughts about her own pregnancy. Obviously, Yammie's views are complicated by a promise made to the Creator at age fifteen to not have an abortion, as she wants to keep the child, but still feels at a loss (125). However, her exchange with Julie allows her to come to terms with her fear and isolation regarding the pregnancy, as the young girl demonstrates courage and strength regarding her own unplanned pregnancy. It is at that moment that Yammie appreciates the other young mothers as an example for herself. It gives her courage and confidence to be a mother herself. More specifically, Yammie notes that:

(...) la fille à qui je parlais n'était plus une adolescente. Et dans cette vie qu'elle planifiait, elle deviendrait une femme. Elle n'était pas la première à qui ça arrivait. Et comme toutes les autres avant elle, elle concilierait les rendez-vous chez le médecin et les examens de juin. Je savais qu'elle possédait ce genre de courage. Et sans qu'elle ne le sache, j'ai senti qu'elle m'en transmettait quelques parcelles. (124)

Julie's use of the term of address *Madame* can be linked to the setting of the conversation, the need to respect Western forms of address while in an academic setting. Nonetheless, the reassurance emphasizes the elements of Yammie being welcomed. Julie's down-to-earth reaction to her own unexpected pregnancy leads to self-acceptance for Yammie. Furthermore, both cases illustrate critic Elizabeth Lamzus' argument that it is essential for Indigenous women to push against white women's perspectives in order to assure their own organizations of their families and the development of their sovereignty:

Feminist theory remains integral to the process of decolonization for Hawaiian and other Indigenous women because colonialism takes place through gendered and sexualized forms that reconstitute both individual and communal indigenous identities in stigmatized and disempowering ways. (137-139)

In fact, at the end of the novel, in a scene that creates an inextricable link between her students and her future child, Yammie hears a compliment from Rodrigue, one of her students and notes: "Je me suis dit que l'enfant que j'allais mettre au monde, élever et aimer, je voulais que ce soit un garçon" (136). Why? Because she sees in Rodrigue, her rebellious but appreciative student, a possible future for her child. The evolution of the relationship between Yammie and her students creates a safe space where the students begin feeling comfortable approaching her with sensitive topics such as teenage pregnancy as well as being appreciative of her work during the school year

(122-135). The relationships in *Manikanetish* demonstrate that care and motherhood are not limited to a biological or genetic relationship between mother and child.

DECOLONIAL LOVE AND CARE

The principle and act of decolonial love is also a key aspect of community care in Fontaine's novel. For critic Isabella Huberman, decolonial love is described as a gateway to social changes and deepening connections to self, others, and our community (112). She attributes the term to Junot Díaz, a Dominican African American scholar who defines decolonial love as: "(...) the only kind of love that could liberate them from that horrible legacy of colonial violence" (in interview with Moya). In other words, decolonial love is breaking the cycle of colonial abuse and mistreatment by healing and liberating oneself from its subjugations (Huberman 111). In many of her works, Fontaine uses decolonial love to approach sensitive topics such as suicide, alcoholism, and sexual assault. *Kuessipan*, Fontaine's earlier novel, uses transmission of knowledge and learning as a mean of decolonizing care: "L'apprentissage auprès d'un-e aînée est un processus collaboratif, qui met l'accent autant sur la participation de l'étudiant que sur son implication active" (Huberman 119). The elders help communities heal and fight the obstacles put in their way due to colonization by decolonizing empathy and love. In *Manikanetish*, these themes are the foundation of the ever-growing relationship between Yammie and her community. A key example of decolonial love in the novel once again relates to how Yammie's students change her. When Yammie again has to eschew "white" or colonial ideas and decides to listen to her student's grief and sadness regarding the passing of one of their classmates, she experiences a new kind of love. She depends on this love to heal herself and those around her, according to Díaz's definition of decolonial love. In order to understand the complexities of Fontaine's treatment of death, education, community, and decolonial love in a single episode of the novel, we need to explore the full context.

The episode centres around the suicide of Marithée, a student in the school and the older sister of Yammie's student, Myriam. The death occurs while the students in Yammie's French class are rehearsing a play in which Myriam plays a key role. In her grief, she misses weeks of class but is expected to continue as the lead role of the school play. Yammie begins to doubt the young woman's return and her initial distrust can be linked to her experience in the south, her

desire to push aside her Indigenous self and the institutional push to strengthen the student's French skills (14).

Even in their fragile emotional state, the students feel heard during the crisis and are able to regulate their intense feelings of sorrow. Yammie notices that her approach sparks an intimate link with her students: “Je voulais croire, j’avais besoin de croire, que quelque chose est né ce matin-là. Entre eux et moi. Quelque chose de fragile, sans doute. Du moins, quelque chose de vrai. Comme un début de confiance” (84). Her role as a teacher makes her a figure who can act as an elder; she offers them a space to discover and feel through their emotions, all while creating a respectful space. Papillon also points this out as the affectionate relationship between Yammie and her students is an agent of change in her point of view of herself and her identity (56). Yammie begins to better understand and appreciate her community and those in it. Perhaps more importantly, her class also begins teaching her the values of the community, such as care for one another. In this case, the students take on the role of the teacher and transmit value to her.

The example of the school play highlights some complexities and contradictions in Yammie's role. On the one hand, the principal plays on racialized and gendered power dynamics to convince Yammie to oversee an extracurricular theatre project in French. On the other hand, and despite hesitations and resistance, Yammie welcomes the challenge (63). She reconciles her somewhat contradictory goals by choosing a classical French play, *Le Cid* by Corneille, thereby suggesting a certain paradox in the colonial project of the French language and her own more decolonial desire for collaboration. Nonetheless, what this situation really highlights is how Yammie tries to balance her pedagogical objectives, the quality of the production and her concerns for Myriam. She therefore suggests casting someone else for Myriam's role, something that is not taken lightly by her schoolmates:

(...) peut-être le moment le plus tragique qu'elle aurait à subir durant toute sa vie, et ils gardaient la foi. Ils savaient qu'elle surmonterait cette épreuve et reviendrait pour finir ce qu'elle avait commencé. Ce n'était pas de la candeur. Très loin d'être naïfs, ces jeunes avaient conscience de la vie et de la mort, de la souffrance et des moments heureux. (95)

The teenagers have patience and trust in Myriam and assure Yammie that they will help her get back on her feet. This demonstrates the care they have for their schoolmate as they know she can overcome this difficult part of her life. Marie Carrière describes this type of care as “une voix qui unit raison et émotion, soi et relation, esprit et corps, nature et culture, une voix encline dans ce

changement de paradigme, à façonner une nouvelle forme de justice sociale” (207). The students understand their teacher’s concerns but they also recognize that it is precisely their solidarity towards Myriam and her family that will allow her to come back and perform. The trust placed in her by her schoolmates is successful and Myriam does indeed return to school and is able to perform in the play (133).

INDIGENOUS TEACHING AND EUROCENTRIC EDUCATION

Following a similar train of thought, the decolonization of the education system and its approaches are important to the plot in *Manikanetish*. Anishinaabekwe-Métis-Nehiowé scholar Janice Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe uses the term *white-eurocanadian-christian patriarchy* to describe the systemic abuse and marginalization of Indigenous communities (4). In essence, Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe identifies Catholicism, colonization, patriarchy, and whiteness as the principal actors in the systemic racism Indigenous people face in Canada. Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe notes in particular the negative presence of white-eurocanadian-christian patriarchy in education: “(...) there were plenty of professors at the University of Saskatchewan in various disciplines who implicitly and explicitly reinforced notions of white cultural supremacy, albeit perhaps unconsciously, ignorantly, or naively” (23). This reflection mirrors Yammie’s experience in the school system in Uashat. In other words, all of these colonial influences also inform the educational system in Québec, where *Manikanetish* takes place, even on reserves. For example, in *Manikanetish*, the young students are still able to recite the Catholic prayer “Our Father” from memory, suggesting the deep roots of church influence: “Très doucement, elle débute sa prière. Les autres, en unisson, récitent avec elle le Notre Père appris par cœur” (83). On the one hand, this moment shows the ingrained effect of forced assimilation within Indigenous communities and more specifically, within children’s education. On the other hand, they are reciting the prayer in Innu, demonstrating the complex relationship and nature of colonization and decolonization within the community; they are using their own language, but using it to reinforce the very institution that abused their culture and language.

Another influence seen in *Manikanetish* is the one of the white male having control over others. The school principal in the novel not only decides on what the students do, but is also a representation of a eurocentric education. At the beginning of the novel, the narrator describes the new school principal, M. Boulanger:

(...) Sa dizaine d'années au service de la communauté lui a procuré le flair nécessaire pour travailler avec les Innus. L'autodérision, la rigueur, l'absence de pitié sont les armes à déployer pour œuvrer chez des gens qui ont eu leur part de préjugés raciaux et de raccourcis faciles sur leur manière de vivre. (20)

The principal, a white man from Montreal, is described as someone who takes charge, who “changed” the negative perspective of the school. According to Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe’s perspective, that makes him the white saviour of a community who could not change for themselves using traditional ways (85). The description of the principal also reinforces the fact that he has the “flair nécessaire”, meaning that he has grit, to “control” the youth. The term “control” in *Manikanetish* underscores the subtle and not-so-subtle racism in the education system. Controlling the youth community in Uashat is a direct reflection of times when children were forcibly brought into residential schools to erase their culture and traditions in the most abusive ways. Residential schools have led to intergenerational trauma, where Indigenous voices have long been silenced to cover up the abuse and pain inflicted on them (Million 56).

