

Cree, Canadian and American: Negotiating sovereignties with Jeff Lemire's Equinox and "Justice League Canada" (2014).

Canadian and Torontonians Joe Shuster co-created Superman in 1938, drawing on his experiences at the *Toronto Daily Star* to define Clark Kent's everyday life as a reporter. Despite Shuster's Canadian co-authorship of the definitive American comic book superhero, John Bell suggests "Canadians are probably too wary of the uncritical portrayal of unrestrained heroism and power for the superhero genre ever to become a mainstay of the country's indigenous comic art" (84). Bell's comments express national scepticism towards American myths of heroism, perhaps best summed up in the equally iconic Canadian trope of the 'beautiful loser'.¹ Whilst comic books may heighten these distinct senses of a national narrative, they are also the potential sites of encounter for intersecting national cultural narratives. Intersecting national cultures also lay within Bell's sense of Canadian comic art. Bell's use of the term 'indigenous' here is also problematic. Might superheroes appear a more appealing genre for Indigenous comic art? Capitalising the term Indigenous removes an awkward euphemism for Canadian sovereignty and considers the role of First Nations as participants in sequential art. How might Indigenous superheroes make meaning in a cross-border cultural industry enmeshed in primarily American cultural power? Would such Indigenous visualisations necessitate a tie to First Nations authorship, or, as with Superman, might national narratives be framed by other national interests? These questions come to the fore in the recent "Justice League Canada" storyline of American publisher DC Comics' *Justice League United*. Echoing its past connections with Canada, DC Comics' Canadian cartoonist Jeff Lemire has created a superhero team storyline set explicitly in Northern Ontario, Canada. Lemire's border-crossing story also introduces a new, female, First Nations superhero named Equinox to the DC comic book universe. Cree, and from Moose Factory, Ontario, the hero Equinox is in everyday life the teenager Miiyahbin Marten. This article considers the depiction of Miiyahbin/Equinox within a wider cultural context, discussing the comic as *fantastika* within its culture and time. Whilst the 'DC universe' is firmly a realm of the fantastic, Lemire's storyline underscores how its characters can provide real-life negotiations of American, Canadian and Indigenous identity. National boundaries, identities and sovereignties are potentially re-enforced and challenged through "Justice League Canada," and particularly in the characterisation of Equinox. The mainstream storyworlds of American comic books are complicated by this engagement with the transnational and the explicit negotiation of plural sovereignties.

Historically, representations of Native characters in mainstream comic books have been problematic, to say the least. Fascinating articles trace the extent of Twentieth-Century depictions of Native characters in comic books, notably in the work of C. Richard King and Cornel Pewewardy. Focusing on mainstream comic book production in America, King asserts that "representations of Indians and Indianness in comic books have fostered the construction of identity, history and community through the assertion of claims by Euro-Americans" (*Unsettling* 87). King goes on to cite a lack of diversity in the workplaces of comic book giants such as DC or Marvel as part of the problem in the depiction of Indigenous characters. Native writers and artists are less visible in the world of mainstream comics, and are often working for independent companies or publishers with a specific remit to support Indigenous cultural production.² Whilst the construction of Equinox as an overtly Indigenous character might be seen as continuing a tradition where "elements of

Indigeneity become props in colonial discourse,” the presence of new Native characters and communities might also be seen as opening a door to a wider reflection of comic book audiences in the fantastic universes they depict (*Unsettling* 87). To distinguish between these critical positions it is useful to establish some of the problems with, largely non-Native created, Native representation. For King, the charges of prop-Indigeneity have specific indicators. Signifiers of Indigeneity in mainstream comics tend towards the creation of a generic Native character, erasing particularity and approximating what has been termed elsewhere by Daniel Francis as the ‘imaginary Indian’. Despite a familiarity with certain Native iconographies, Francis argues that “Non-Aboriginals still seem to be most comfortable when they can infantilize and spiritualize Aboriginal people, treating them as historic figures of legend and myth rather than citizens of the twenty-first century” (240). King’s survey of comic book representations echoes Francis’ view where a mass of generic depiction bears “the ascription of unspecified Indianness [and] functions to claim Indigeneity without the burdens of tribal affiliation, cultural tradition, and historical struggles” (“Alter/Native Heroes” 218). The erasure of particular histories and Indigenous sovereignties, whilst attempting to visualise Native characters, carries the sense of performing Indigeneity whereby vital and meaningful knowledge is sundered from the remaining aesthetic. Furthermore, outside of the social visualisations of the Indigenous superhero, the transposed storyworld of the comic book may also distort the particular connections to place and land which are a vital part of each Indigenous nation’s history and sovereignty.

