Quarterly Review of Film and Video

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/gqrf20

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To cite this article: Michael Truscello & Renae Watchman (2022): Blood Quantum and Fourth Cinema: Post- and Paracolonial Zombies, Quarterly Review of Film and Video, DOI: 10.1080/10509208.2022.2026273

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2022.2026273

Published online: 22 Jan 2022.

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QUARTERLY REVIEW OF FILM AND VIDEO
https://doi.org/10.1080/10509208.2022.2026273

Blood Quantum and Fourth Cinema: Post- and Paracolonial Zombies

Michael Truscello and Renae Watchman

> "If I don't make it out of here,
> I want you to tell my grandchild big stories about me."
> –Sheriff Traylor to his family
> (seconds before getting disembowelled and eaten by the undead)

Sheriff Traylor did not make it out alive, and his story adds to the continuum of Indigenous stories that will be told to his grandchildren and to their grandchildren and seven generations into the future. Traylor is played by Plains Cree actor Michael Greyeyes in the 2019 zombie film *Blood Quantum*, written and directed by Jeff Barnaby, who is Mi'gMaq.[1] Traylor, as a "full-blooded" Mi'gMaq, was immune to the zombie plague, but he could no longer hold the door, behind which were infected zombies. Traylor sacrifices himself for his family's survival. The zombies ultimately bite chunks out of his neck and disembowel him. Though Traylor is violently murdered, his soon-to-born grandchild symbolizes Indigenous futures not premised on blood quantum, and it continues the legacy of Indigenous stories and storytelling.

The following examination of *Blood Quantum* emphasizes the meeting of Film Studies and Indigenous Studies, a convergence of media and Indigeneity described by Brendan Hokowhitu and Vijay Devadas as the "Fourth Eye," a term that attempts to translate "the complex encounters that take place at the media-indigeneity intersection" (Hokowhitu and Devadas 2013, xvi). Specifically, the Fourth Eye asks the following questions:

> What are the Indigenous experiences of being the subject of the media gaze? How does the media capture, articulate, and rearticulate the lives of Indigenous peoples? How do Indigenous peoples use, transform, and tactically use the media to subvert certain modalities of power relations? What postcolonial complexities reveal themselves through Indigenous media expressions? (xv)

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Blood Quantum and the postcolonial zombie films contemporary with it provide objects of study to illustrate some of the distinctions between postcolonial horror and the horror of Indigeneity that exists concomitant with a continuing colonial occupation, often referred to as paracolonialism. *Blood Quantum* is the most expensive Indigenous-directed film to come from Canada, and its postponed release in theaters because of the covid-19 pandemic produced a particularly intense interest in the film and arguably positioned it as one of the most notable examples of paracolonial horror, a film that unsettles colonial esthetics and politics "to confront conventionalized regimes of representation and to engender Indigenous sovereignty" (xvi). As this essay will argue, writer/director Jeff Barnaby imagines an Indigenous futurity beyond the racist settler imposition of the blood quantum regime by using a specifically Indigenous esthetic, a cinematic exemplar of the Fourth Eye. Postcolonial zombie films such as *Zombi Child* (2019) and *Betaal* (2020) arrive in the wake of decolonization movements in Haiti and India, but *Blood Quantum* speaks of colonial horror from within an existing occupation and offers a vision of a paracolonial or Indigenous futurity. In this sense, our reading of *Blood Quantum* through the lens of the Fourth Eye demarcates some of the differences between postcolonial and paracolonial zombie films, while simultaneously proposing a generative convergence of Film and Indigenous Studies for future scholarship.

The zombie film presents a popular and politically appropriate form for interrogating and denouncing colonialism. George Romero has stated that *Night of the Living Dead* is inspired by a revolutionary ethos he found in Richard Matheson's *I Am Legend*: "I thought *I Am Legend* was about revolution," Romero said. "I don't care what they [the zombies or vampires] are. I don't care where they came from .... They don't represent, in my mind, anything except a global change of some kind" (quoted in Reilly 2016, 67). Zombie films typically involve protagonists focused on the elimination of an Other of unrelenting necropolitical power. For this reason, Gerry Canavan describes the zombie film as the repackaging of "the violence of colonial race war in a form that is ideologically safer" (Canavan 2010, 439). The specific Other of the zombie film is not always the same, but there exists an extensive catalogue of zombie films in which the Other is a racialized Other, from the first feature-length zombie film, *White Zombie* (1932), to Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) and more recent films such as Romero's *Land of the Dead* (2005) and Bertrand Bonello's *Zombi Child* (2019). Rushton and Moreman claim the "zombie is best understood in the postcolonial mode," often detached from the Haitian origin and depicting "Western" fears writ large (Rushton and Moreman 2011, 1). Romero was largely responsible for the zombie

"metaphorically escaping its Caribbean roots" and becoming a more wide-ranging signifier (4). Yet, despite the zombie's implication as an adaptable metaphor for varieties of oppression, Rushton and Moreman associate the zombie with capitalism "above all else" (7), and Romero plays an obvious role in this association. The combination of capitalism, colonialism, and a post-apocalyptic setting maps onto the history of Indigenous experiences seamlessly and tragically: as historian Gerald Horne writes in *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism*, "What is euphemistically referred to as 'modernity' is marked with the indelible stain of what might be termed the Three Horsemen of the Apocalypse: Slavery, White Supremacy, and Capitalism, with the bloody process of human bondage being the driving and animating force of this abject horror" (Horne 2018, 9). Barnaby inverts the conventional racialized Other of the zombie narrative, to situate white settlers as the voracious necropower.

In the context of Indigneous literary arts including oral stories, written narratives, film and visual stories, Joy Porter argued the field "is sometimes grouped with postcolonial literatures, but recently critics have found this to be too simple a conflation [and they] suggest that Indians [*sic*] in fact live under paracolonialism and that is more appropriate to think of Indian literature as part of resistance" (Pearson 2005, 59). Despite her dated language and succumbing to what Daniel Heath Justice frames as deficiency narratives (Daniel Heath Justice 2018, 2), *Blood Quantum* is arguably resistance filmic storytelling. As such, we consider it paracolonial (alongside ongoing colonialism), yet position this film alongside others that are arguably set in the postcolonial moment. The malleable quality of the zombie metaphor, what Sarah Juliet Lauro calls "the accumulated historical meaning" of "the zombie myth" (Lauro 2015, 4), enables filmmakers to position zombies as, alternately, the colonizers and the colonized, slaves in captivity and slaves rebelling. In the films discussed in this brief intervention, the zombies embody white settlers, British colonial invaders, and the descendants of slaves. What unites these disparate representations of the zombie and colonialism, we argue, is the perspective of these films as post- and paracolonial media that simultaneously destabilize settler ontology and the zombie horror subgenre.