In Fontaine’s novel, the principal aims to restore order by asking the teachers to continue with their regular day after hearing about the suicide of Marithée (77). Yammie, who herself has subscribed to ideas of being a “saviour”, nonetheless recognizes the harm in this. She defies the principal’s orders by relying on her Indigenous ways of care; she asks the students if they are comfortable creating a discussion circle where everyone has time to discuss their feelings (79). Care in Indigenous communities is not only physical care, it is the preservation and strength in community tradition, such as a healing circle (Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe 85). The group decides to lean on love to help them grieve: “C’est l’amour, ma belle, c’est l’amour qui va nous sauver” (82). Decolonial love and care intertwine with solidarity in *Manikanetish*, as the students decide to write letters of support to Marithée’s family and friends. As the novel progresses, Yammie leans more and more on her Innu roots in her educational position as she realizes that her students have taught her more than she has taught them (135). We explored this earlier when initially, Yammie wanted to ignore her Indigenous knowledge and wanted to continue her role as a westernized teacher. Yammie’s evolution, not only as an educator, but also as a member of her community, is a direct result of dismantling colonial ways of educating and of enacting care. Without her change in perspective, the students would have been doing homework and she would have not developed as a community member.

LANGUAGE USE AND INTERTEXTUALITY

Language and word choices are another interconnected topic that underscore acts of care and of community-building. A first instance of this would be the language of the novel. Originally written in French, the text does integrate some Indigenous words, specifically Innu-aimun words. Innu-aimun, or Innu, is the language spoken by the Innu people, a community where Fontaine and her protagonist Yammie both live. For the purpose of this essay, the term Innu will be used because this is the term Fontaine uses. As Dian Million notes, Fontaine's use of her Indigenous culture and language is a direct act of activism, of speaking directly from her lived experience as an Indigenous woman in Canada (56). As mentioned earlier, Yammie is a reflection of Fontaine by the use of specific language and word sequences.

For example, word choices include the names of her characters such as Mikuan. Mikuan plays an important role in the novel as she is Yammie's oldest student, but also one she is the closest with. The word has two meanings, feather and pencil, which can be explained as Mikuan's light and easygoing personality as well as her drive to succeed in school (Filippi). Fontaine's use of Innu names directly translates her culture and identity. This cultural translation is also seen in the name of the school where Yammie teaches: "Et ils lui ont donné le nom de Manikanetish, Petite Marguerite, à la mémoire d'une femme décédée quelques années avant le début des travaux" (18). Not only is *manikanetish* the name of the school, it is also the title of the novel itself. Under a literary lens, the word *manikanetish* thus has many connotations: academic, institutional, literary, botanical, to name a few. The name *Manikanetish* for the school also holds another meaning, it is the name of a childless elder who cared endlessly for the children in Uashat, those in poverty, in the foster care system, or those facing addictions or abuse of any sort. Having the word *manikanetish* for title of the novel therefore strengthens the decolonization of literature as highlighted by Mukherjee: "In both their literature and theoretical writing, Aboriginal women writers have thrown challenges to predominant modes of thinking that have yet to be acknowledged" (166).

Intertextuality has a similar function in *Manikanetish*; Fontaine begins her novel with a quote taken from An Antane Kapesh, another Innu writer. In her book, *Je suis une maudite sauvagesse/Eukuan nin matshimanitu innu-iskueu* (1976), Kapesh states that she will be happy once Innu people write in the Innu language. Fontaine's relation to her in the epigraph of

Manikanetish hints at the decolonization of language and at shared culture and community. Fontaine quotes from Kapesh, in both Innu and in French translation:

Après avoir bien réfléchi et après avoir une fois pour toutes pris, moi une Indienne, la décision d'écrire, voici ce que j'ai compris : toute personne qui songe à accomplir quelque chose rencontrera des difficultés mais en dépit de cela, elle ne devra jamais de décourager. Elle devra malgré tout constamment poursuivre son idée. Il n'y aura rien pour l'inciter à renoncer, jusqu'à ce que cette personne se retrouve seule. Elle n'aura plus d'amis mais ce n'est pas cela non plus qui devra la décourager. Plus que jamais, elle devra accomplir la chose qu'elle avait songé à faire. (7)

The reader can understand that this choice is a direct homage to Fontaine's roots and a way to empower Indigenous female writers. It also reflects a deliberate choice by Fontaine to preserve Kapesh's original text in Innu.

Let us examine other examples the relationship between Innu and French in *Manikanetish*. Beyond the epigraph, there are only a few Innu words, but we have seen that they are significant. Fontaine's first novel, *Kuessipan*, was written for a Québécois readership; her second novel, *Manikanetish*, is written for those in her surroundings, such as the youth of her community (Huberman 11). Fontaine's choice of French as a primary language is not due to shame, but as an understanding that not every Innu person has had the chance to learn Innu due to assimilation. That said, having Innu words such as *mikuan* and *manikanetish* in the novel protects the polysemy of language. This means that the cultural significance and importance is preserved (Mosetto 147).

Language is important to one's identity and belonging in a community. For hundreds of years, Indigenous peoples were not allowed to speak or teach their language to future generations due to fear of repercussions. For many, this caused language insecurity, as one who does not speak the language of their community often feels like an outsider and is ashamed of their non-fluent grasp of their so-called mother tongue. Fontaine explores this phenomenon in *Manikanetish* as a direct problem caused by colonization. In the beginning of the novel, Yammie, who has spent the majority of her life living in the "south", mostly spoke French with her peers and those surrounding her. This led to a sense of rupture of identity where she did not conform to the idea of an Indigenous woman nor to that of a white woman. She consequently becomes anxious over her use of her mother tongue, Innu, and resists speaking it with her students, a clear result of language insecurity: "Je leur cacherais mes craintes de début de carrière, mes incertitudes, mon manque de confiance.

Et je ne leur parlerais pas en innu. À cause de ma syntaxe, de mon accent de blanche” (Fontaine 14). This insecurity can also be linked to the lack of Indigenous teachers in the school: “(...) les enseignantes, quelques Innues, surtout des Blanches (...)” (18). Moreover, the capitalization of the word “blanche” to describe her coworkers indicates the perceived authority and higher status of these white teachers (interestingly, the same word is not capitalized in “mon accent de blanche” as seen above). The feeling of “otherness” can be linked to the disempowerment of Indigenous voices. For that reason and many others, Fontaine’s word choices and language use are highly significant to the plot, as well as to the overall meaning of her novel.

In sum, language use, such as naming the school after a caring elder, is closely connected to care throughout the novel. The school is a place for growth and interpersonal relationships, a place which may uphold a eurocentric view of education, but which also allows for Yammie and her students to question such a model, through attachment to each other and to their language.

CHAPTER 2: Redefining the Perspective of Acadie in *Alma*

Following our discussion of Naomi Fontaine's exploration of how language acts as a foundation for care and community for the Innu women she portrays, we will now turn our attention to another cultural context to see how these same themes traverse *Alma* by Georgette LeBlanc, an Acadian author and scholar from Baie Sainte-Marie, Nova-Scotia. The novel, written as a narrative poem in the Baie Sainte-Marie dialect, explores the life of Alma, an Acadian woman living in a post-World War II era who faces difficulties such as financial issues and the strong grasp of patriarchy. The novel is composed of short poems that give a glimpse into the young woman's everyday life, starting at birth and entering motherhood and womanhood. Compared with two iconic, almost mythologized, literary figures Évangéline and La Sagouine, Alma offers a different vision of womanhood. The character is a more contemporary one who breaks the norms of what an Acadian woman is expected to do. As critic Julie St-Laurent puts it, LeBlanc creates a character who shows us the realities of female bodies and their communities: "LeBlanc désire offrir une autre vision des femmes, qui n'ont jamais eu de véritable corps dans la littérature acadienne, et y réintégrer plus généralement de l'érotisme et de la sensualité (...) LeBlanc cherche à mettre en lumière la pluralité des expériences vécues au cœur de l'histoire acadienne" (16-17). Furthermore, Alma's internal dialogue demonstrates her opinions, disbeliefs, and confrontations against the world around her (Nyela 261). The character of Alma therefore allows us valuable insight into how another minority language - Acadian French in the Nova Scotian context - underpins questions that are crucial to her role in her community, notably on how she is able to break stereotypes and expectations that are put on her. Although Alma faces issues of patriarchy, misogyny, and adultery, the text also shares the strength and tenacity of the Acadian people. For this analysis of *Alma*, this chapter will explore themes of language as a part of identity, community, care, and the interconnectedness of culture.