Cornel Pewewardy suggests an overt sense of violence often accompanies the representations of Indigenous comic book superheroes. Through a sundering of national identity, Native characters often constitute pejorative representations of Indigeneity in comics. Here, the historical comparison is with the imagery of Anti-Semitism. Despite noting a shift towards ascribing Native characters with superpowers, these characters are for Pewewardy: “ideologically, not much different from the subhuman characteristics attributed to First Nations representatives in the 19th century. Both superhuman and subhuman portrayals serve to exclude, isolate, and defame First Nations peoples from a common humanity” (1). Accentuating elements of unspecified Native identity runs the risk of disavowing everyday life for contemporary Indigenous peoples. Reflecting briefly on recent comic-book complexity within the mainstream, Pewewardy finds that “the depiction of First Nations peoples has not undergone a concomitant increase in sophistication” (6). Michael A. Sheyahshe highlights a number of examples that lack sophistication, discussing a detailed history of Indigenous characters in comic book narratives. A recent example discussed by Sheyahshe, with bearing on the legacy for Lemire’s *Justice League United* series, is Joe Kelly’s DC character Manitou Raven. Part of various Justice League storylines between 2002 and 2006, Manitou Raven appears in present day storylines but evades the attachment of a particular history being “a North American Indigenous person [transported] from ancient pre-Columbian contact times” (Sheyahshe 77). This seems to serve as a pre-text to appropriate and merge elements of Apache and Algonquian cultural signification. Crossing national groupings more obviously, Manitou Raven transforms, and deploys shamanistic powers by shouting the phrase “Inukchuk” – an approximation of the more commonly transcribed Inukshuk which is Inuit for the formations of a rock-cairn in the shape of a human (“Nunavut”). Subsequently, the anachronistic gender-attitudes Manitou Raven expresses enable Native imagery to be deployed in the guise of what Thomas King terms, more forcibly, the “dead Indian” (64). King gestures to an American societal

attitude congruent with C. Richard King's sundering of specificity, whereby the imagery of Indigeneity is safely a part of distant history, that of the "dead Indian" (T. King 64). Drawing on select parts of various Indigenous histories in order to convey a kind of Nativeness actually creates an impossible and inauthentic shell identity. Whilst fiction might permit such creations it seems at odds with the narrative suggestion of authenticity in Manitou Raven's pre-contact character. This idea of Nativeness writes over the identities of Indigenous peoples living today, or as Thomas King argues: "to maintain the cult and sanctity of the Dead Indian, North America has decided that Live Indians living today cannot be genuine Indians" (64). The representation of Manitou Raven is complicit with this imagery of the 'Dead Indian' ensuring the erasure of contemporary Indigeneity whilst enacting a surface appeal to a sense of contemporary subjectivity.

Manitou Raven and his wife Dawn represent the most recent introduction of Native characters into the DC comics storyworld prior to Equinox. Rather than deploying a temporal anomaly within the character biography, Jeff Lemire's Equinox is very much born within recent memory, situated in the lived political realities of nation-states in North America. As such, there should be less narrative support for anachronistic stereotypes. However, within the DC storyworld each character shares the same framework of American cultural production and also shares a narrative premise with its own transnational, if not transplanetary, negotiations - DC Comics' Justice League of America. The formation of various iterations of the Justice League consistently suggests diversity and yet, often, the sense of difference is contained within the bracket "of America". As this group has developed, constantly being rewritten and redrawn, so too has the nationalistic frame. Not only has this admitted other national and extra-terrestrial characters but it has also shifted the collective to become aligned with the terms 'International' or 'Europe' before eventually removing any qualifier to become *Justice League* in 2011. Nationalistic bracketing may still form an implicit part of the comic book's cultural and economic logic, but the essence of a Justice League storyline is grounded in intersocial difference and commonality.

