

# Tell Us When You're Uncomfortable: An Anti-Colonial Poetic Script with Mosquito, Lisa, Knowing, Western, Caesarean, Written Word, Marion, Being, Medicine, Sarah, and Other Unruly Characters

by Marion Erickson, Lisa Striegler, and Sarah de Leeuw

Drawing on unruly, messy, and arts-informed methods emerging in Indigenous, anti-colonial, feminist, and queer research and literatures, this creative article is styled as a 'poetic dialogue script' exploring tensions between diverse world-views and ways of being. Authored by Indigenous and white settlers from (so-called) northern British Columbia, the article upends long-standing tendencies in medical and health sciences to pathologize Indigenous peoples, knowledges, and places. In both form (experimental) and conceptual content (anti-colonial and arts-based), the article asks why some bodies, stories, and geographies attain and accrue power while others are written off and out of, for instance, disciplines like medicine. We take as a starting point that if bodies and places are to be re-narrativized, the structures and lineations that discursively form and frame those bodies and places must also be rewritten: to this end, we are informed by the lyrical epic narrative written by Peter Cole of the Douglas First Nation, by the poetic scripting method generated by Métis/Michif scholar Max Liboiron, and by Black Canadian author Esi Edugyan's observation that "[o]ur social hierarchies, our hatreds and divisions, are constructs awaiting dismantlement. This is the Western world as we have built it ... and it can [thus] be changed" (31). Following stories about pathologies in babies from Dakelh Territories, woven through with birth experiences in marginalized geographies, stories about teaching medicine in northern places, and tethered together with conflicted voices and narratives about coexisting in states of contemporary coloniality, this article is an effort to dismantle the various ways that pathologization of people and places occurs.

**MOSQUITO:** nnnnniiiiiiiZZZZZZZZZZZZZ .... ZZZZZZZZZZ ..... ZZZ-  
ziiiiiinnng .... ZZZZ .... nnnnniiiiiii ..... ZZZZZZZZZZZZ ....

**WESTERN:** Which translates in bioscience, which I am here to tell you all about, as roughly: Frequency = 500 vibrations/second; Time Period = (Time Taken) / (Number of Oscillations) = (1/500) = 0.002/second.

**SCRIPT NARRATOR:** Who is translating?

**KNOWING:** Just to say I know the answer.

**WESTERN:** And I trust your answer, Knowing. You're always so RIGHT, you have ALL the answers.

**MOSQUITO:** ZZZZZZZZZZ ..... ZZZziiiiiinnng

**SCRIPT NARRATOR:** WTF?

**CAESAREAN:** Okay. Look. I need to know about A BIRTH! About the baby here. And the mother. Can we talk about something real? Translating? Really? There's a BIRTH happening here.

*"Okay. Look. I need to know about A BIRTH! About the baby here. And the mother. Can we talk about something real?"*

**MEDICINE:** You're welcome, Caesarean. Thank goodness for me.

**WESTERN:** Medicine! Yes! Thanks for YOU. Of course. I know all about that too. If it had not been for me, you would not have a job ...

**MOSQUITO:** zzzzzzzzzz ..... zzzziiiiinnng

**CAESAREAN/MEDICINE:** (Crying out together.) CUT! Let's CUT! I am so clear. CLEAR-CUT! CLEAR-CUT! Lands. Women. Thank goodness I was discovered and pioneered by doctors. DOCTORS! White, male DOCTORS. CUT! Everything is CLEAR-CUT.

**MARION:** Ummmmm ... can I mention a story? A history I know to be true?

(**Marion** begins fastening a white male to a chair, fixes his tie nicely, and adjusts his posture neatly.)

**WESTERN:** What are you doing?

**MARION:** I am placing him here so you can better listen to me ... (*Facing Western.*) This is okay, right?

**WESTERN:** Yes, that's fine.

**MEDICINE:** (*Squints eyes inquisitively.*) Odd, I never noticed how well that works.

**MARION:** Well, I certainly have. Now. Would you like to listen now to my perspective? Are you listening, Western? Medicine?

**WESTERN:** (*Looking at the white male.*) Yes.

**MEDICINE:** (*Also looking at the white male.*) Yes.

**WESTERN:** Oh, of course I am listening. I always honour and respect little stories like yours. It is so important to discover your stories. Also. Stories! How cute! Totally. Yeah. I will just record what you have to say, okay? Then it is mine? Your stories?