LA LANGUE IN ACADIE

Firstly, LeBlanc relies on the language used in her text to convey the importance of Acadie. Indeed, because Acadie is often defined as a "collectivité sans état" (Keppie 200-204), language (rather than geography) becomes a key defining trait. As Jean Morency and Hélène Destrempe describe it, Acadian literature offers "(...) toute une collectivité qui défile devant nos yeux, avec ses joies et ses misères, dans un langage truculent qui résonne autant des échos de la mer, du vent

sur les terres que les rumeurs de la ville” (68). With respect to *Alma* in particular, St-Laurent identifies the language as a “langue de poète qui exprimerait sa façon la plus intime d’être au monde, d’être au temps” (21). Georgette LeBlanc uses the colloquial French of Baie Sainte-Marie, but does not situate her work using other specific (named) geographical references in the poems. The geographical ambiguity has a number of effects. Firstly, it means we can situate the poems through linguistic features, thereby accentuating the role of language as marker of belonging or identity. The dialect is categorized by its use of English words (which are italicized in the text), French conjugation of English verbs, and other uses specific to this region, such as “pi” for “puis”, “chu” for “je suis”, and “ej” for “je” (Fritzenkötter 25). The third person inflectional ending also changes from the standard -ent suffix to the irregular -ont suffix as written in the *landont* (Fritzenkötter 22). Furthermore, the dialect uses different negations than in standard Canadian French such as “point” instead of “pas” (Fritzenkötter 19):

(...)
 dans la nuit il me dit
 que si ej suivions le grand chemin
 ej pourrions nous rendre jusqu’à la Chine
 pis que si j’étions en Chine
 j’aurions point besoin
 de penser aux Dames de Lilas (LeBlanc 30)

In short, the dialect of Baie-Sainte Marie is very recognizable in *Alma*, as LeBlanc uses all these features in her poem, tying her real community and the fictional one together, and highlighting her cultural inheritance and attachment to it.

LeBlanc’s use of language also highlights the theme of community in the narrative. It is understood that the village portrayed in *Alma* is small, with everyone knowing each other. This means that their interconnectedness is dependent on their culture, shared language and care. At the beginning of *Alma*, LeBlanc accentuates the polarities of language use in the village, using it as means of indicating who is really invested in the community and who may not be:

(...)
 ils ricassont
what is that curious dish?
 ou bien les Soutanes Noires

« nous ne mangeons pas de pareilles choses » (26)

The characters speaking in English are the Englishmen who immigrated into the area, they do not speak French and communicate with the community in English. Their presence acts as an indicator of the domination of Anglo-Saxon culture in Nova-Scotia and how the Acadian communities were surrounded by them. The tone shared in the example above also demonstrates the stereotype of Acadians being uneducated and infantile, not understanding “mainstream” English culture. Another difference highlighted in this example is the presence of the Soutanes Noires. While the parishioners speak the dialect of Baie Sainte-Marie, the Soutanes Noires, the priests, differ in language, and in authority. Their language is a more formal, standardized French, which creates distance between them and those who do not speak “proper” French. LeBlanc puts quotation marks around their discourse and capitalizes Soutanes Noires to make this polarity known as well as to make note of their authority in the area. At the same time, not naming them in the novel suggests that they are not individuals with their own identity, but more of an allegory for the power and control the Catholic Church holds over the community.

Language disparities are also demonstrated through different education goals among community members. In the poem “recess”², two young girls are speaking with Alma about their future goals. The one who speaks in a more standardized French wants to pursue her studies while the other, who speaks in the Nova-Scotian dialect, is destined to become a housewife (42). The different futures expressed as well as the different register of language hint at the fact that the community is divided between those who are educated, like the Soutanes Noires, and those who are not. The linguistic contrast therefore highlights the unique character of the community and how education, goals, and authority can alter language use.

FORMING A RELATIONSHIP THROUGH LANGUAGE

Even if a dialect can have negative or restrictive connotations associated with it, it can still be a pillar of one’s relationship and identity. Julie St-Laurent explains how LeBlanc’s use of Nova-Scotian Acadian French by no means suggests a limited thematic focus on minority identity: “(...) il est clair que LeBlanc refuse de se laisser cantonner à la position de minoritaire, ce que son utilisation du français acadien de la Baie Sainte-Marie aurait pu laisser croire (...)” (22). This

² It is to be noted that the titles of the poems in *Alma* are not capitalized, which can be perceived as a more personal approach into the narrator’s life.

means that LeBlanc's use of the Baie Sainte-Marie dialect does not hint at her home being an isolated, rural community, but is more of a portrayal of the richness of language, community and ways of life.

More specifically, as a minority linguistic community within a majority English-speaking area, the dialect of Baie Sainte-Marie relates to care for others in the same community. In *Alma*, members of the community all speak the same dialect, creating bonds among people who share the same language. This bond can be synonymous to the care they have for one another, but also to the growth of their more intimate relationships. The evolution of the relationship between Alma and Pierrot exemplifies this. At the beginning of the novel, Alma introduces the character of Pierrot, a neighbour who later becomes her husband. In fact, born the same time in the same place, they seem destined to be together. At the beginning of the relationship, Pierrot speaks in the regional dialect, like Alma:

(...)

tu devrais voir ça, Alma

toute cte couleur-là dans un tas chaud

tu devrais voir ça

j'ai faim rinqu'à y penser (44)

Their discussions express care and equality as they use the same register and dialect, demonstrating no disparities between them. They look out for each other and exchange intimate and thoughtful conversations that validate both characters' thoughts and beliefs. However, this changes when Pierrot leaves for his studies with religious authorities: "Ils quittèrent le bois pour deux côtes différentes. Pierrot pour apprendre la langue des Soutanes Noires. Alma pour apprendre la langue de la misère" (48). This comparison of their "languages" foreshadows how his language changes as he begins his studies and starts using a more standard register of French. In turn, his perspective of her choices and lifestyle change as a result. Critic Francis Langevin supports this theory as he describes Pierrot as a manifestation of "(...) ce désir d'être autre et ailleurs, d'échapper au sol et au corps atavique, féminin, maternel" and he notes that this has a paradoxal consequence for Alma herself: "(...) c'est ce qui va à la fois perdre Alma et lui permettre de se trouver" (43).

LeBlanc portrays this not only as a rift between individuals, but between ways of speaking. The language previously synonymous with care between them now creates a gap between his new identity and the relationship with his wife. This means that not only does the evolution of language

and their relationship affect the way Pierrot and Alma used to care for each other, but also how Alma sees herself in society and her community. As we shall see, Pierrot's shift in language and into a more strict, traditional man creates hardships for Alma, but it also ultimately liberates her, allowing her to truly know how to care for her language and herself.

Furthermore, LeBlanc's approach to language is connected to her own relationship to the text. In fact, we can interpret *Alma* as LeBlanc's representation of the Acadian women past and present - indeed, ones she knows from Baie Sainte-Marie - living in the Atlantic provinces. On the one hand, Alma is a representation of assertive and liberated Acadian women who do not let others guide their paths. On the other hand, critic Lamia Saada explains that LeBlanc's grandmother's name is Alma, indicating a more personal, familial relationship to language use (51). The reader can thus hypothesize that this text may be a representation of LeBlanc's personal heritage being passed along using storytelling. In a sense, the author is using her mother tongue (and her (grand)mother's tongue) to preserve both her family memories and bonds. For that reason, Alma is a representation of LeBlanc's ancestors and her own perspective of Acadie: "C'est l'intime d'une femme qui s'exprime à travers des mots signés de l'Acadie (ou des mots que reconnaît une certaine Acadie)" (Saada 52). In other words, LeBlanc's use of language and the name of her grandmother are inextricably linked to the exploration of a collective Acadian identity (Saada 51).

INTERGENERATIONAL CARE

Not only does storytelling provide a representation of LeBlanc's Acadie, it also shows that Acadian women (and other women caught in the traditional realm of life) are able to overcome difficulties and barriers. They can be confidant and stand for their beliefs all while encouraging others to do the same as Papillon notes in her article "Plonger: Risque, désir, mobilité et creation au féminin chez Georgette LeBlanc": "Bien ancrée dans la Baie, LeBlanc veut embrasser le monde et ses personnages en constant mouvement (...)" (37). Similarly to what was touched on earlier, earlier generations can transmit messages of care to help us find our own identity through the changes of life. We see an example of this in Alma's relationship with her mother, Françoise la Première. Even if not explicitly explained, we can surmise that the older woman is living a traditional marriage with her husband. That said, she secretly supports her daughter when Alma defies gender expectations from a young age, expressing a desire to write instead of living "la vraie

vie du monde”, as her father scolds her (47). Even if her father discourages her for this so-called unrealistic dream, her mother shows her daughter support through the use of playful teasing:

(...)

Mame dit qu’ej chus peut-être une miette folle

Mais elle le dit en *smilant* (47)

Even more pertinently, Françoise la Première understands her daughter’s passion for words and writing, another way in which LeBlanc indicates that language is closely connected to care and community. This small token of support also guides Alma through the rest of her life as LeBlanc demonstrates her mother’s choices that benefitted herself and the community. Before Alma’s birth, Françoise la Première already saw her unborn child as deeply connected to care and community; she ran to the woods with her husband, François le Premier, to avoid an unnamed danger that we can infer is the assimilation of the Acadian people:

(...)