Post- and Paracolonial Zombie Films

The racist policy of quantifying Indigeneity via blood quantum laws continues to dictate and determine identity in the twenty-first century. Jeff Barnaby has noted his desire to draw attention to the colonialist invention of racism: "I wanted to educate non-Native people, settlers, and colonizers about our history…. Nobody seems to remember that it was settlers who introduced the concept of race to North America" (quoted in Mazumder 2019).

Blood Quantum is a political commentary of ongoing colonialism that is informed by Barnaby's unique experiences, highlighting an Indigenous esthetic that privileges Indigenous storytelling (oral, aural, and visual), and appears almost simultaneously with other postcolonial zombie films such as *Zombi Child* (2019) and *Betaal* (2020).

The storyline of *Blood Quantum* centers Indigenous lands, as the majority of the film takes place on the fictional, virtual reservation[2] of the Red Crow First Nation and was filmed in the actual Mi'gMaq community of Listuguj, as well as in Kahnawake (Mohawk territory), in what is currently Quebec. It opens with eerie, Carpenteresque non-diegetic music that precedes the epigraph, a story altered from the book of Exodus, chapter 34, verses 12-16[3]. Using a dissolve and fade effect, *Blood Quantum's* epigraph excludes the Exodus verse that talks about a jealous God and continues: "Take heed to thyself, that thou make no treaty with the inhabitants of the land for when they whore themselves to their demons and sacrifice to them, you will eat their sacrifices. And when you choose some of their daughters for your sons, they will lead your sons to do the same. Ancient Settler Proverb." The biblical story's allusions to intolerance of others, their beliefs, their stories, their sustenance, and their survival is a direct reflection of colonization's impact on Indigenous lives, hence its attribution as an ancient settler proverb. Barnaby modifies Exodus' story and introduces the mixing of blood through intermarriage, which is the critical plot point of this film.

The epigraph cuts to the film's establishing shot: it is pre-dawn. The silhouette of an Elder seated at the bow of a motorized canoe is tightly framed. The only light is from a hanging lantern. The Elder is fishing and the infamous steel, green bridge (the Joseph Charles Van Horne bridge, named after the racist politician Joseph Charles Van Horne) is visible in the background. A title card interrupts the shot: "Red Crow Indian Reservation 1981." 1981 remains a year that is of critical historical importance for Barnaby. On June 11 and 20, 1981, Quebec Provincial Police raided the reserve community of Listuguj (Restigouche) and arrested Mi'gMaq residents for fishing salmon in the Restigouche River, a practice that was an essential component of their livelihood. These events traumatized the community, affecting their source of nourishment, food sovereignty, and economic sustainability, amounting to an act of cultural genocide.[4] Famed filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin's 1984 documentary *Incident at Restigouche* captures the 1981 raids, which Barnaby says offers a therapeutic way to remember his childhood (Powers). He has experienced non-Indigenous people raiding reserves for their own livelihoods at the expense of Indigenous peoples' lives:

> In 1981, before I got put into the system, I still lived in Listuguj with my mother and watched from our dumpy basement apartment as 800 plus Quebec Provincial Police and Department of Fisheries officers flooded the reserve, blocking off the only

> 3 entrance points. I remember it distinctly; I had my Superman pajamas on with the burn hole in the arm that I had gotten from an iron. It was the first time I had seen a helicopter. They had come to kick the shit out of some fishermen for not listening after being told when, where, and how much to fish. During the raid, I was sitting on the back of a pick-up truck when one of the S.Q. agents smashed me in the face with the barrel of his rifle while running down my uncle. I was four years old, and it's the first thing I can remember in my life: someone I've never met busting my mouth for what I represented. (Barnaby, qtd in RDV Canada)

Obomsawin's body of work paved the way for Barnaby to begin to explore how "to work genre into these commentaries on colonialism" (Dunlevy 2019). While *Incident at Restigouche* maintains prominence for Barnaby, he was also influenced by George A. Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968). Jesse Wente (Ojibwe, Serpent River First Nation), appointed director of Canada's Indigenous Screen Office in 2018, acknowledges Romero's influence on Barnaby's *Blood Quantum*, which Wente sees as a return of politics to the zombie genre (Cram 2019). Arguably, politics never left the zombie genre: not only did Romero continue to make zombie films as political allegories until *Survival of the Dead* in 2009, but the genre continues to produce films in the spirit of Romero's best work. Romero's *Land of the Dead* (2005) follows a straightforward allegory for anti-capitalist revolution, which is also key for Barnaby, but notably missing from Romero's zombie films is a sense of how Indigeneity features in the horror show of capitalist history. Romero's films are political, but primarily in the context of settler leftist politics; for example, in *Land of the Dead* the zombie uprising is fronted by Big Daddy, a Black proletarian who at first is spotted rehearsing the tasks of his former occupation working at a gas station. The zombies in *Land of the Dead* are notable for their ability to learn, arguably an allegory for acquiring class consciousness. *Blood Quantum* focuses less on a kind of Indigenous solidarity and foregrounds the genetic feature of resistance to the virus that affects only white settlers. In this sense, *Blood Quantum* does reproduce the generalized *othering* of early Romero but not the specific class war politics of later Romero. The power of visual media in *Blood Quantum* brings to light "rez noir," horrific and traumatic historical events and "things on reserves" (Power 2019, 3:36). In conjunction with Bertrand Bonello's *Zombi Child*, which revisits the Haitian origins of the zombie mythos to interrogate French colonialism, and Patrick Graham and Nikhil Mahajan's *Betaal*, which features nineteenth-century redcoat zombies awakened by twenty-first century capitalist development in rural India, *Blood Quantum* is part of a post- and paracolonial moment in the zombie subgenre. This quality of *Blood Quantum* makes Barnaby's reference to the influence of *Night of the Living Dead* interesting because it was Romero's ground-breaking film that reoriented the zombie from its historical roots in Haitian slavery to an unmoored

signifier for a range of oppressions. In other words, Barnaby takes a film that is the point of departure *from* the history of the zombie legend rooted in Haitian slavery and assumes that film as a central influence in the *return* to the zombie as a historical signifier in the critique of colonialism, capitalism, and Christianity. Barnaby seems to enjoy the postmodern pastiche of Tarantino, but his title and use of historical, political, and cultural markers (the year 1981, the location of Red Crow/Listuguj, blockades, and the seamless incorporation of the Mi'gMaq language) suggest he wants to do more than simply create a bonkers grindhouse experience.