A large part of Jeff Lemire's 2014 relaunch of DC comics' Justice League title centred on the narrative presence of Canada. Rumours persisted that the comic book title would be 'Justice League of Canada' and images were released that supported a dramatic rewriting of an American framework with a Canadian one. In August 2013, a news story published by the *Toronto Star* featured a range of recognisable DC superheroes in a tableau reminiscent of Joe Rosenthal's famous World War Two photograph, 'Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima,' but here planting the Maple Leaf rather than the Stars and Stripes into a pile of rubble (Mudhar). The imagery was thus explicit and trading on the anticipated subversion of nationalistic iconography. The discussion of the upcoming comic book also featured on the front page of the print-version of the *Toronto Star*, neatly recalling Joe Shuster's early career selling the *Star* on the streets of the city in the 1920s. Yet, as with Bell's notion of the uncomfortable fit of superheroes and the Canadian context, the visual promotion of the nascent story could easily have been interpreted as a parody. Jeff Lemire highlighted the dissonance, suggesting that a Canadian 'Justice League' title might have been a joke (Mudhar). To counterbalance this, Lemire suggested a key part of the project would be to establish a new Canadian superhero, a "character that reflects a real part of our cultural identity, who could be a real Canadian teenager" (Mudhar). Working with this brief, and after visits to Northern Ontario, Lemire created Equinox, an explicitly Cree and Canadian superhero.

The superhero Equinox, alias Miiyahbin Martin, is a sixteen-year-old girl living in Moose Factory, Ontario. The full extent of her superhero character has yet to be fully portrayed although significant elements have now been established. Appraising the character in its comic-book infancy allows for an examination of the archetypal superhero narrative, the origin story. Two key stories establish this, “Justice League Canada,” a five-issue series, and its continuance in the single-issue story “The Midayo and the Whitago”. The first transformation of Miiyahbin into Equinox is triggered by a domestic confrontation. In *Justice League United (JLU) #0*, having finished a school day, and left her friend Heather, Miiyahbin believes she will return home to find her grandmother, or as she is seen to call out, “nohkomp” (12/7). The deliberate visual mixing of Cree words with English establishes the marked difference of Miiyahbin’s Indigeneity. However, instead of finding her grandmother, Miiyahbin encounters a strange presence, an Indigenous man sitting on the floor. Pleading that Miiyahbin recognise him, the man warns her that a Whitago is coming. Inferred in this exchange, and the plea for recognition, is that the man could be an absent father or another male family member. Nevertheless, with no recognition made explicit, the man begins to transform before Miiyahbin’s eyes, with a distended jaw hinting at what is to come. Fully transformed into a tall, bare skulled and monstrous Whitago figure, the being appears other than human, but implores Miiyahbin to “Say it...you know what to do!” (*JLU #0 14/1*). Shown resisting this, Miiyahbin is eventually compelled to yell “Keewahtin!” (see fig. 1). With the word, a dramatic transformation is enacted, and Miiyahbin levitates, simultaneously being surrounded by a pale blue aura and becomes enrobed in a black, white and pale blue costume. The transformative word ‘Keewahtin’ is variously translated from the Cree as ‘blizzard of the north,’ north wind, or ‘the wind that comes back’ (“Cree”; “Collins”). This foreshadows the revelation of Equinox’s full origin in “The Midayo and the Whitago” where her powers are explained to be derived from nature or, as Miiyahbin’s grandmother suggests in the latter story, “the power of our land itself” (*JLU #5 14/1*).

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Fig. 1. The first transformation of Miiyahbin into Equinox (*Justice League United #0 14/3*).

Given the colour of Equinox’s costume, alongside these naturally-derived powers, the new superhero seems to follow a tradition of female Canadian superheroes. Visual connections to prior female Canadian comic book superheroes seem clear, despite these figures inhabiting other storyworlds (those of Marvel or the independent Canadian publisher from the 1940s Hillborough Studios). Aspects of Nelvana of the Northern Lights, Snowbird and Aurora might all be seen in the characteristics of Equinox. In turn, comparing the new superhero to these prior figures suggests significant departures, each with a bearing on the notion of negotiating sovereignties. Firstly, Nelvana of the Northern Lights is a fascinating touchstone for Equinox. Created during the 1940s by Adrian Dingle and a member of the Group-of-Seven, Franz Johnston, Nelvana was arguably the first female superhero, drawing her powers from the Northern Lights (Dingle 327).³ In her origin story, Nelvana was the daughter of the King of the Northern Lights, but inspired by an Inuit myth heard by Johnston on his Northern travels. This aboriginal source material, and proximity to the natural world, met what would become a conventional Western approach to the female superhero form, with Dingle suggesting he had “tried to make her attractive” by costuming with “long hair and mini skirts” (Bell 60). Each of these lines of

thought can still be seen to frame Equinox, considering the issues of her costume alongside her powers over nature and the invoking of Native narrative. However, as with Manitou Dawn, the writing of a new mythology in Nelvana was used to justify much borrowing and reworking of Native cultural symbolism. The Canadian comic artist John Byrne reconfigured a version of Nelvana as part of a Canadian team of superheroes, Alpha Flight, produced for Marvel comics in the 1980s. Snowbird is a female superhero and “a descendant of Nelvana, the Eskimo God of the Northern Lights” (Sheyahshe 171).