François le Premier s’en fut dans le bois avec sa famille

Ceux-là qui voulient perdre leur langue

Pourront rester à la côte (11)

Alma’s mother wants her daughter to not only be a caregiver of the community, but also of their language.

Incidentally, Papillon points out in her article “Les quatre saisons d’Alma: une lecture écoféministe d’*Alma* de Georgette LeBlanc” that Alma’s birth at the beginning of the novel is marked by affectionate relationships, her birth compared to sap coming out of a tree “(...) évoquant des images de protection et de soin pour l’autre” (77). The comparison of Alma’s birth to that of the arrival of spring and everything nature-related is a metaphor for the bond between the mother and child as well as for the arrival of something new into the world. For LeBlanc, this new entity can be the representation of a new sense of Acadian communities, somewhere bonds can be made over common language as explored earlier in the chapter.

In addition, Françoise la Première is the one who makes Alma understand the disparities she will face growing up. The text is set in a post-WWII era, when topics such as menstruation were perhaps rarely discussed with young women, and not at all with young men. In Alma’s case though, when she begins her first menstrual cycle, her mother does offer some explanation:

(...)

j'ai saigné partout sur mon beau lit blanc
t'es femme astheure, m'a dit maman
 les femmes avont une coupure qui se ferme point
 qui reste rouverte et cachée
 qu'ils faut protéger
 comme qu'on protège ceux-là qu'on aime du mal (39)

This exchange conveys the importance of women supporting each other, as the mother does for her daughter. Françoise la Première does not want her daughter to be afraid of her body's natural cycle, but also warns her of the consequences of becoming a woman. Becoming a woman means that Alma will need to care for the others around her, and eventually adopt the mothering duties her mother already holds. In this exchange relating to care, Alma also realizes the difference between men and women. Moreover, the following poem in the novel is titled “un homme saigne rinque quand ce qu'il se coupe”, demonstrating clear gender expectations for men and women. Even if it is implied that Françoise la Première is living within these defined roles, she tries to make her daughter understand that she does not have to follow them by telling her to protect herself, and those around her (39). We can understand that she had to do the same by resettling in the woods to protect her language and to protect the culture and heritage of her daughter. Although Alma first falls into the traditional role of a housewife to please the men around her, she is later able to assert herself thanks to the lifelong guidance of her mother and to the desire to creating an identity for herself beyond gender stereotypes.

FINDING ALMA

Throughout the novel, Alma's identity is not only shaped by her role as a housewife, but also by how she cares for those in her community. Her decisions are largely shaped by the men surrounding her, something that becomes a strength of hers later in the novel as they help her change the perspective on her livelihood. Indeed, her initial role is quickly decided by her father who stops her from starting her own career as a nurse because, as Alma explains, they want her close by: “(...) ils me voulions là à cause qu'ej savais comment mettre le monde à l'aise (...)” (52). She understands that she is expected to care for those around her, framed here as her skill in making people feel comfortable. This creates an initial internal conflict as Alma knows what she is to do, but does not want her identity to be completely erased because of her gender:

Pape
 t'as raison
 la différence entre une *nurse* pis une servante
 c'est point son travail
 c'est la différence entre rester icitte et aller par là
 c'est la différence entre écouter et se faire entendre (53)

Alma therefore steps into the role of mother and housewife, and as we have seen, her relationship with Pierrot comes to lack understanding, communication, and emotional intimacy. She is treated as a commodity whether in her daily monotonous chores or when tending to her children.

That said, Alma does manage to disrupt some of the monotony and some patriarchal expectations. The only place where her skills and care are truly appreciated is during community events. At first glance, the reader may understand this as a part of her housewife role, but in fact, this duty allows Alma to create and to be surrounded by those with whom she used to spend her youth. Before stepping into her role of housewife, Alma was “en charge” of her friend group; she was the person responsible for the youth’s weekly late-night dance parties by inviting them by calling out as a crow (43). In a way, she was the assembly point of the community, where the youth went to go “pécher”.

After stepping into her married life, she continues being an assembly point, this time not for entertainment, but to feed others, a role that can be interpreted in multiple ways: “C’est pour ça que la bakery halait tant de monde. (...) C’est pour ça qu’Alma faisait beaucoup de pain. Du matin au soir. Elle faisait du pain si tant qu’avec chaque brassée sa peau braquit à changer de couleur une miette. Personne s’en rendit compte” (77). On the one hand, this can be seen as the by-product of a patriarchal system that holds women accountable to their stereotypical roles (Langevin 47). Langevin compares the bakery to gestation, suggesting that both strip Alma of her freedom: “ (...) comparés au lieu de la fabrication du pain, le four-ventre des mères et le rôle nourricier qu’Alma assigne à son corps la rendent progressivement moins libre (...)” (45). On the other hand, the act of offering food in her “bakery” is also indicative of the mothering effect of care, as she is feeding her community, ensuring that people are not hungry during their late-night parties. Even if we do understand that Alma subscribes to the societal norms of the time, we need to acknowledge that she does so in her own way. As a matter of fact, she finds enjoyment in baking bread while tending her children, comparing it as a melody that makes her feel as if she is dancing

(111). This monotonous work reminds her of her own self, how she is “la mousse et les roses sauvages”, something soft, but tenacious (111).

SELF-CARE

Alma’s tenacious personality can be associated to the care and values transmitted through her mother. It can also stem from the aspects of self-care. As touched on in the previous section, the young woman enjoys baking bread for others and is not afraid of doing them in her own way. This means that not only does she care for her community, she values herself and what she needs to fulfill in order to care for others. Self-care is not limited to the physical upkeep of oneself, it can be categorized as maintaining one’s boundaries with self and pursuing one’s goals and aspirations. In this context of Alma, the protagonist is able to develop an understanding of what would benefit her, described by Papillon as someone who “(...) persiste à exprimer sa façon d’être et à s’affirmer, puisant sa force dans le monde naturel dans lequel elle est profondément enracinée” (*Les quatre saisons d’Alma : une lecture écoféministe d’Alma* de Georgette LeBlanc, 81). As an example, even if Alma is following the duties set by society due to her gender, she also sets her own rules by calling the kitchen “sa cuisine” and questions what is happening around her (LeBlanc 112). As she begins to succumb to the fatigue of motherhood and the overall life of a stay-at-home mother, Alma realizes something that initiates a change in her life. Realizing that her husband is growing distant and is often absent from the home, Alma lives in an uncertain, monotonous world (69). This uncertainty turns into truth when Pierrot mentions Grace, a young woman who attends many of the men’s evening get togethers. The truth of his adultery, and his scorn for Alma, is uncovered when she notices he wants her to have similar features as his mistress, showing desire for the other woman (86). It is at this point in the novel where Alma begins renewing herself and caring for herself. Her cleaning lady, Noemie, points out this change and describes it as a “rebirth”, saying to Alma, “(...) *you been to the water, ain’t nothin’ gonna hurt you now*” (96). Following an incident where her husband openly declares his infidelity and his hatred towards his wife, it is Noemie who helps Alma remove him from the family home. In fact, Noemie’s encouragements are framed as another act of community care, but across different communities as she is from Whydah Falls, a Black community (96). Her support, in the poem “gospel” are synonymous to Black spiritual motivation, something that makes Alma aware of the changes she needs (96). Therefore, Noemie encourages Alma to look beyond others and to care for herself as they

physically remove all his belonging from “le logis” and she is able to continue her life, happily baking with her children (112). Critic Nyela describes this scene as a “rupture douloureuse pour Pierrot, expulsé du foyer conjugal ; mais émancipatrice pour Alma qui parvient à l’autonomie” (261). The closing scene of LeBlanc’s novel demonstrates Alma’s newfound strength as she continues caring for herself and her children, re-becoming the delicate moss as her mother once declared her as: “Elle était grande et solide astheure. Sa peau comme une neuve écorce tendre. Alma avait retrouvé l’épaisseur de la terre. Elle avait du travail à faire” (112).

To summarize, LeBlanc’s narrative poem *Alma* demonstrates multiple interactions between care, community, and language. The character of Alma counters pre-defined stereotypical norms by being a pillar of language and care within her community. Alma not only questions her role within the household from an early age, she also overcomes the patriarchal grasp imposed upon her since her birth. She eventually is able to enact self-care by breaking these norms and becoming her own self. This self-care stems from the support of others, implying the importance of community within the Acadian culture. More importantly, the intergenerational care conveyed by her mother, Françoise la Première, allows her daughter to understand how she may be treated due to her gender. This act of intergenerational care also supports Alma’s community by strengthening the heritage of language and culture. In its own way, community is highlighted in *Alma* by the use of the French dialect from the Baie Sainte-Marie in Nova-Scotia, as it allows LeBlanc to give representation to her home community but also to add a layer of complexity by portraying Alma as a representation of the author’s grandmother. This element demonstrates the intergenerational legacy of care and language. The differences in speech in *Alma* are also used to show the disparities within the community as those who become educated or are outsiders use a more standardized French as the rest of the community uses the local dialect. These disparities are another aspect of Alma’s character as she notices these changes within her interpersonal relationships, but does not let them affect her own speech, marking the importance of cultural identity through changes. LeBlanc also brings forward women who are the backbone of their communities and care for those around her through the use of breadmaking, conversations about bodily changes, and the suggestions to leave an unfaithful husband. This representation enriches the novel as it makes the reader understand the importance of the interconnectedness of language, identity, and care. Without these key themes, LeBlanc’s text would not have as many layers of complexity surrounding her characters and their development. Without a doubt, *Alma* the poem

and Alma the character reach the heart of Acadians all over Acadie as she overcomes not only stereotypical norms, but is able to do so by representing the strength and literary plurality of Acadians through a collection of poems.