Aalya Ahmad (Ahmad 2015) describes "indigenization horror" in terms that apply to *Blood Quantum*: these are "narratives that effectively leave settlers *unsettled*, as all good horror stories ought to do" (48). Beyond the crowd-pleasing moments of gore, *Blood Quantum* arranges historicizing touchstones to ground the narrative in a framework that presents a potential challenge to "national myth making" (48). There is, of course, the fact that only white settlers are zombies in *Blood Quantum*, a subject position unfamiliar to settlers who consume North American popular culture. After the Indigenous protagonists of *Blood Quantum* build a fort (an ironic embracing of forts that became reservations in the U.S. context) to defend their community from the virus, they are sought out by a white settler father with his infected daughter. The daughter must be killed brutally, to prevent her zombified corpse from attacking Indigenous people. This brief scene is part of the broader esthetic of what Ahmad calls indigenization horror, because it confronts settlers in the audience to the film "with the presence of the Indigene, the relationship calling into question [the settler's] complacent sense of ownership over the land and [their] privileged position as the 'normality' by which the Monster is defined. Horror therefore produces an *unsettled* Canadian identity, one in which the boundary between monstrous wilderness and brutish 'civilization' becomes blurred with violence, death, and atrocity" (52). Unlike most zombie films, *Blood Quantum* establishes white settlers as unquestionably the monstrous antagonists whose mere presence is a blight on the land and an existential threat to Indigenous people. Despite the extended sequences of Indigenous land protectors slaughtering settler zombies in *Blood Quantum*, the ending, in which a child is born of a Mi'gMaq father and a white mother, suggests a symbolic reminiscent of the liberal state policy of *reconciliation*. Barnaby's previous film, *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* (2013), ends with a violent form of retribution against the Catholic Church; but *Blood Quantum* seems to favor reconciliation over brutal revenge, with an ending that echoes *Children of Men* (2006). Unfortunately, these stories about children of "mixed" parentage might confuse audiences over the social construction of "race," since these stories foreground genetics instead of kinship relations.

In addition to *Blood Quantum*, 2019 also saw the release of another zombie film that interrogates colonial relations, *Zombi Child*. Instead of Canadian nationalism being unsettled by a zombie allegory, *Zombi Child* interrogates the legacy of the French state and the colonization of Haiti. Like *Blood Quantum*, *Zombi Child* opens with the image of a fish: in this case, it is a puffer fish from which a venom is extracted for use in a zombification ceremony. Based on the story of Clairvius Narcisse, a Haitian man who was allegedly zombified, forced to work in the sugar cane fields, and later returned from a comatose state, *Zombi Child* asks whether the legacy of the French Revolution, in the form of the French state, has lived up to its ideal of freedom, especially given the history of French colonialism. Director Bertrand Bonello moves the narrative between Haiti in 1962 and a French girls' boarding school in the present, where a descendent of the zombified man is a student negotiating existence with her all-white classmates. Bonello invites actual historian Patrick Boucheron, who edited the successful 2017 anthology *Histoire mondiale de la France* (published in English in 2019 as *France in the World: A New Global History of France;* Boucheron and Gerson 2019), to provide an impromptu lecture on French history early in the film. Boucheron makes a series of francocentric pronouncements—like the idea that people around the world associate the word "revolution" with France—and then wonders whether the history of France is a continuing history of progress, or something else, something he links to "a subterranean history of the nineteenth-century idea of liberty." As part of her initiation into the white girls' clique, Mélissa, the *zombi* descendent, must reveal something personal about herself, so she recites from the poem "Cap'tain Zombi" by René Depestre (Depestre 1998): "Listen white world/To the volleys of our dead/Listen to my zombie voice." Mélissa makes present the voice of her enslaved ancestors, an attempt to reincarnate a subjectivity annihilated by French colonialism and its historical erasure.

A third zombie film about colonialism appeared shortly after *Blood Quantum* and *Zombi Child* in May 2020, the Netflix series *Betaal* from co-directors Patrick Graham and Nikhil Mahajan. A special police unit is called in to remove villagers trying to prevent a construction company from building a tunnel in a remote part of India, and, following a massacre of most of the villagers, the police unit awakens a nineteenth-century Betaal, a vampiric monster and former god from Indian lore, and his battalion of red-coated zombies. The Betaal possesses Colonel Lynedoch, a member of the East India Company. The villagers in the present are referred to as Naxalites throughout *Betaal*, which identifies them as a legacy of the Communist Party of India; in fact, the villager named Puniya, who survives the massacre and eventually collaborates with the police to