In the same team, Byrne created a second female Canadian superhero, Aurora, who can fly and control light. Though Aurora is from Quebec, her personal history of a forced and repressive religious education has resonance with real-life Native histories. In turn, Aurora’s powers are still related to the North and to nature. If Equinox references these figures, it could be perceived as a nostalgic embrace, a reiteration, that Canadian superheroes exist because there is a national tradition to underpin the claim. However, Equinox’s representation of Indigenous identity within Northern Canada qualifies and builds on this by insisting that particular national narratives exist in tandem within the Canadian polity. Rather than a fixed narrative retreat of Canadian nordicity, or the threat of the exotic “unspecified Indianness” put forward by C. Richard King (*Unsettling* 88), Equinox’s powers are represented as both located and dynamic with her command of nature changing with the seasons. Yet, “The Midayo and The Whitago” also dispels the notion that Equinox is a flawless vessel of the landscape. Equinox’s powers are rooted in human tradition, inherited from the “seven Grandfathers” of Cree spirituality (*JLU* #5 12). Furthermore, Equinox’s costume does not function in line with regular rules of clothing, visualising the spiritual inheritance of Miiyahbin’s powers by disappearing and reappearing alongside each utterance of the word “Keewahtin”. The transformation of her body, enrobed in blue, black and white, and imbued with seasonal powers, might either emerge from within or be bestowed from without. In either sense, the visual of Equinox’s costume becomes closely tied to an essential sense of physical being. Given that this might prove more troubling than previous heroes who ‘chose’ their costume, it is worth considering the visual of the costume in further detail.

Expectations of superhero costume are both affirmed and subverted in Equinox’s visualisation. Building on the work of comic book artist and theorist Scott McCloud, Peter Coogan suggests that the superhero costume functions by removing “specific details of a character’s ordinary appearance, leaving only a simplified idea that is represented in the colors and design of the costume” (79). Such simplified ideas are neither neutral nor apolitical as already implied by Dingle’s alignment of short skirts with Nelvana’s beauty. Refusing elements of simplification and abstraction, in creating the female superhero costume, may be just as significant. Coogan notes that this sense of costume has evolved from the design of earlier ‘pulp heroes’ who were drawn with less abstraction and where clothing was seen as less important than facial recognition in expressing identity (79). If the development of superheroes has not prioritised facial recognition then the face, and the covered face, has become a loaded part of private and public identity formation. Viewing the uncovered face of the superhero, linking the regular persona and the hero persona, is often posited as a danger to the everyday family, friends and community of the superhero. Masks, glasses and hoods, extend costumed abstraction across the face. At the same time, this masking signifies a public identity and hides a personal, private identity. Whilst Equinox follows in the tradition of bold and seemingly abstracted costume, this co-

exists with a visible, unmasked face. Equinox is both a transformed figure and easily identifiable as Miiyahbin. That the reader, and other characters can still see Miiyahbin's face may yet come to form a significant plot-point. In present usage, the close visual alignment of Miiyahbin and Equinox might indicate Lemire's desire for communal signification to be taken from individual heroism, with each act reflecting back on the aspirations of the Moose Cree First Nation. The suggestion here would also be that Miiyahbin does not need to be freed from the constraints and obligations of everyday [life](#), but rather maintains a complicated or heightened role within [this](#) everyday [life](#). The role Miiyahbin's unmasked face might play in future narratives is complicated by the co-created form of serial narratives. Given that different artists draw and ink characters from issue to issue, and as can already be seen in the first few issues of *Justice League United*, different interpretations of Miiyahbin's face are possible. The opening between narrative understandings of facial visibility and how the face continues to signify to readers complicates any one reading of Equinox.