CHAPTER 3: Plurality of life experiences and care in *and a body to remember with*

As explored in the two previous chapters, Canadian literature expands well beyond a familiar dichotomy between English and French writing. Canadian women authors have explored their uniqueness, particularly their experience as women from different cultures who value identity, community, and language in many types of literature. Their writing counters some of the traditional literary critical discourse as Arun Prabha Mukherjee explains. She notes, “According to nationalist critics, in order to be considered a Canadian writer, one does not just need Canadian content in one’s work; only ‘birthright Canadians’ can be considered Canadian writers. Such criteria have meant that non-Canadian-born writer’s work has been slotted as ‘immigrant writing’” (159). Mukherjee also questions the meaning of sub-categorizing works of women who are a part of a racial minority because they have much more to share than being a newcomer (159). According to critic James L. Battersby, elevating one’s writing above restrictive norms allows for the representation of one’s self, meaning that there is a deeper investigation of their identity and culture (27). As a result, plural Canadian literary discourse makes it so as neither the race nor the culture of a writer denies the fact that they are indeed writing Canadian literature, it simply strengthens it. In Canadian women’s writing, it emphasizes the experience of the author as well as posing a critique on sociopolitical and historical events surrounding their experiences (García 242). In fact, critic Luis Alberto Ambroggio highlights this by stating that: “(...) el acto de la imaginación y expresión poética nos permite superar la preocupación entre el realismo y subjetivismo de la memoria porque este género de creación toca otros niveles de vivencia y obtención de significados.” (149). For this reason, people who do not share this culture can understand the deeper meaning of the literature, clarifying that poetry and imagination are essential to the act of remembering oneself and culture.

An author who is an example of multilingual Canadian writing is Carmen Rodríguez. Originally from Chile, Rodríguez immigrated to Vancouver in response to the oppressive Pinochet regime in the 1970s (Rodríguez). Her work as an author evolved from working part-time as a teaching assistant and janitor, to publishing poems, anthologies, and short stories. Her collection of short stories, *and a body to remember with*³, was published in 1997 and shares the fictional stories of women who explore the question of identity, language, and motherhood. Rodríguez in fact fictionalized some of her stories based on the real experiences of people she knows. The stories

³ Rodríguez does not use capital letters for the title of her collection nor for the titles of her short stories.

feature female characters who have immigrated to Canada, in most cases from Latin America countries, but also from other places. No story is alike, as themes range from violence, immigration, experiencing Canada, and the difficulties and triumphs of motherhood.

It is also important to note that some of Rodríguez's short stories were originally published in Spanish and translated into English. As Rodríguez explains in the book's foreword, the volume is not just the result of a creative process, but also "an interesting linguistic exercise" (13). She describes having her words translated from Spanish into English by translators, then doing it herself from Spanish into English, and sometimes back to Spanish again. Each time, there were new connotations and emotions (13). This back-and-forth continued until she "felt that both tips of [her] tongue and [her] two sets of ears were satisfied" (14). Therefore, while this version of the collection is published in English, it mirrors her "hyphenated existence" (14) and carries the echoes of Spanish with it. It is a means to express herself as a Chilean Canadian author:

I live, struggle, and work here, but I cannot forget where I came from. My heart trespasses borders and stretches over a whole continent to find its home at the two extremes of the Americas: in Chile and in Canada. And my hand writes in two languages: Spanish, my mother tongue, and English, my adopted tongue. (14)

This also implies that the words that are written in Spanish throughout the text were chosen carefully; they are conveying a message, something that simply could not be written in English. The duality of language therefore expresses Rodríguez's bilingualism and biculturalism, which is a key factor in her work.

This chapter will highlight three stories: "black hole", "i sing, therefore i am", and "breaking the ice". These particular stories explore the relationships between identity, community, and motherhood through the use of the protagonists' experiences. As there are intersecting themes among all the stories, excerpts from other stories will also be briefly mentioned to emphasize or support an aspect in one of the main three stories, which will allow a greater understanding of Rodríguez's literary approach. The following analysis will undertake an investigation of the significant themes in *and a body to remember with* such as the use of intertextuality, intercultural friendships, and the effects of motherhood as both mothers and grandmothers.

INTERTEXTUALITY

Before turning to our analysis of the short stories, it is particularly interesting to look at Rodríguez's use of epigraphs. Every section (which focuses on one particular woman) is prefaced by a quote from a Latin American author⁴:

Facing the ocean, I'm one
 Another one when I turn
 My head swarms with farewells
 Longing burn in my chest
 -Gabriela Mistral (99)

This type of intertextuality demonstrates firstly an admiration for these authors' works. Furthermore, these authors are known to criticize or denounce the injustices surrounding them. Indeed, the home countries of the authors, Chile, Uruguay, and Argentina, have faced sociopolitical issues that affected the lives of many. For them, writing was a way to express frustrations and denounce injustices present in their countries, even if that meant fearing severe repercussions. Despite this, the authors demonstrate strength by demanding justice through the use of the arts. For example, Eduardo Galeano, the Uruguayan author highlighted on page 119, is known for his 1971 book *Las venas abiertas de América Latina*⁵, where he criticizes the impact of colonialism and assimilation on the Indigenous and enslaved peoples of and in Latin America. This could mean that Rodríguez also wants to convey this resistance in her own works. Having lived a similar life, she understands the importance of speaking out through literature.

Although Rodríguez mostly touches upon the abuse of power and injustices in Latin America, she also uses her pen to bring forward the injustices committed towards the Indigenous people of Turtle Island in her story "saudade":

Charlie got tired of hiding from the government agent and went off to the residential school with his hair slicked down and a big smile on his face. He was eleven years old then. He never came back. Two years later, the government sent a letter saying he had run away. His mother didn't cry. Flora went out to throw stones into the river. They didn't look for him. (68)

⁴ There are quotes from Pablo Neruda, Cristina Peri Rossi, Gabriela Mistral, Julio Cortázar, Eduardo Galeano, and Rubén Blades.

⁵ Also known as *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent* in the English translation.

The above quote explores how Indigenous childrens' innocence was taken from them, and even when they disappeared, their families could not muster the strength to find them. Rodríguez acknowledges her Canadian self in this text as she explores a sensitive subject in Canada's history. For this reason, we understand that the authors chosen in the epigraphs are an influence not only on Rodríguez's aesthetic choices, but the overarching themes explored and the way they are approached. They also allow her to create parallels between social justice issues in Latin America and in Canada.

INTERCULTURAL BOND

As noted earlier, *and a body to remember with* shares many stories of women who face adversity and challenges, stories which are the foundations for themes of motherhood and immigration. Some stories focus only on one experience whereas others recount how different women navigate multiple and intersecting experiences. A multifaceted approach to the themes demonstrates that the experiences are not unique to just a certain group, it can affect people of all origins and ethnicities. A common experience can help shape the identity of a community who can understand similar strong opinions and feelings. Critic Lori Ashcraft states that such connections can help in trauma recovery, specifically "a focus on our strengths; love and support from our peers; and opportunities to contribute to the wellbeing of others" (10). In *and a body to remember with*, the story "breaking the ice" is an example of this type of support and communal bond. It is the story of three women, Silvia, Rosa, and Signora Carmella, who come from three different parts of the world, Chile, the Azores, and Italy, respectively, and they all share the difficulties of adapting to Canadian culture and lifestyles. The group also speaks to each other in English as they have different mother tongues, but that does not stop that for expressing themselves in the language of their choice to express frustration or shock (Rodríguez 112). They do not only share having English as a second language, but, according to critic Carol Stos, they also share the "(...) the difficult process of adopting, adapting to, or even just tolerating new and different cultural and societal norms" (148). The short story is narrated by Silvia, who makes note of their growing friendship. Initially, their bond was created over watching their sons and grandsons play hockey: "Every Wednesday, at six in the morning, we saw each other at Britannia, holding coffees in our shivering hands, while the 'little ones', dressed as astronauts, got trained to hit a puck with a stick" (109). Bonding over sports is something that is often present in first-generation people as people

tend to spend a lot of time together, sharing a weekly moment with a common goal (Walseth 9). As a result of that social bond, Rodríguez highlights numerous times throughout the book that the women met on Wednesdays and the importance of that meeting: “Every Wednesday we kept on seeing each other (...)” (112). They even bring coffee and food to share, to sustain each other.