defeat the Betaal, spends most of the show wielding a sickle. This dynamic of corrupt police and capitalists who die at the hands of the zombies, while righteous police and local communists endure, is similar to the way *Blood Quantum* aligns a local sheriff, his comrades, and at least one settler collaborator against the horde of settler zombies. In other words, these postcolonial zombie narratives have preserved the idea that some aspect of state violence (the police) might retain legitimacy in an anti-colonial struggle, a problematic assumption most likely driven by the genre necessity to have people with guns aligned against the zombie horde. While *Blood Quantum* does not identify an institution of colonialism such as the Hudson's Bay Company as one of its villains (whiteness more broadly is the villain, but it's a whiteness awkwardly inscribed as genetic), the zombies of *Betaal* belong to the East India Company, whose "conquest, subjugation and plunder of vast tracts of Southern Asia" William Dalrymple describes as "the supreme act of corporate violence in world history" (Dalrymple 2019, xvii). Instead of the past returning to haunt the present in *Betaal*, the capitalists of the present unleash a supernatural force with which they are a continuation, a gang of East India Company zombies who colonized India for capital in much the same way the construction company capitalists are doing to the Naxalite villagers in the present. While *Betaal* does not depict a simple clash between bourgeoisie and proletariat, it does feature capitalist modernity and its vampiric antecedents clashing with a sickle-wielding communist. Marx famously wrote, "Capital is dead labor, which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks" (Marx 1990, 342), and in *Betaal* capital returns literally as a vampiric monster representative of colonial capitalism and its modern incarnation. At the end of *Betaal*, the destruction of the shrine that was holding Betaal heralds the worldwide onslaught of a zombie Armageddon embodied by British warships sailing into the port of Mumbai, providing interesting possibilities for this postcolonial zombie narrative to explore the global reach of capitalist colonialism.

Indigenous Aesthetics

Barnaby combines the zombie genre conventions with the contentious issue of governmental requirements that define one's Indigeneity through the colonial and genocidal process of quantifying blood, or blood quantum. *Blood Quantum* engages settler cinematic esthetics on the virtual reservation to imagine a post-apocalyptic world where zombification is all but guaranteed, unless one is a "full blooded *indian*."[5] His film, as well as several others by Indigenous filmmakers (Blackhorse Lowe, Sydney Freeland, Georgina Lightning) rely on mainstream filmmaking techniques. For example, the

Indigenized epigraph that *Blood Quantum* opens with and attributes to an "Ancient Settler Proverb" resembles Tarantino's title card joke from *Kill Bill* (2003), in which the saying "Revenge is a dish best served cold" is attributed to an "Old Klingon Proverb." Tarantino's influence is further sharpened with Barnaby's photographic use of the "trunk shot" from several of Tarantino's films, the intermittent use of animated sequences, as well as a grindhouse penchant for exaggerated violence and gore. The ending of *Blood Quantum* frames Indigenous futurities with an homage to the dystopian art house blockbuster *Children of Men* (2006) by Alfonso Cuarón. These are surface-level observations that film reviewers are quick to critique and which ignore decades of work by Indigenous filmmakers and scholars.

Barry Barclay (Māori) (Barclay 2003) coined the category of Fourth Cinema or "Indigenous Cinema –that's Indigenous with a capital 'I'" (7), which he advances in a 2002 lecture "Celebrating Fourth Cinema." Barclay says that Fourth Cinema is more than "the surface features: the rituals, the language, the posturing, the décor, the use of elders, the presence of children, attitudes to land, the rituals of the spirit world" (7). To distinguish the essence of Fourth Cinema, Barclay tells a story. After relating his story, he contextualizes his own understanding of it through a collective national orthodoxy: "Indigenous cultures are outside the national orthodoxy. They are outside the national outlook" (9). Cameras in Indigenous peoples' hands constitute Fourth Cinema, whereas cameras in settlers' hands constitute First Cinema. Joanna Hearne's "Native to the Device: Thoughts on Digital Indigenous Studies" aptly summarizes Barclay's characterization: "He imagines the settler perspective – 'First Cinema'—represented by 'the camera of the ship's deck,' while an Indigenous perspective –'Fourth Cinema'—arises from the 'camera ashore'" (Hearne 2017, 8–9), which we hope to complicate below. Barclay ends his lecture with:

> It seems likely to me that some Indigenous film artists will be interested in shaping films that sit with confidence within the First [American], Second [Art House], and Third [from the so-called Third World] cinema framework. While not closing the door on that option, others may seek to rework the ancient core values to shape a growing Indigenous cinema outside the national orthodoxy. (11)

Hopi filmmaker, critical thinker, and champion of Indigenous esthetics, Victor Masayesva, Jr. says that cinematic recognition and inclusion of Indigenous languages, place-based knowledges and practices, and a subversion of colonial, Western tools distinguish Indigenous films from non-Indigenous filmmaking. Furthermore, he affirms early childhood experiences that that are the seeds of an Indigenous esthetic:

> Our earliest childhood experiences play a role in shaping our future sensory world, our later reconstruction of what affected us when we were young. This is at the root of the third-arm aesthetic. If you were surrounded by Native speakers and immersed

> in traditional performances from an early age, then this shaped your instinct to pounce on the record button at the epiphanic moment. Deciding when to record is shaped by these early experiences. The defining moment is the pounce, which is executed not by the first or the second hand, but by the third hand—the flourish of the indigenous [sic] aesthetic. (Masayesva 2000, 230)

Jeff Barnaby's experiences as a Mi'gMaq youth, whose first memory is of settler colonial violence, informs his Indigenous esthetic. He imagined an Indigenous future whereby Mi'gMaq retained a living mother tongue, where stories continue to be valued and passed on, and where conflict will not dilute hope. *Blood Quantum's* soundtrack includes a Mi'kmaq drum group, the Eastern Eagle singers, as well as Cree and Salish singer Fawn Wood. Their stories as songs constitute an Indigenous esthetic. Most importantly, Masayesva advocated for Indigenous filmmakers to "control the production, distribution and screening of their work" (Padget 2013, 374), which Barnaby champions in his films.