Just as notions of the personal or the communal are opened up in the visibility of Indigeneity in Miiyahbin/Equinox's face, so to are they explicit in her costume. Richard Reynolds suggests that "costume is the sign of individuality" and that superhero costumes express this within and against "the structure of costume conventions" (26). Given that Equinox's costume appears to derive closely from her own grandmother's costume more affinity might be found in the notion of a superhero uniform. When Miiyahbin and her grandmother transform together in "The Midayo and the Whitago," both shift into coloured bodysuits with hemmed white capes (11/5). Equinox's introduction is then grounded as an inheritor of power, another Midayo.⁴ Her costume, as a variant of her grandmother's costume, inscribes this generational presence. The costume is an immediate performance of originality whilst suggesting succession and inheritance, visualising both individual and shared dimensions of identity. Few origin stories immediately gesture backwards to multiple generations, and so this is a departure from conventions of both superhero costume and narrative. Prior examples of Native comic book characters in superhero uniform emphasise any hybridity as a negotiation between the personal and the power of the heroic collective, what Marco Arnaudo terms "the public-collective-superheroic vs. the private individual-familial" (70). For Equinox, the public is also the private as the collective superhero identity is embedded in an organising concept of a lineage of Cree superheroes. Rather than adapting to an institutional identity with a collective uniform removed from the private and familial, Equinox's costume is both a public and private expression.

The costume makes broader extra-textual gestures, borrowing its colouring from the symbolic dress of a figure with individual, communal and national meaning. Lemire cites the influence of the late Native youth-activist Shannen Koostachin, from the Attawapiskat First Nation, in creating Equinox. Discussing this connection, Lemire has said of Shannen, "perhaps she'll almost be a guiding spirit in the creation of this character" ("New DC Comics"). Shannen was a teenager who advocated for equal education funding across Canada, essentially fighting for Native rights to education.⁵ A 2013 Alanis Obomsawim-documentary, *Hi Ho Mistahey!*, tells the story of Shannen's campaign, from the voices of the Attawapiskat First Nation.⁶ The final scenes of the documentary depict Shannen dancing in a stylised version of her aboriginal dress. The colours and tailoring of Equinox's costume also resemble Shannen's traditional dress, mimicking the flowing cape and dress regalia and perhaps some of the stylisation seen in Obomwasim's documentary. Sketches released by Lemire of the drafting stages of the costume also show chevron shapes across the

front of Equinox's dress, again paralleling Shannen's own dance regalia ("Equinox"). The appearance of Equinox seen through the lens of Shannen's clothing and ideals reveals a potent symbolism to counter any charge of a lack of engagement with specific First Nations identity. However, there might also be a tension here, considering the mobilisation of highly emotive and traditional imagery.

Miiyahbin's origin story is as embedded in Cree culture as her costume. Perhaps the most significant element of this is the antagonist, the Whitago figure, which is eventually revealed to be the father Miiyahbin thought dead. The Whitago, as Margaret Atwood notes, exists in a variety of forms:

In their Indigenous versions, Wendigo legends and stories are confined to the eastern woodlands, and largely to Algonquian-speaking peoples such as the Woodland Cree and the Ojibway. The concept has many name-variations, including Weedigo, Wittako, Windagoo, and thirty-four others all beginning with W and having three syllables, as well as a number of forms beginning with different letters. (66)

Evading any singular authoritative narrative, the Whitago has a shared mythic base as a ravenous, cannibalistic presence with a distorted human body. Differing Indigenous cultures' narratives vary over the materiality of such a figure, or the impact of its spiritual manifestation. Some views hold that the seemingly Indigenous narratives are themselves products of colonial encounter and therefore carry in them the confrontations between Indigenous peoples and the settler-invader cultures. Whilst those same settler-invader cultures have considered belief in the Whitago as the psychological illness 'Wendigo Psychosis' or have struggled to acknowledge the particularity of fear within imposed systems of justice, public testimony combined with cross-cultural storytelling ensures that the figure has a long history outside of Native literature.⁷ Atwood also notes that non-Native literature is filled with references to this Native being (62). The figure appears in the writing of Stephen King, extends into contemporary fantasy television narratives such as *Sleepy Hollow* and *Grimm*, and has previously been a villainous character in Marvel's storyworld, fighting Canadian superhero Wolverine.⁸ Despite the danger of a re-enactment of appropriation of myth, Lemire's comic book depiction of the Whitago emphasises the particularity of the figure to the Cree community. When Alanna Strange describes the figure as 'The Abominable Snowman,' Miiyahbin is quick to clarify that the figure was instead The Whitago (*JLU* #5 2). The defence of some generalised Northern monster is apt, given that Lemire's Whitago seems to resonate with the Cree descriptions recorded by Morton Teicher, and cited by Sidney Harring: "His eyes are protuberant, something like those of an owl except that they are much bigger and roll in blood. His feet are almost a yard in length, with long, pointed heels ... His hands are hideous with claw like fingers and fingernails... His strength is prodigious" (76). The visual of the Whitago seems grounded in the Cree perception of the figure. The distinctive red eyes are present in Miiyahbin's first encounter with the monster, and remain red whilst it attempts to shift forms to parody Equinox's costume. This haunting duplicity is more than a visual trick, and expands to the underlying spiritual reasoning in both Miiyahbin's powers and the Whitago's presence.