**WRITTEN WORD:** And I will just ensure this is all accurately and scientifically documented, okay? No harm in that. In English? So, you know, truth can be shared. Verified. Anchored in evidence? Are stories evidence, by the way?

**MOSQUITO:** zzzzzzzzzz ..... zzzziiiiinnng

**SARAH:** Ummmmm? If anyone wants, there are some references and citations for our discussion ... in case anyone has, like, a strong desire to delve into the literatures undergirding this fascinating inter/play?\*

**UNRULY CHARACTERS:** (*To reader.*) How do we keep these people focused?

**WRITTEN WORD:** I beg your pardon? Did somebody say something? If it's not written down, it's not real.

**WESTERN:** Wait a minute! I thought that was MY line! And did I mention that cities are the best? All in the name of things being clear-cut.

**MOSQUITO:** zzzz nnnnzzzzz

**LISA:** (*Swats.*) Dammit! This infernal thing is annoying! How can I concentrate? Look, I know you think I'm supposed to be 'Western,' but I don't 'feel' like Western ...

**MARION:** If you knew where the mosquito came from, it wouldn't bother you so much ...

**LISA:** Well, we'll see about that ...

**MARION:** I think what you need to know is the evidence base and literature review behind this conversation.

**UNRULY CHARACTERS:** This will teach something about health. This is art teaching something about health. Remember this. Herein is something about health. A lesson. Listen.

**WESTERN:** Is there a literature review for this? What's the evidence?

**MARION:** You're not listening. There's the methodology for the evidence base.<sup>1</sup> There's a reference.<sup>2</sup>

**CAESAREAN:** This. Is. About. Me. This. Is. About. Me. CLEAR-CUT.

**UNRULY CHARACTERS:** You. And you. And you. And us. And you. And me. And you.

**BEING:** Mountains. River. Trees. Air. Creeks. Lakes. Bears. Sky. Moss. Berries. Moose. Deer. Ferns. Streams. Wind. Rain. Snow. Sun. Islands. These are here with us too. Remember the land. The territory. The ecology.

*"Mountains. River. Trees. Air. Creeks. Lakes. Bears. Sky. Moss. Berries. Moose. Deer. Ferns. Streams. Wind. Rain. Snow. Sun. Islands. These are here with us too. Remember the land."*

**WESTERN/MEDICINE/KNOWING:** (*In unison, with arms around each other.*) Wait! First, land is for extraction and profit, not health. Second, your people didn't do C-sections. We discovered them. That's scientific brilliance. That's MEDICINE. And it all took place in CITIES!

**WRITTEN WORD:** And I wrote it down.

**MARION:** Now this is going to be an interesting story ... (*Laughing smugly.*)

**BEING:** Well, you were raised by Western, and you look the part. And I have first-hand knowledge that you're Western, since I've been watching you ... you can't just bang on a drum and reject all that is Western.

**WESTERN:** Drum? Did I hear someone say 'drum'? We should put it in a museum for safekeeping. So the people can learn about culture.

**BEING:** (*Rolls eyes.*)

**MARION:** (*Picks up white male's arms and starts waving them.*) Hey you! I'm over here. I'm getting kind of uncomfortable.

**MEDICINE:** (*Looking at white male.*) Uncomfortable? I can fix that. (*Hands white male a Coke.*)

**CAESAREAN:** Marion, you'll have to do better. You have to stay in control of the situation or we're in trouble.

**WHITE MALE:** (*Drinking from can of Coke.*) slllhlhlhlhlhlhlhoosp

**MEDICINE:** I listened to a podcast. I got a CME credit for it. I think I know how to look after you appropriately. Culturally appropriate? See? All fixed now. Looks like you are doing fine.

**MOSQUITO:** ssssszzzzZZZZZZZiiiiinnng

**LISA:** (*Swats.*) Fine! I'll play Western. I'm the default. I'm the def deaf.

I'm the fault, deaf. (*Cries.*) I think you hurt me ...

**KNOWING:** I know.

**WRITTEN WORD:** I better write that down too.

**BEING:** Look, Written Word, stories existed long before you and your scratchy ego. It's not all about THE WRITTEN. There are even written references about how problematic you are. It's. Like. Well. It's like you've documented your own limitations. (*Sighing.*)<sup>3</sup>

**MARION:** Okay, here's the story. Long ago in the time of my ancestors, there were no mosquitoes in Dakelh territory ...