Barnaby employed seasoned Indigenous actors as well as newbies from many Indigenous nations, including: Plains Cree (Michael Greyeyes), Sámi and Blackfoot (Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers), Diné, Hidatsa, Mandan, and Tsimshian (Forrest Goodluck), Haulapai (Kiowa Gordon), Seneca and Ojibwe (Stonehorse Lone Goeman), Kanien'kehá:ka from Akwesasne (Brandon Oakes), Shuswap from the Alkali Lake Indian Band (William Belleau), Kanien'kehá:ka from Kahnawake (Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs), and Cayuga Six Nations (Gary Farmer). In the iTunes "Behind the Scenes" feature Barnaby says, "I 100% expected everybody that we cast to *bring something* that I hadn't seen before because they're from different parts of … Native perspectives … " He continues to say that although from different parts of the world, the actors are "coming at it from the same perspective. I think the one thing that held us all together was this idea that everyone had their take on how they experience colonialism" ("Behind the Scenes" 2019). He has made it clear that his characters are everyday "blue collar rez *Indians*" (Powers). Visual sovereignty, a concept championed by Michelle Raheja, is specific to visual culture and esthetics but rooted in thinking about sovereignty in other contexts.[6] It is "the creative self-representation of Indigenous visual artists" (Raheja 2010, 9). Visual sovereignty for Barnaby is not poverty porn, nor is it positivity porn. These characters reflect how he has experienced reserve life as a self-proclaimed "rez rat" and not reflective of an educated, urban *indian* experience. While universalizing experiences of colonization, Barnaby also privileged Mi'gMaq language as each character either spoke Mi'gMaq or listened to it. He said the film was an exploration into toxic fatherhood and Indigenous masculinities as well as "a comment on colonization and settler politics in Canada and the U.S" ("Behind the Scenes") through tackling the contentious issue of blood quantum.

Quantifying Indigeneity: Blood Quantum

Coauthor Renae Watchman is first and foremost Diné (Navajo), of the Bitter Water clan, born for the Towering House. Her maternal grandfather is Bird clan from the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, and her paternal grandfather is Red Running Through the Water clan. This matrilineal kinship, and relationality with her communities, is what makes her Diné. However, settler colonialism has institutionalized and legislated foreign policy onto Indigenous communities, and Dr. Watchman must bear a Certificate (Degree)[7] of Indian Blood, issued through the Bureau of Indian Affairs, the Navajo Region, which states she has ¾ degree of *indian* blood because her grandparents, the late Sylvia (Allen) Manus (4/4, Diné), and the late Andrew Manus (4/4, Oklahoma Cherokee) had children who amount to only ½ degree of *indian* blood on paper, despite being fully or wholly Indigenous. When Watchman's mother (1/2 on paper) met Watchman's late father, Lewison Reynolds Watchman (4/4), Dr. Watchman's math equates to having 3/4 of *indian* (Diné) blood. Watchman's children are/will be only half of 3/4 s (as Watchman is partnered with a Cree man and not a Diné man)[8]. This genocidal erasure of Indigeneity has not been as gradual for some; but it is devastating for all. Matika Wilbur (Swinomish and Tulalip) and Adrienne Keene (Cherokee) direct and co-host the podcast *All My Relations.* Episodes 10 and 11 (Wilbur and Keene 2019) discuss blood quantum. They asked their colleagues the following questions: (1) How does blood quantum play into identifying with Indigenous identity? (2) How do you maintain citizenship? (3) What does it mean to be Indigenous in the modern era? and (4) How do we navigate such questions? The responses of their colleagues were raw and unscripted, exposing deep wounds, guilt, and confusion around thinking about Indigenous futures, which are determined by blood quantum. The colleagues included their producer as well as their production assistant. Both are enrolled members of their distinct Indigenous nations (Jemez Pueblo and Blackfeet/Salish) and both acknowledge that blood quantum plays a significant role in how they self-identify. Both have experienced racism because of their "mixed" heritage and see blood quantum as destructive. At the heart of their conversation is the realization and understanding that their future children are highly unlikely to also be enrolled, if they follow their hearts in love. Whether or not to consciously couple with an Indigenous person is also not a solution, as many Indigenous nations do not allow dual citizenship (as Dr. Watchman's example demonstrates). In short, these stories clearly illustrate the state sanctioned policy of Indigenous people "breeding out,"[9] jeopardizing Indigenous human rights to life, land, and love. Jill Doerfler's "We Aren't Like Dogs" reflects opposition to blood quantum by citizens of the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe,

namely Leech Lake spokesperson William (Bill) Morrell's sentiments, which insist that "everyone with any amount of Indian blood have the same privileges" (Doerfler 2017, 42). Despite the call from Elders, community members, activists, scholars, and grandchildren, Indigenous nations across Turtle Island face a future akin to the dystopia depicted in Barnaby's film. When matrilineal systems of identity and belonging are replaced with governmental policies that position patrilineal and purebred ideologies reserved for horses, dogs, and *indians,* the resulting death and subsequent zombification of Indigenous peoples is what is prophesized.

The practice of quantifying Indigeneity is at odds with pre-contact Indigenous ways of being and relationality, and Tracey Deer's (Mohawk) *Club Native* (Deer 2008) addresses this. Most films about Indigenous peoples have cast a nostalgic glance onto this far-away past; others have imagined *indianness* in opposition to whiteness, as dichotomous (good vs. evil, civilized vs. savage, alive vs. dead, winners vs. losers), and a few have ventured into a future where Indigenous presence thrives. *Blood Quantum* has been touted as the first Indigenous zombie film, but *The Dead Can't Dance* by Rodrick Pocowatchit (Comanche, Shawnee, Pawnee) is a 2010 low-budget Indie film that showcases ndn humor in the form of an homage to *Shaun of the Dead* (2004).[10] *The Dead Can't Dance* depicts "poetic justice," according to Pocowatchit (Silversmith 2013). Like Barnaby's film, the zombie virus "turns everyone into zombies except the Native people – they're immune." Another Indigenous zombie film, a short musical, *Savage* (2009) by Lisa Jackson, is an antidote of ethnographic "cinematic taxidermy":

> At its most negative, ethnographic film might be said to produce Indigenous peoples as zombies, simultaneously dead and alive (reflecting as well, the spirit of taxidermy, which is to make the dead object look alive), or perhaps alive despite having been declared dead. That, too, is the result of colonization, which from the mid-nineteenth century worked hard in most settler/invader countries to produce non-Indigenous people inside Indigenous skins. The zombie image, more popularly accessible than the more academic notion of taxidermy, has a real power, one very successfully exploited in Lisa Jackson's short film *Savage* (2009), where a young girl delivered to a residential school in the 1950s arrives to find that her classmates-to-be have been transformed into zombies. (Pearson and Knabe 2015, 4)