One of the key beliefs within each understanding of the Whitago narratives is a sense that it can originate and manifest in anyone. As an entity the Whitago is very often seen in close proximity, inhabiting friends, neighbours or family members. That the Whitago in *Justice League* is Miiyahbin's father is then in keeping with its usual narrative logic. In turn, that it attempts to manifest as a dark mirror of Equinox, but is still partially overcome, or banished, is a marker of the spiritual basis of the creature.

Reading a Cree-authored depiction of a Whitago in Steve Sanderson's comic book *Darkness Calls*, Dianna Reder suggests that Cree teachings serve as an important guide to understanding the Whitago. Instead of a Western or Euro-Centric villain, the Whitago is part of a sacred teaching and illustrates that "conflict must be faced not just in the physical but also the metaphysical realm" (188). Reder suggests that depictions of the Cree Whitago might invoke this metaphysical realm, and also the need to confront and overcome the same creature in order for the self to move on from the conflict. Through such an encounter the self in question would experience a "spiritual epiphany" (188). Providing answers to the threat of the Whitago established in "Justice League Canada," "The Midayo and the Whitago" concludes Equinox's origin story by gesturing to this spiritual epiphany.

Miiyahbin's grandmother counsels that the Whitago must be understood as a constant, not something that can be destroyed but rather overcome by understanding the "Seven Pillars of Cree Life" (*JLU* #5 12). These pillars resonate with the wider binary world of good and bad posited in superhero narratives, being "Love, Humility, Bravery, Truth, Respect, Wisdom and Honesty" (*JLU* #5 12). Following this instruction, Miiyahbin repels the Whitago as embodied by her father by first stunning him with her newfound elemental force and then displaying to him her love and sorrow. This frees the father from inhabitation by the Whitago force and appears to allow him to die (*JLU* #5 18). That Miiyahbin's teaching comes from a grandmother is also significant here. Jennifer K. Stuller remarks that in studying female superheroes, "there are few examples of women mentoring superhero women" (22). Stuller suggests that the absence of such figures disregards female knowledge in the formation of female superheroes, and thus that such heroes must inevitably adopt masculine tropes to enter the framework of superheroism. Miiyahbin's reliance on Nohkom insists not simply on women as a source of knowledge for other women, but also on the importance of Native knowledge. This double assertion ensures that Miiyahbin's character is actively rewriting comic book depictions of sovereignty and power relations. All the while, it is striking that Miiyahbin enacts a highly personal and collectively embedded spiritual quest given that this particular story about a Northern Cree First Nations girl overcoming physical and metaphysical issues, experiencing true-to-life development, takes place within the pages of a comic book series fighting alongside Animal Man, Supergirl, Green Arrow and the Martian Manhunter.

The use of the Whitago alongside such figures as the Martian Manhunter could threaten an exoticisation of Native beliefs under the guise of fantastic legends but rooting the story within a particular locale and people, whilst entering into the hybrid fantasy world of the DC universe, seems to be a positive movement. In doing so, Lemire gestures cannily to the reach of such a storyworld, and its cultural form as a transnational product. Entering into the logics of a Cree story under the guise of the fantastic realm of superheroes, ensures a narrative illustration of what Stuart Christie terms "the shared horizon of plural sovereignties [which are] a working political and cultural reality for many, if not most, active members of Indigenous communities" (10). The physical space of the comic book, and its transnational readership ensures that whilst a Native narrative is told to a non-Native audience, by non-Native creators, elements of specific Native culture are conveyed. Working at a variety of levels, the narrative, interwoven with a story of a nascent incarnation of the Justice League forming in Northern Ontario, avoids the "homogenizing discourse on Aboriginal worldviews" that might be risked by such an endeavour by entering into particularity (Eigenbrod 445). Depicting the Moose Cree First Nation through the particular