Not only does hockey bring them together, but the shared experience of motherhood keeps that bond alive. Incidentally, this is not unique to this particular story. The act of care among mothers is also seen in the short story “trespass”, where the narrator talks to a *comadre*⁶, telling her about their newfound life in Vancouver: “You were right to be afraid, *comadre*. But fear is not insurmountable, and now, more than ever there is hope” (90). The term of endearment, *comadre*, makes the reader understand the friendship present between the two mothers. It also reinforces the aspect that motherhood can bond people together into a trusting relationship, even across borders. Returning to “breaking the ice”, all three women in this story are either single mothers or widows, meaning they are responsible for the upbringing and care of their children and grandchildren. In their specific cases, it is not only childcaring that affect them, but the changes in the very definitions and practices of motherhood they observed when they moved to Canada. They face situations that they had never seen before, such as having a daughter who defies the requests of her mother. At one point, Signora Carmella tells Silvia that Rosa had a falling out with her daughter that left her heartbroken due to the fact her daughter was dating a Black man. As hard as it may be for readers to understand why Rosa is upset at the news, and as much as this example speaks to multiple forms of racism, for our purposes, it also demonstrates how the three women seek to support each other. Understanding the cultural significance for Rosa (the embarrassment of having a rebellious daughter whose lover is deemed “inappropriate”), the two women care for her in a way that allows her to overcome her racism: “What to say? What to do? The psychologist in me should know, especially, what to say. (...) Rosa, Rosa, why did you abandon us on such an ugly day, when I was looking forward to eating your bread so much?” (114). Even if Rosa’s absence also means the absence of the cherished bread that the women were in the habit of sharing while they watched the hockey practice, Carmella and Silvia demonstrate the very care defined by critic Marie Carrière in her text “Mémoire du care, féminisme en mémoire”; they go beyond the traditional realm of caring, by bringing forward the rather uncomfortable act of accepting

⁶ *Comadre* is an endearing term in Spanish literally meaning “co-mother”, but with the connotation of friendship and care.

something that is different, or unknown, in their culture (206). In this case, they reflect upon the biases they overcame, recognizing the importance of supporting their friend in her own unlearning. As a result, they discuss their own experiences with their daughters who have had extramarital relationships or failed relationships that may have caused shame for their families. The women realize that they share similar experiences with their own daughters even if they do not come from the same culture, demonstrating that motherhood can be very alike across different countries. That said, it is also worth noting that Rosa's daughter confronts her mother "in English" (114), adding further insult by suggesting that her actions, her attitudes and now her language are distancing the daughter from the mother.

Signora Carmella and Silvia understand Rosa's sadness and are able to make her recognize the importance of her daughter's relationship even if it is not what she expected of her. The intercultural bond among the three women also leads to Silvia opening up to her friend: "As I cry for her, my face buried in her smoky coat, I realize that I am not only crying for this Italian grandmother, for Enzo and Gina, Rosa, Luzia and Americo. I'm also crying for all the accumulated tragedies of my own life (...)" (117). Silvia allowing herself to feel raw emotions around her friends demonstrates the sense of community they have built. In the short story "mirror", there is a similar sense of community created between two women, Clara, who lives in Canada, and Cristina, a young woman who fled torture and abuse in Chile (39). Clara physically and emotionally cares for her new friend, and eventually they both open up to each other to talk about everything and nothing: "In the semi-darkness we drank tea and spoke in whispers about the things we never mentioned in the light of day: your childhood, my childhood; your adolescence, your first love; my adolescence, my first love" (42). Rodríguez conveys the intimacy and care in these stories by making the women vulnerable, but it is in part the vulnerability that makes their relationships closer. In the first story, their communal strength and shared experiences make them support people to Rosa, who, clearly, is quite distraught. That said, the reader can thus understand that the author puts an emphasis on female relationships built on common experiences in her short stories.

MOTHERHOOD AS STRENGTH

Equally important to the ways in which motherhood creates bonds among women, Rodríguez's text highlights motherhood as strength. Critic Lori Saint-Martin situates motherhood in contemporary literature as a gateway to creation and subject status

in writing by women (1999, 252). For this reason, *and a body to remember with* can be seen as a type of echo of Rodríguez's own motherhood and care. In an interview, Rodríguez discusses how she needed to work in the Chilean underground in order to support her family (Room). This put her family at risk, but she did not stop thinking about them. In many Latin American countries, women make similar sacrifices for their children. Rodríguez explores this theme in the text "i sing, therefore i am". The text follows the story of an unnamed female narrator who crosses the Andes mountains to reach the U.S, describing the cruel reality of such a treacherous trip. Indeed, other accounts - such as Aguirre and Simmers' article "Mexican Body in Immigration Discourse" - confirm the danger, not only because of the difficult climate, but also due to the threat of *pandillas*⁷ (99). The border crossing can also be a sign of bicultural or transcultural social space, as Rodríguez explores in her stories. In "i sing, therefore i am", the narrator is tortured by what is presumed to be a corrupt police officer with ties to a *pandilla*, but she does not stop thinking of her son and mother: "She dreamed that her mother was taking her by the hand through the clouds towards an orange tree full of fruit. Her son was sitting on a branch, peeling an orange" (55). The reader may understand this as a way to ignore the pain of the torture, but this changes when there is the repetition of wanting to see her mother and son. This means that they represent hope for her; they care for her even though they are not physically there. At the end of this story, Rodríguez reunites the three by having them go together to Canada, showing that the narrator survived thanks to the help of her family. Furthermore, not only does the narrator think of her child, she also thinks of her mother, demonstrating the intergenerational aspects of maternal care. She relies on the generation before her and after her to gain strength, all while hoping to sew her son's sleeve. Even through the worst of moments, this mother's thoughts are of taking care of her child, all while longing for her own mother. Intergenerational motherhood is a theme repeated within Rodríguez's work, as in the text the "labyrinths of love", an elderly grandmother begs her daughter to share the stories of her home country to her granddaughters. Such acts of intergenerational care can be seen as wanting to preserve one's culture, and remembrance of a loving, strong mother figure. It is without a doubt that the strength of motherhood, whether it be through violent situations or dire moments, is an important theme to Rodríguez's work.

⁷ Latin American Spanish word for an organized crime group.

FINDING AN IDENTITY

As we have seen in multiple instances in the works by Naomi Fontaine and Georgette LeBlanc, Rodríguez's protagonists often doubt their identity, whether it is due to colonial influences or patriarchal views. In the context of *and a body to remember with*, Rodríguez brings forward her own experience of questioning her identity when she first arrived in Canada (Room). Rodríguez shared in another interview that when she first arrived to Canada, she could not write because she felt lost, in denial, and in survival mode (Iranian Poets). Under those circumstances, the author shares stories of women who have similar feelings of uncertainty about the future due to a great change of identity, who start as being a citizen of a country in peril and become a newcomer in a politically calm country. The opening story of the collection, "black hole", tells the story of Estela de Ramírez, a mother who escaped from Chile with her husband and two young daughters. When they first arrived in Vancouver, Estela did not know anything about Canada or its culture, something that deeply troubled her: "This became evident when they arrived in Vancouver and Estela realized that when she opened her mouth, nothing would come out, not even the 'This is a table and that's a chair' that Miss Soto had taught her in Liceo #2" (21). In light of Rodríguez's personal experience, this event can be explained as Estela's initial shock; she realizes that she cannot speak the language as she could not remember her high school English classes and the lack of language reminds her that she is an outcast in a culture she doesn't know. In simple terms, Estela is recovering from an identity that has been pushed out of her; she was forced to leave behind everything she knew and loved in order to survive. This means that she is finding a new identity based in new surroundings. Eventually, Estela does adapt to her new surroundings, language, and culture, but she still remembers and values her Chilean identity. This aspect of the novel touches on Rodríguez's theme of biculturalism: "But in the end, I think that also what most people come to see it is that you can belong to the two places, but it takes many years: you can like it here, you can like it there, and it's OK, and emotionally you are able to do that" (Iranian Poets). This is highlighted when the young woman calls her mother both *Mami*⁸ and Mom, demonstrating her multilingualism and the importance of preserving her mother tongue (25). As we saw in our analysis of Fontaine's novel *Manikanetish*, using terms of address specific to one's own culture can help maintain that culture, but also demonstrate the respect we have for others around us. This means that even when Estela is questioning her identity, she knows to address her mother in

⁸ *Mami* is a diminutive of *Mamá*, which could be translated as Mummy or Mommy in English.

Spanish. This respect is reciprocated as her mother calls her *mijita*⁹ when addressing her daughter's identity crisis.

Nevertheless, Estela's identity shifts to fit into Canadian culture as she gains Canadian citizenship and her mother notices the changes within her: "It's okay, Mom... We have to adapt and accept things, you know... How do I feel? Fine, I guess... Yeah, it makes me sad, but part of me also feels proud ..." (26). This brings us back to critic Mukherjee's perspectives on the expectations of immigrant minority women; they are expected to merge into "traditional" white culture and forget their country of origin (155). Inasmuch as Estela wants to fit into her new surroundings, she also loses her Chilean self. At the end of the story, we can see that when she is finally allowed to return to Chile, she is in despair (32). She does not know how to separate her two identities, emphasizing again a fraught biculturalism, but in a way that blurs the lines: "The only clear thing in the midst of total darkness was her voice, trapped in her throat, trying to remember how to cry out for help... but, in what language?" (35). Estela wants to return to her mother and her community but is afraid of losing touch with herself, she is "stuck" between Spanish and English, Chile and Canada. Rodríguez explores the complexities of learning a new language, navigating a new culture, all while being a mother and having to guide children through the same uncertainties and doubts.