Unlike *Savage,* Barnaby's *Blood Quantum* does not center deculturation and the zombification of Indigenous peoples. Rather, the title quite clearly prompts viewers to contemplate whether or not those with *Indian* blood are the future: the good, the civilized, the living, and the winners. The zombies are non-Indigenous, and *Blood Quantum* is evocative of "Colonialism redux—it's a film that uses the zombie trope to reexamine colonialism and some of the questions faced by indigenous [sic] peoples when they first encountered Europeans" (RDV Canada). The non-Indigenous zombies who invade Indigenous lands are violently eaten by

rigged farm equipment in a scene that pays homage to Indigenous activism and blockades; it is both gory and gratifying. Barnaby explains in an interview: "If you watch *Incident at Restigouche*, you'll notice that we set up the zombie blockade in *Blood Quantum* exactly where the police set up their blockade in 1981" (Barnaby, quoted in Carleton). The 1990 Oka Crisis, as told by Obomsawin (Obomsawin 2000) in *Rocks at Whiskey Trench* (Carleton 2000), illuminates the violence that has transpired from racism, capitalism, and colonization and the subsequent resistance by Indigenous people, in this case the Kanien'kehá:ka. Barnaby's zombie blockade on the bridge could be a reversal of, and a nod to, the violence that the citizens of Kahnawake faced as they were trying to flee to safety, yet francophones threw huge stones at their cars, injuring many children, women, and Elders. One man died from a heart attack the day after. Indigenous efficiency and Indigen-uity are depicted through the creation of a snow plow with attached rotary blades that mulches zombies to death as they attempt to cross the bridge onto the Red Crow reserve. Equipment that settler farmers used to dispossess Indigenous lands was used for their own demise in a form of poetic justice. The zombies were also slaughtered by Indigenous land protectors. The very fact that zombies are "mindless automatons" who "don't think or speak" (Bishop 2006, 196) and that immune Indigenous peoples are now in control of the narrative—literally—refreshes the Romero zombie formula. Where Romeroesque "zombie movies are always set at the apparent end of the world, in which devastating events have rendered the human race all but helpless" (Bishop 201), Barnaby's film reimagines the end as ridding the apocalyptic world of a ravenous Other, prompting a new beginning of a world, and the human race survives because of Indigenous people, voices, and agency.

Blood Quantum takes place on two distinct days, six months apart. After the previously mentioned epigraph and title card announcing the setting and year, the camera returns to the water, to the boat. Perhaps unintentionally, Barnaby reverses Barclay's notion of the Indigenous perspective being from the "camera ashore" to that of "the camera of the ship's deck." The Mi'gMaq perspective is from the canoe's bow and the silhouette of the Elder is of old man Gisigu,[11] played by Stonehorse Lone Goeman. He is bringing in his fishing nets, and the camera looks ashore at the hillside as the sun rises. Gisigu docks and goes ashore to clean his catch, as he has done for sixty years. He guts the salmon, throws their organs in a slop pail, and piles them. Suddenly, the third fish's tail begins moving, and the undead fish flops to the ground. The Elder backs up; his face evokes confusion and fear as he tries to process how five gutted salmon are dancing. The opening scene ends with an extreme long shot and the Elder is flanked by the rubble from a building and the fishing chanty.

There is a jump cut that depicts the title, *Blood Quantum*, in a font that acts as a picture frame. The kinetic images embedded are of an apocalyptic/dystopic skyline. The seamless transition to animation features an industrial wasteland: in the background are charred trees as smoke rises from burning buildings and the sun is centered, evoking the Mi'gMaq Creation Story.[12] As the camera zooms out, it focuses on a green-ish haze, illuminating dozens of human skulls. The camera pans down to a naked, pregnant Indigenous woman sitting with her knees beneath her. She is atop a mound, shaped like a turtle, with what looks like the last environmental life of green foliage. Her right arm cradles her belly, her left arm covers her breasts, and her long, black hair blows in the wind. She is surrounded by green ooze that has trickled from the toxic wasteland to her one small Turtle Island. The green ooze resembles an umbilical cord and winds its way to the life-giving woman, making its way to the unborn child inside of her. The animated woman appears to be laboring and the green umbilical cord extends into the belly of the Turtle Island, Mother Earth. In what appears to be a flash from her womb, the camera pans downward, beneath the surface of the mound, to reveal a uterus carrying a fetus. The panning continues downward, flawlessly integrating the animated sequence of tainted and toxic wasteland to the live-action cinematography of the now tainted waters of the Restigouche River that old man Gisigu was just fishing in. The waters flow into the landscape, exposing the roots of Mother Earth with vein-like topography of waterways, treetops, and earth.

Blood Quantum foregrounds two brothers: Joseph, played by Forrest Goodluck, and Alan, also known as Lysol, played by Kiowa Gordon. Their father is Sherriff Traylor; Joseph's mother is a registered nurse named Joss, played by Elle-Máijá Tailfeathers, and she is nurturing and ever-present, whereas Lysol's mother is not known and met a mysterious death. Lysol is rebellious and traumatized by his childhood, as he alludes to being abused by Traylor; he was also neglected and eventually fostered. Lysol's trauma has evolved into his own self-hatred and misogyny, and he has no concept of family.

Mi'gMaq are matrilineal, and it is critical to examine Barnaby's intention for including Charlie, Joseph's white, pregnant girlfriend, played by Olivia Scriven.

> Women are the glue that holds the community together … Canadian law has tried to take over that role. They saw how powerful Mi'kmaq women's roles were […] in a matriarchal society. They always say you know who your mother is. There was always that feeling that women were the backbone, the heart and soul of the nation. (Doyle-Bedwell 2003, 124)

We meet Charlie as she sits in a waiting room of an abortion clinic. Joseph asks Charlie if she is embarrassed of him, and if she still wants to

go through with the abortion. She nods "no" but is clearly unsure. In the second act Charlie is bitten by a zombie, just prior to laboring. She ultimately gives birth to a little girl but only holds her daughter momentarily. Joseph shoots and kills Charlie because as a white woman, she carries the zombie infection and puts the entire community and nation in danger. The film does not ask us to quantify the newborn's blood—instead we see the baby (the future) swaddled tightly in the protective arms of Grandmother Joss. In a 1989 article called "Mikmaq Women: Their Special Dialogue," Dr. Marie Battiste (Mikmaq) says: "Mikmaq women begin the dialogue with the future. They are the first teachers who transmit knowledge of the past and present to the future" (61). Throughout the film, Joseph and his family are not concerned with quantifying the unborn child's Indigeneity, or how much *indian* the child will be. The threat of settler blood, however, is valid, as there is a chance of infection, which threatens the future of Indigeneity and Indigenous sovereignty. Prior to the indoctrination of racist colonial blood quantum practices, kinship was (and continues to be) practiced by Indigenous families and this practice has been retained through storytelling. These families make up communities, which comprise Indigenous Nations. Indigenous livelihoods and futures as Indigenous Nations with Indigenous sovereignty are ultimately what is at stake in that blanketed bundle.