geography of snow-covered streets, using the Delores D Echum Composite School in Moose Factory as the visual for the local school, and the iconic Cold War architecture of an abandoned NATO Radar base, gestures to the broader mass of Northern Native communities with ex-military facilities nearby who share similar experiences. Accommodating a complex cross-national fantastic within this grounded setting seems to resist the homogenising discourses of popular culture oft-associated with superhero comic books. However, the challenges for ensuring the longevity of Equinox's character lay ahead, in how teachings which might overcome a Cree antagonist can lead and guide approaches to extraterrestrial threats. Moreover, as part of the Justice League team, the inter-social dynamic between American, Canadian and other-worldly heroes will prove a fascinating context through which to discover the Native roots of Miiyahbin's powers.

Lemire's shift from creating a Canadian superhero to a Cree superhero demonstrates the extent to which contemporary Canadian understandings of citizenship might embrace the lived negotiation of sovereignty. Lemire's own transition to a position within an American cultural industry permits this negotiation a fascinating cultural arena. The rubric of superheroes travels across nations and can often be adopted and adapted, but to experience a reverse flow, and to accommodate the diverse readership of such comics shows the decolonising potential of popular cultural industries. Indigenous visualisations need not necessitate a tie to First Nations authorship, but to embrace fully the agency and cultural gains possible from such representations, a sense of the history underpinning cultural narratives. Lemire's goals seem to suggest something of a provisional representation, hoping to inspire Cree teenagers to themselves take hold of the narrative and consider comic books as a domain for their narratives: "10 years from now some kid from James Bay ends up writing or drawing [his or her] own comics, then...the project was worth it" ("Equinox"). However, the sense that such proxy representation is open to charges of violence is not easily disregarded. The narrative frame of the Canadian nation has its own freighted politics, and ones which may not appear communicable within what is still an American cultural product. How far the site of production will reassert influence on the continuing reshaping of a communal fantasy world remains to be seen, not least in the influence of powerful conventions of superheroism. The consistent redrawing of Equinox might also enable a continual negotiation, or a continual awareness that in every narrative the characters are all "*inside* de/colonization albeit in widely different locations" (Eigenbrod 443). Whether this means a symbolic externality such as interplanetary travel, or on the grounded terrain of Northern Ontario, the implications ultimately stem from the ongoing social signification of Equinox.

Notes

¹ Following the publication of Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers* (1966), this anti-heroic trope in Canadian culture was cemented by Margaret Atwood's *Survival* (1972).

² Remedies to Euro-American depictions can be seen in a Native American visual history of self-representation entitled 'Comic Art Indigene' which has toured museums and galleries across the USA since 2009.

³ Nelvana first appears in *Triumph-Adventure Comics* in August 1941, four months before Wonder Woman's debut in *All-Star Comics* in December 1941.

⁴ The Midayo here seems to share narrative similarities with the Ojibway sense of Manitous, see Basil Johnston, *The Manitous* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995).

⁵ This battle has its own dark history in twentieth-century Canada, where residential schools set up by the government and church groups forcibly removed Native children from reserves. These schools were eventually closed but left behind a legacy of violent and often sexual abuse, and the attempts to eradicate First Nations culture. A formal apology was issued in Federal parliament by the Government of Canada in 2008 but reparations claims are yet to be fulfilled.

⁶ Shannen Koostachin's Attawapiskat First Nation school had been closed after the long-term effects of a fuel-spill led to mass-illness. Rehoused into temporary classrooms since 2000, the school has only recently seen work begin on a new permanent building. Shannen died in 2010 in a car accident, and in her memory a campaign group has continued her work under the name 'Shannen's Dream'.

⁷ Sidney Harring's survey of a range of legal discussion relating to manifestations of Whitagos in early twentieth-century Canada demonstrates how the figure becomes a site of negotiation between Canadian and Native sovereignty, see "The Windigo Killings: The Legal Penetration of Canadian Law into the Spirit World of the Ojibwa and Cree Indians," *Violent Crime in North America*, ed. Louis A. Knafla (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003) 75-104.

⁸ A recent study encompasses a number of these within a history of Whitagos in literature and culture, see Shawn Smallman, *Dangerous Spirits: The Windigo in Myth and History* (Victoria, BC: Heritage House, 2014).

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