GRANDMOTHERS AS PILLARS OF COMMUNITIES

Following a similar train of thought, Rodríguez introduces another type of character that reminds women of their home countries and also of their granddaughters. The grandmothers in *and a body to remember with* play a significant role as they represent the strength of communities and are a physical reminder of the community, culture, and people the women left behind when leaving their country. This is an important role as not only do grandmothers ensure the cultural heritage passed onto their own daughters, they also ensure that their grandchildren, who may have only been in the country for their infancy, are proud and understand the importance of their cultural and family heritage. The grandmothers are a way for them to not forget who they are, something that Rodríguez personally values and as quoted by critic and historian of Latin American literature, Hugh Hazelton, states: "Vivo aquí, trabajo aquí, lucho aquí, escribo aquí. (...) Pero no puedo

⁹ *Mijita* is a diminutive of *mija*, an affectionate name composed of *mija* (*mi+hija*) (my daughter) and *-ita* (used to symbolize something small, or cute). In this case, it is a pet name.

olvidar de donde soy. Mi corazón vive aquí también, pero siempre mira al sur” (211). Here, Rodríguez explains that even though she lives in Canada, it is imperative for her to remember where she comes from. In the short story “black hole”, we saw that Estela teeters unsteadily between her two identities, almost forgetting who she is. Her mother, who is also a grandmother, is a constant reminder of her community and culture as they communicate frequently via telephone or mail. That said, she can also be seen as a reminder of Estela’s struggle with identity. Even if Estela’s mother is unable to understand her disconnect between Chile and Canada, she is the one to tell Estela she is no longer blacklisted from Chile, something that she does with glee as it means that her family is able to be reunited once again:

Of course it’s accurate, Estela. Lina told me she read it in El Mercurio too. It’s all over the news. On TV too... Yeah... Everybody’s here... Well, everybody came to visit... Yeah, everybody’s excited... Well, Lina’s here, and Señora Olvido, and Renato, of course, and Gino... Señor Orozco is coming in a little while... Well, they just wanted to celebrate with me... (31)

In this quote, the reader can understand that Estela’s mother is a pillar of her community, the epicenter for news about Chile for Estela, but also where Estela’s family and close ones in Chile reunite to hear news about her. It is important to note that the grandmother is also the one who reminds Estela of the importance to share the Spanish language, culture and food with her granddaughters (26-28).

This reminder is also present through a grandmother figure in the story “accented living.” This story in fact sheds light on multiple changes in language, culture and country through the generations. The protagonist visits her aging *Oma*¹⁰ in Argentina. Despite having fuzzy memories of her granddaughter, *Oma* insists on sharing the family history; she immigrated from Germany with her young children and husband in search of a better life before the Second World War. Unfortunately, history repeats itself as her daughter had to leave Argentina with her own young children, in this context the granddaughter, in order to escape an oppressive political regime (104). These memories are important, as it makes the narrator realize that her story resonates in her own from fleeing to Canada: “(...) I realize that Oma’s story is mine and that of my daughter’s, who sits beside me. I look at Oma and I see so many exiled, immigrant women (...)” (104). Despite not having ties to Germany herself, the granddaughter retains her grandmother’s heritage by using the

¹⁰ *Oma* means grandma in German.

German form of address, *Oma*. This demonstrates that the connection between granddaughter and grandmother strengthen the legacy of not only their culture, but also that of their community. Rodríguez's approach to the grandmother character repeats itself again in a text we have already discussed, "the labyrinths of love", where the protagonist's mother insists that she teaches her children about Chile, all while on her death bed. Throughout Rodríguez's book of short stories, the grandmother role signifies home as well as the value of preserving a culture, a history, and at least elements of a language, for subsequent generations.

Rodríguez's work demonstrates the plurality of Canadian women writing; she uncovers topics such as colonialism, identity, and the different aspects of motherhood. The stories "black hole", "i think, therefore i am" and "breaking the ice", among other stories in the collection, explore these themes through the perspective of women who faced immigration and exile. Undoubtedly, Rodríguez uses her own experience as inspiration by writing about "(...) the female experience of resistance, exile and immigration, situating her accounts of the difficult process of transculturation on the body, each story adding another woman's body, another woman's voice to the tale" (Stos 143). Therefore, we, as readers, can understand that these stories are a type of fictional memoir used to share personal accounts. It is evident that the author also values the roles of motherhood, as the majority of her characters are strong and caring mothers who navigate new relationships and cultures. It is also important to note that community and cultural heritage are highlighted by Rodríguez have roots in her own Chilean identity and culture. Overall, *and a body to remember with* brings forward the voices and experiences of Canadian women who have had different life experiences and are from a number of different cultures.

CONCLUSION

At the outset of this analysis, we asked ourselves how women writers navigate the plurality of languages and non-standard forms of languages and how to these minority languages influence the themes of community, care, and motherhood. In fact, in *Manikanetish* by Naomi Fontaine, *Alma* by Georgette LeBlanc, and *and a body to remember with* by Carmen Rodríguez, we were able to explore the interconnectedness of language, care, community, and motherhood. These themes are important, as they allow us to understand why language and identity are fundamental to Canadian literature, and more specifically, to contemporary women's writing.

Firstly, *Manikanetish* allows for a deeper observation of Indigenous writing in Canada. In particular, Fontaine's work explores how Indigenous storytelling and writing are important to the ongoing project of decolonizing literature. Her protagonist, Yammie, can be seen as a mirror of Fontaine as she reflects on her language use and personal experience. In fact, it is through Yammie that the reader can first understand that motherhood is not limited to the relationship of a mother and child; teachers and students also benefit from this type of relationship. In fact, her students are the ones to remind her of her Indigenous roots through their care and their teachings. They represent the strength of Uashat by supporting the young mothers around them, but also those mourning their loved ones. In addition, Yammie's internal identity crisis represents the harm done to Indigenous communities, how they are expected to follow a eurocentric way of life. She is able to overcome this with the help of her community and eventually begins accepting herself and her heritage. Fontaine supports this in her work by using the works of another Indigenous (in this case also Innu) author, An Antane Kapeshe, to demonstrate her own relationship with the decolonization of literature and language. This particular aspect hints at the intertextuality within Canadian literature. By highlighting the Innu language and identity, Fontaine's work represents the cultural celebration of the balance between care, community, and language.

Secondly, *Alma* demonstrates how women can define their own culture, language, and community. The language in *Alma* is particular as it defines LeBlanc's Acadie, but it represents the disparities of its use. It is also used to show the relationships, whether romantic or platonic, present within the text itself and how it helps create a shift in the protagonist's world. Similarly to *Manikanetish*, *Alma* also highlights care and motherhood; Françoise la Première protects her daughter in order to maintain her community. Self-care is also a key concept in *Alma* the character, as it is one of the driving factors that make her certain of her identity, wants, and needs. In a way,

these aspects of the main protagonist show that she is not only breaking traditional gender roles, but she is also the pillar of language and care in her home community. Overall, LeBlanc's use of language in her work gives representation to the Acadian culture in Nova Scotia and the plurality of the French language in Canada. It is clear that the complexity of her characters and themes are born from the interconnectedness of both her culture and heritage.

Thirdly, *and a body to remember with* demonstrates how someone who is not born in a certain country can still share values and experiences with the country's literature. Rodríguez highlights the multilingual experience in literature as her work is written in both Spanish and English, something that gives cultural and personal significance to her novel. The different perspectives of the stories also give insight into a world often underrepresented within Canadian literature; the stories of women who left their home countries in search of "better" life in Canada. These experiences act a pillar in their relationship, creating a community based off friendship and motherhood. Rodríguez's text also shows the intergenerational knowledge and wisdom shared by grandmothers to their granddaughters. In addition, Rodríguez's own experience with identity and culture is demonstrated through her work by the creation of female characters that face similar difficulties such as adapting to a new culture without leaving their heritage behind. *and a body to remember with* demonstrates that one's identity can be plural; one cultural affiliation does not diminish another. Specifically, the duality of cultures explored shows that Rodríguez values those two facets of herself and wants to express that in her writing. This particular work brings forward the plurality of Canadian experiences, while also noting that we share similar experiences that may bond us together.

Finally, all three works situate themselves within the realm of the definitions of care, community, motherhood, and language given by scholars Carrière, Saint-Martin, Million, and Papillon. As discussed earlier, these themes are explored through the use of other sub-themes such as identity, assimilation, and immigration. Fontaine, LeBlanc, and Rodríguez successfully show the interconnectedness of their languages and cultures and in so doing they also show the plurality of women's writing in Canadian literature.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources:

Fontaine, Naomi. *Manikanetish*. Mémoire d'encrier, 2017.