Non-diegetic blues music opens the second act. It is six months after they all realize there is a zombie plague. The camera pans across the town and zombies wander the streets, with buildings set afire. The longshot of the town as a wasteland evokes the animation featured at the beginning of *Blood Quantum*. The next shot cuts to the Red Crow community, resting on a legless zombie chained to the fortress made of shipping containers. The zombie is wearing a World War II German Stahlhelm (steel helmet) and Lysol, wearing a black bandana as a face mask, walks up to the zombie and stares him down. The shot pays homage to Alanis Obomsawin's (Obomsawin 1993) *Kanehsatake: 270 Years of Resistance,* which features the iconic shot of a camouflaged masked Mohawk warrior staring down a Canadian soldier. Barnaby reverses the power and magnifies the imagery and symbolism of the German Stahlhelm (a stand-in for white supremacy). In the post-apocalyptic world, xenophobia does not have a leg to stand on (literally), and while Lysol (read to be equally toxic) does not typify or represent Indigeneity to uphold, he holds the power in this instance. The clear leader to uphold is Lysol's birth father, Traylor—who storms onto act two donned in the same blue shirt as Ash from both iterations of *The Evil Dead* (1981 and the 2013 remake).

Two actors reappear from Barnaby's 2013 *Rhymes for Young Ghouls*. Kawennáhere Devery Jacobs plays Aila, and Brandon Oakes plays Burner

in *Rhymes* and stars as Bumper/Burner in *Blood Quantum*. Barnaby's first feature film propelled Jacobs' career, even inspiring Anishinaabe writer and blogger Ali Nahdee to develop the Aila Test, which is used to determine whether or not a film features Indigenous women who do not fall into tired stereotypes. "We don't need to be perfect, but we don't need to be killed all the time. Indigenous children, especially Indigenous girls, deserve to see themselves depicted in mainstream media without feeling shame or trauma. They deserve to see themselves in a more positive, empowering light instead of as the victim" (Nahdee, quoted in Vassar 2020).

Jacobs' role as James in *Blood Quantum* does not see much screen time, and she is not the main character; however, she does not fall in love with a man, nor is it explicit on whether or not she survives the zombie plague. Both Jacobs and Oakes' roles in *Rhymes for Young Ghouls* tell of the "monstrosity" of Indian Residential Schools in Canada, prophesizing the devastation of Indigenous futures. This future when zombie priests (historically, white men) feast on Indigenous youth is also reminiscent of Indigenous stories like Windigo, Shape Shifters, or Navajo Skinwalkers. Such stories, says Barnaby, are

> just a thing on reserves everywhere—people are really into horror and science fiction. The other thing, too, I've heard so many ghost stories growing up just from the reserve itself, like seeing witches or demons or whatever the case may be. And that is a thing, too, "cuz my wife is Navajo and she's from the Navajo reserve in Arizona, and she attests to the same thing." So, you get people from Cree reserves or wherever, they all have their horror stories. They all have a penchant for horror movies. (Powers 3:36)

Blood Quantum does not follow the formula of a typical horror movie, however. There is no clean "us versus them." One major conflict, for instance, is when toxic Indigeneity takes a toll on the Red Crow community. Lysol does not want to harbor uninfected townees and wants to rid the compound of all outsiders, many of whom were brought in by Charlie. James, for instance, ends up assisting Moon and Lysol in the final act of the film in an attempt to rid the earth of all non-Indigenous peoples. They ultimately fail and both Moon and Lysol (archetypes for toxic Indigenous manhood) are killed, despite being "full blooded." Prior to Moon's demise, he tells a story to Joseph. He says (in English): "The earth is an animal. Living and breathing." Moon then speaks in Mi'gMaq: "White men don't understand this." He returns to his storytelling in English: "That's why the dead keep coming back to life. Not because of God. Because this planet we're on is so sick of our shit. This old, tired, angry animal … turned these stupid fucking white men into something she can use again: fertilizer!" This animistic explanation for the zombie apocalypse differentiates *Blood Quantum* from a long list of popular apocalyptic tropes in the

zombie subgenre (the plague is caused by military experiments gone awry, a virus is accidentally leaked, an alien space probe crashes to earth, and so on). Barnaby's nod to the toxic environment was foreshadowed in the first animated sequence, at the opening of the movie, and resumes after Moon's story. He told this story at a party in which Lysol is preying upon Lilith, one of the white refugees who happens to have lied about being bitten. In one of the film's goriest scenes, Lilith bites off Lysol's penis as the infection reanimates her to a zombie as she is giving him a blow job.

There is then a jump cut to the second animation sequence: Lysol is standing behind a tree stump holding the end of a spear that is penetrating Lilith's skull. Her corpse and Lysol's penis are inside the hollowed-out tree stump. Moon's voice-over narration concludes his story: "Maybe we are not immune, and the earth just forgot about us." Moon's story ignites his own inhumanity, just like the zombies. Gisigu slays Moon, who meets his end inside the church, alluding to the possibility that Moon attended a church-run residential school. Gisigu also aids in Lysol's demise by firing a gun in the air to attract the zombies to him. Lysol was stabbed by Joseph and lay in the cemetery, and the zombies—upon hearing the gunshot—race over to Lysol's bleeding body and feast on him.