**UNRULY CHARACTERS:** Past remains in the present, not distant at all, nor safe. I also of course mean bodily remains after death, the bones, but also the excess, the remainder left over from uneven equations, the unaccountable humanness dismissed by early anthropology and genocidal policy. What *remains*, after all that happened has been accounted for, cannot easily be documented, yet it remains ghosted in the archive (Shook 161).

*"Past remains in the present, not distant at all, nor safe. I also of course mean bodily remains after death, the bones, but also the excess, the remainder left over from uneven equations, the unaccountable humanness dismissed by early anthropology and genocidal policy."*

**MARION:** This is the story of the mother who killed her daughter. A mother and daughter and the daughter's husband were on a hunting trip. The daughter was pregnant and was to give birth any day now. The husband/son-in-law was hunting. Natnilh ...

**SARAH:** Who's Natith? And how do you spell that?

**MARION:** N A T N I L H

**LISA:** (*Whispers.*) That's the spirt of sleep paralysis. I know this. I have so many Indigenous friends.

**SARAH:** Natith, natill, am I saying this correctly?

**MARION:** Don't say it too much.

**LISA:** (*Whispers to Sarah.*) Mel says if you say it too much, it will jump on you too. I've had sleep paralysis once, have you?

**MARION:** (*Talks louder as to interrupt.*) While disguising herself as her son-in-law, Natnilh has sex with the mother. The husband continues hunting. The mother kills her daughter with a sharpened arrow.

**SARAH:** Fuck! Really?

**LISA:** To the temple.

**MARION:** Then the mother conceals herself as the daughter. The mother takes all her daughter's clothing and all her special objects and the mother decks herself out in all of her daughter's clothes and things, everything of her daughter's, all of it ...

**CAESAREAN:** Really? This is my story? This is the original beginning of me?

**MEDICINE:** Clearly not. You're mine. I figured you out. I have always known what's best for women and babies, being as I am a fine, fine colonial man.

**WESTERN:** Yes!

**MARION:** Finally, the husband returns from hunting. He lies down beside the woman he believes to be his wife. When he realizes his error, discovering it's his wife's mother, he screams at her and demands to know where his wife is.

**MOSQUITO:** ssssszzzzZZZZZZZiiiiinnng

**MARION:** The mother screams back at him: "We just slept together! Was that not you?" The son is confused. "That was not me, you old hag! Where is my wife?"

**WESTERN/MEDICINE/ KNOWING:** (*In unison, with arms around each other, looking knowingly into each others' eyes.*) Uhuuuuummmm-hmmmm. We like the idea of this ...

**MARION:** The old lady leads the son to his unresponsive naked wife. The husband reaches down to his love and holds her and weeps. That was when he felt the baby. There, the baby is still moving.

**CAESAREAN:** See! This is where I COME in.

**MEDICINE:** I discovered Caesareans. This is a fairy tale. A myth.

**WRITTEN WORD:** I do not think I recorded this story. It can't be real.

**MARION:** Recall that this is the time before mosquitoes, so before your time too, Caesar lover. Caesarean . So.

**WESTERN/ MEDICINE/ KNOWING:** (*In unison, again.*) She should be nicer. Really. She's so difficult. Typical.

**MARION:** The husband cuts the baby from his wife's belly with an obsidian knife. He takes the baby back to the village. On his journey back to the village, the tiny hungry baby attempts to suckle on the dad's ears and neck. Then, suddenly, baby sucks the dad's tongue right out of the dad's face.

**WESTERN:** Gross.

**SARAH:** Really? Right out of that dad's FACE?

**WRITTEN WORD:** Again, I have no documentation of this occurring.

**MARION:** Then, the baby jumps down from the father and runs at all the other men in the village, stealing their tongues



training curriculum. The interrogative review is justified because an interrogative literature review helps review new and emerging topics (Torraco 404). In addition, I worked toward gathering data that were previously unacknowledged or unrecognized as this has the potential to expose seemingly neutral practices that privilege some and disenfranchise others (Herr and Anderson 19; Anderson et al. 17; Johnson 12–13). This method falls short in opening space for critical or CREATIVE reflection: there is no room in traditional literature reviews for processes of discomfort, to encourage feeling uncomfortable ... we are working toward this with this script.

3 See, for instance, Edugyan; see also King.

4 See Pawlowska-Mainville; see also Lillian.

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