LeBlanc, Georgette. *Alma*. Éditions Perce-Neige, 2008.

Rodríguez, Carmen. *and a body to remember with*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 1997.

Secondary Sources:

Acoose-Miswonigeesikokwe, Janice. *Iskwewak Kah' Ki Yaw Ni Wahkomakanak: Neither Indian Princesses nor Easy Squaws*. Women's Press, 2016.

Aguirre, Adalberto Jr., Simmers, Jennifer K. "Mexican Border Crossers: The Mexican Body in Immigration Discourse." *Social Justice*, vol. 35, no. 4, 2008, pp. 99-106.

Ambroggio, Luis Alberto. "La Memoria en la Obra de las Poetas Hispanocanadienses Yvonne América Truque y Carmen Rodríguez." *Revista Anual de Estudios Literarios*, special issue of *Hispanic Canadian Writers*, vol. 15, no. 17, 2011, pp. 149-162.

Ashcraft, Lori. "Communities Bond Through Shared Experiences." *Behavioral Healthcare*, vol. 34, no. 4, 2014, pp. 10-11.

Battersby, James L. "Narrativity, Self, and Self-Representation." *Narrative*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2006, pp. 27-44.

Battiste, Marie. *Decolonizing Education: Nourishing the Learning Spirit*. UBC Press, Purich Publishing, 2013.

Beverley, Andrea. "The Oral, the Archive, and Ethics: Canadian Women Writers Telling It." *Basements and Attics, Closets and Cyberspace: Explorations in Canadian Women's Archives*, edited by Linda M. Morra, Jessica Schagerl, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2012, pp. 155-168.

Boudreau, J. Paul, Gammel, Irene. "Linguistic Schizophrenia: The Poetics of Acadian Identity Construction." *Revue d'études canadiennes*, vol. 32, no.4, 1998, pp. 52-68.

Brake, Justin. "Ktaqmuk." *Maisonneuve: A Quarterly of Arts, Opinion & Ideas*, available on <https://maisonneuve.org/>, 2021.

Carrière, Marie. "Du métaféminisme et des histoires au féminin." *Régénérations : Écritures des femmes au Canada*, edited by Marie Carrière, Patricia Demers, The University of Alberta Press, 2014, pp. 85-97.

- Carrière, Marie. "Mémoire du care, féminisme en mémoire." *Women in French Studies*, 2015, pp. 205-217.
- Carrière, Marie. *Writing in the Feminine in French and English Canada*. University of Toronto Press, 2002.
- DeFalco, Amelia. *Imagining Care: Reasonability, Dependency, and Canadian Literature*. University of Toronto Press, 2016.
- Dudgeon, Patricia, Bray, Abigail. "Indigenous Relationality: Women, Kinship and the Law." *Genealogy*, vol. 3, no. 2, 2019, pp. 1-23.
- Filippi, Bénédicte. "Le mot préféré de Naomi Fontaine." *Radio-Canada*, <https://ici.radio-canada.ca/nouvelle/1187845/mot-prefere-innu-naomi-fontaine>. Accessed November 15 2021.
- Fontaine, Naomi. Littérature autochtone : Résurgence, guérison et affirmation, 7 février 2022, Université d'Ottawa, Ottawa, ONT. Conference Presentation.
- Fritzenkötter, Stefanie. "H'allons Back à la Baie!- Aspects of Baie Sainte-Marie Acadian French in a 2011 Corpus." *Études canadiennes/Canadian Studies*, no. 76, 2014, pp. 43-56.
- Galeano, Eduardo. *Las venas abiertas de America Latina*. Siglo veintiuno editores, 1971.
- García, Irenne. "Crítica y Teoría Literaria Feminista: una Guía de Lectura." *Debate Feminista*, vol. 9, 1994, pp. 239-244.
- Hazelton, Hugh. *Latinocanáda: A Critical Study of Ten Latin American Writers of Canada*. McGill-Queen's University Press, 2007.
- Huberman, Isabella. "Entrevue avec Naomi Fontaine : Garder nos yeux dans l'espoir." *Littoral*, no. 11, 2016, pp. 79.
- Huberman, Isabella. "Les possibles de l'amour décolonial : Relations, transmissions et silences dans *Kuessipan* de Naomi Fontaine." *Voix Plurielles*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2016, pp. 111-126.
- Iranian Poets. Interview with Carmen Rodríguez. *Auto Open Hosting*, 5 August 1999, <http://www.autopenhosting.org/IranianPoets/aninterview.html>. Accessed 24 May 2022.
- Kapesh, An Antane. *Je suis une maudite sauvagesse/Eukuan nin matshimanity innu-iskueu*. Leméac, 1976.
- Keppie, Christina. "Understanding the Meaning of Acadie." *Journal of Canadian Studies*, vol. 45, no. 1, 2011, pp. 200-258.

- Lamszus, Elizabeth M. A. "Native Americas: A Transnational and (Post)colonial study of Indigenous Women writers in Canada, the United States, and the Caribbean." *ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global*, vol. 77, no. 6, 2016, pp. 1-219.
- Langevin, Francis. "Sacrifice du corps et transmission dans *Alma, Amédé et Prudent* de Georgette LeBlanc." *Voix Plurielles*, vol. 13, no. 2, 2016, pp. 41-54.
- Massicotte, Julien. "L'ambivalence acadienne : Discours et identité à l'heure de la Confédération." *Acadiensis*, vol. 46, no.2, 2017, pp. 143-154.
- Million, Dian. "Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History." *Wicazo Sa Review*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2009, pp. 53-76.
- Million, Dian. "There is a River in Me: Theory from Life." *Theorizing Native Studies*, edited by Andrea Smith, Audra Simpson, Duke University Press, 2014, pp. 31-42.
- Morency, Jean and Hélène Destrempe. "La littérature acadienne." *Québec français*, no.154, 2009, pp.66-68.
- Mosetto, Anna Paola. "Nicole Brossard, Naomi Fontaine : L'univers et la réserve en assonance." *Francofonia: Studi e Ricerche Sulle Letterature di Lingua Francese*, special issue of *Femmes voyelles. Écrivaines du Québec.*, vol. 32, no. 62, 2012, pp. 45-57.
- Moya, Paula M.L. "Decolonial Love: An Interview with Junot Díaz." *Boston Review*, <https://bostonreview.net/articles/paula-ml-moya-decolonial-love-interview-junot-diaz/>. Accessed October 28 2021.
- Mukherjee, Arun Prabha. "Canadian Nationalism, Canadian Literature and Racial Minority Women." *Floating the Borders: New Context in Canadian Criticism*, edited by Nurjehan Aziz, TSAR Publications, 1999, pp. 151-169
- Mukherjee, Bharati. "Immigrant Writing: Changing the Contours of a National Literature." *American Literary History*, vol. 23, no.3, 2011, pp. 680-696.
- Nyela, Désiré. "LeBlanc Georgette, Alma." *Port Acadie*, no. 22-23, 2012, pp.259-262.
- Papillon, Joëlle. "La solidité des filles chez Naomi Fontaine." *Tangence*, vol.19, 2019, pp. 41-58.
- Papillon, Joëlle. "Les quatre saisons d'Alma : une lecture écoféministe d'Alma de Georgette LeBlanc." *Revue de l'Université de Moncton*, vol.47, no.2, 2016, pp.73-94.
- Papillon, Joëlle. "Plonger : Risque, désir, mobilité et création au féminin chez Georgette LeBlanc." *Voix Plurielles*, vol.13, no.2, 2016, pp. 25-40.
- Paré, François. *Les littératures de l'exiguïté*. 1993. Le Nordir, 2001.

- Room. "Writing that Travels Between Two Languages: An Interview with Carmen Rodríguez." *Room Magazine*, vol. 38, no.1, date n.a., <https://roommagazine.com/writing-that-travels-between-two-languages-an-interview-with-carmen-rodriguez/>. Accessed March 22 2022.
- Saada, Lamia. "Le dedans et le dehors dans *Alma*- Une lecture d'*Alma* de Georgette Leblanc." *Port Acadie*, no.18-19, 2010, pp. 51-61.
- Saint-Martin, Lori. *Écritures au féminin : le genre marqué*. Tangence, 1995.
- Saint-Martin, Lori. *Le nom de la mère : Mères, filles et écriture dans la littérature québécoise au féminin. Essais critiques*. Éditions Nota Bene, 1999.
- St-Laurent, Julie. "Le souffle de l'histoire chez Georgette LeBlanc." *Voix Plurielles*, vol.13, no.2, 2016, pp. 11-22.
- Stos, Carol. "I Write My Self: The Female Body as a Site of Transculturation in the Short Stories of Carmen Rodríguez." *Canadian Cultural Exchange: Translation and Transculturation*, edited by Lucien Pelletier, Norman Cheadle, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2007, pp. 141-157.
- Walseth, Kristin. "Bridging and Bonding Social Capital in Sport- Experiences of Young Women with an Immigrant Background." *Sport, Education and Society*, vol. 13, no. 1, 2008, pp.1-17.