Lysol's castration was the turning point in the film; he used Lilith to feast upon her fellow white settlers (who were not yet infected and being protected by a majority of Indigenous people). The speed at which the zombification infection spreads is rampant, and it is during this third act that Sheriff Traylor sacrifices himself to save his family. His father, Gisigu, his son Joseph, Joseph's mom, Joss, and Joseph's pregnant teen girlfriend, Charlie, flee for safety. There is a boat waiting to take them away from the zombies, but Gisigu says to his grandson in the Mi'gMaq language: "I am not leaving this land again. Don't look back here." Gisigu arms himself with his katana, as non-diegetic powwow music plays and zombies swarm him. The scene cuts to the final animated sequence, where Gisigu says in Mi'gMaq: "None of you are getting past this line." This quote directly mirrors one in Obomsawin's (Obomsawin 1984) *Incident at Restigouche*, and the animated Gisigu is holding a severed head with piled zombie corpses at his foot. Returning to live-action cinematography, Joseph, Charlie, and Joss sail off into the fog.

Paracolonial Futures

Barnaby's *Blood Quantum* begins and ends on the water. The closing, medium shot frames Joss cradling her granddaughter inside the boat, mirroring the opening scene of Gisigu's silhouette. The stories that she will tell her granddaughter transcend this moment, as the sun rises another day.

Blood Quantum closes with Fawn Woods' song "Mommy's Little Guy": "Do you know, I love you so, and mommy will never let you go/To the stars and the sky, you'll always be mommy's little guy."

Mi'gMaq scholar Marie Battiste said: "In the restless individualist society of Canada, the equalization of gender is a necessary task in creating a better society. In the restoration of Mikmaq thought, an unreflective notion of gender could be merely another means of dividing our tribal society" (63). Barnaby utilized oral, aural, and visual storytelling esthetics to amplify hope that places Indigenous people firmly in the future. The newborn baby is a symbol of a decolonial world where blood quantum laws do not apply. Her family and kinship networks will ensure the restoration of humanity. Barnaby says, "The ultimate message of the film is that if we're going to survive–from the sickness of colonialism and capitalism–we're going to need to work together" (Barnaby, quoted in Carleton). Whereas Michelle Raheja explores the filmic trope of Indigenous horror films that employ ghosts to "remind settler nations of the unspeakable, horrific past" (Raheja 2015, 146), Barnaby's defeatable zombies reflect a paracolonial reality that can be conquered.

Notes

1. We follow Barnaby's spelling of Mi'gMaq throughout the chapter, except where we quote others directly in which the spelling varies.
2. Michelle Raheja (Seneca) says the virtual reservation is the imagined and imaginative sites produced by the cinema. As an imaginative site of critical engagement, the virtual reservation serves as a space to counter such stereotypes, while also articulating new models of Indigenous knowledge through visual culture. "The space in which Native Americans create and contest self-images and where these images collide with mass-mediate representations of Indians [sic] by the dominant culture … " (43); "a space where Native American filmmakers put the long, vexed history of Indigenous representations into dialogue with epistemic Indigenous knowledges" (147); "Indigenous people recuperate, regenerate, and begin to heal on the virtual reservation … it is a decolonizing space" (149).
3. The King James Version is: "[12]Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee: [13]But ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves: [14]For thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God: [15]Lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land, and they go a whoring after their gods, and do sacrifice unto their gods, and one call thee, and thou eat of his sacrifice; [16]And thou take of their daughters unto thy sons, and their daughters go a whoring after their gods, and make thy sons go a whoring after their gods."
4. A TIFF Review by Joe Lipsett (Lipsett 2019) explains: "1981. This was the year that Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau and the government introduced amends to the Canadian Constitution and initially omitted Clause 34, which recognized Aboriginal land treaty rights. Mass protests from Indigenous peoples followed, and the issue was

eventually rectified when the federal and provincial governments all (save Quebec) voted to acknowledge Indigenous land claims. For Barnaby to set *Blood Quantum* in a fictional reservation– a narrative that positions Indigenous people not only as heroes, but saviours of the human race – is a direct response to this real-life acknowledgment."

5. We use the Vizenorian spelling of *indian,* lower-cased and italicized: "Native names and identities are inscrutable constructions; the ironic suit of discoveries, histories, memories, and many clusters of stories. Native identities and the sense of self are the tricky traces of solace and heard stories […] The *indians* are the simulations, the derivative nouns and adjectives of dominance, and not the same set as natives, the *indigene*, or an indigenous [sic] native, in the sense of a native presence on the continent. The *Indians* are that uncertain thing of discoveries, and the absence of natives, some*thing* otherwise in the simulations of the other culture. Natives are elusive creations; the *indigene*, that real sense of presence, memories, and coincidence is borne in native stories. Native stories must tease out of the truisms of culture exclusions and the trumperies of simulations." (Vizenor 1998, *Fugitive Poses* 69–70)
6. In addition to Raheja's work, there is a rich scholarly history by artists, filmmakers,scholars, and critics who have theorized about visual, filmic, or cinematic sovereignty, and they include Jolene Rickard, Beverly Singer, Steven Leuthold, Joanna Hearne, Randolph Lewis, and Elise M. Marubbio and Eric L Buffalohead (Marubbio and Buffalohead).
7. The Navajo Nation issues 8.5 × 11 green sheets of paper that bear the title Certificate of Indian Blood. Most other Indigenous Nations, south of the Medicine Line, issue laminated tribal identification cards or passports called a Certificate Degree of Indian Blood. To be enrolled as a Navajo citizen, one needs at least 1/4 *Indian* blood.
8. The authors recognize the problematic hetero limitations of quantifying Indigenous blood and do not condone its usage to determine Indigenous identity and relationality. Another issue that is complicit in Indigenous (specifically Diné) erasure is the controversial Diné Marriage Act of 2005, which opponents are trying to repeal.
9. "Blood quantum emerged as a way to measure 'Indian-ness' through a construct of race. So that over time, Indians would literally breed themselves out and rid the federal government of their legal duties to uphold treaty obligations" (Chow 2019).
10. "We Were Nowhere Near the Grand Canyon" features Indigenous heroes who lead the fight against the zombies in season 2, episode 10 of *Z-Nation* (2015).
11. Gisigu means old man or elderly man in Mi'gMaq.
12. We are not claiming that Barnaby's film is a re-telling of the Mi'gMaq Creation Story, as there are a few versions of it; rather there are elements of the story, such as the sun's role, Nisgam/Grandfather (of the seven layers of creation), whose symbolism can be read interpretively.

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