

No landscape for a good underclass woman

1

Elaine J Laberge (PhD Candidate, Education, University of Victoria, BC, Canada
elaberge@uvic.ca | <https://www.facebook.com/elaine.laberge.92> | www.echoesofpoverty.com

i scrub
i scrub
 my skin raw
 but i can't wash away the stain of poverty

Yet

i scrub my skin with my red-worn hands
Ruthlessly with
 hardcover
 softcover
 electronic
 textbooks
 academic journals

i scrub my skin
 with theorists
Sociological colonial patriarchal
 theories tangle
 into a mish-mash of
 barbed wire

my confidence
my creativity
Is destroyed
 like metal scratching pads on slick shiny teflon
 looks like the teflon frying pans
 rejected
 scraped
 dumped (off)
 discarded
 at the corporate faux-charitable Value Village

Foucault
Bourdieu
Marx
Weber
 don't pay my tuition — my rent
 don't contribute to my retirement
 don't give me hope — even for a break

No landscape for a good underclass woman

2

Elaine J Laberge (PhD Candidate, Education, University of Victoria, BC, Canada)
elaberge@uvic.ca | <https://www.facebook.com/elaine.laberge.92> | www.echoesofpoverty.com

i scald my soul
with
the analytical
the theoretical
the generalizable
the unchangeable
But i can't wash away the stain of poverty

i came *out* of the social underclass closet
on the Canadian higher education landscape
my skin
my body
my entire being
is
embodied
imbued
embedded
as a one-dimensional woman (Power, 2009)

Stigma (Goffman, 1963, 1959; Tyler, 2018)
Stigmatized
Other Othered Othering

Caste in a box
Outsider within (Bourdieu & Champagne, 1999)
Outsider without
we're the "wretched of the earth" (Fanon, 2004)

we're many subjects
revolting (Tyler, 2013)
disgusting (Lawler, 2005)
illegitimate (Haylett, 2001)
wasteful useless pointless

A disposable population
Moral outcasts
The underclass
Marx's hated lumpenproletariat

No landscape for a good underclass woman

Elaine J Laberge (PhD Candidate, Education, University of Victoria, BC, Canada
elaberge@uvic.ca | <https://www.facebook.com/elaine.laberge.92> | www.echoesofpoverty.com

You offer up

your stick and barbed-wire encrusted carrot
bury me alive and dead
 with suffocating student loans
 generously topped up with your interest compounded daily

“Squandering our riches,”

 you say

“You squander our richness,”

 we don't say

How many students are homeless?

 no one knows

 not yet considered an epidemic

 might be another *academic-career-booster*

 Canadian taxpayer-funded academic research topic

How many students go hungry?

 no one knows

 just another epidemic maybe?

 just another *oh-this-has-potential*

 Canadian taxpayer-funded academic research topic

How many students are from poverty?

 no one knows no one cares to know

 we're not supposed to be here are we here?

 poverty's not considered an epidemic

 never gonna be another

 Canadian taxpayer-funded academic research topic

No landscape for a good underclass woman

5

Elaine J Laberge (PhD Candidate, Education, University of Victoria, BC, Canada
elaberge@uvic.ca | <https://www.facebook.com/elaine.laberge.92> | www.echoesofpoverty.com

Poverty intergenerational poverty
it's deeply embedded in my self-identity
part of my embodied being (Laberge, 2017; Adair, 2001)

The shame was bearable until university
a place I believed was never
never
ever
meant for people like me

i lived in fear
of being
on being outed and ousted

and then i *was* outed of the social underclass closet

and then i *was* ousted
pushed out
as a doctoral student
as a Vanier scholar
from my beloved discipline sociology
from my belief in Otherwise (Laberge, 2017; Elbow, 2008)
from within

of imagining Otherwise (Green, 1995)
because i imagined Otherwise

because i dared to critique
Power
The abusers
The users
The faux-teachers
The faux-social justice advocates
The faux-equity, diversity, inclusion leaders
The ignorers deniers
of social class
inequality inequity
marginalisation
exclusion

violence

No landscape for a good underclass woman

6

Elaine J Laberge (PhD Candidate, Education, University of Victoria, BC, Canada
elaberge@uvic.ca | <https://www.facebook.com/elaine.laberge.92> | www.echoesofpoverty.com

Jacked-up capitalism
Rabid neoliberalism
Servitude neofeudism
150+ years of colonialism
Relentless burgenoning —isms
—isms-entrenched
—in Canadian university institutions
shhh there's no classism

Maya Angelou (1978)

yes, i still rise
but, i will move along

But

and *you* Canadian universities
you need to hear this

I'm no learned lemming
I've always been a moth to an injustice flame
I've never walked quietly
I'll make a fuss

but I won't go over the cliff without causing a ruckus
but I'm leaving

cause

Canadian universities
Your education promised a way out of poverty
Your venerated piece of paper
lauded as the great equalizer

NO

You broke your promise (Adair, 2001)
You continue to break your promise

“Your” taxpayer-funded Canadian university

It's no “landscape for a good [underclass] woman” (Steedman, 1987)

No landscape for a good underclass woman

7

Elaine J Laberge (PhD Candidate, Education, University of Victoria, BC, Canada
elaberge@uvic.ca | <https://www.facebook.com/elaine.laberge.92> | www.echoesofpoverty.com

Works Cited

Indigenous territorial map: <https://native-land.ca/>

- Adair, V. (2001a). Branded with Infamy: Inscriptions of Poverty and Class in the United States. *Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 27(2), 451–471.
- Adair, V. (2001b). Poverty and the (Broken) Promise of Higher Education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 71(2), 217–239.
- Angelou, M. (1978). *Still I rise*. Retrieved from Poetry Foundation website: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44111/still-i-rise>
- Bourdieu, P., & Champagne, P. (1999). Outcasts on the Inside. In P. Parkhurst Ferguson, S. Emanuel, J. Johnson, & S. T. Waryn (Trans.), *The Weight of the World: Social Suffering in Contemporary Society* (pp. 421–426). Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Elbow, P. (2008). *The Believing Game—Methodological Believing*. English Department Faculty Publication Series, 5, 1–11. Retrieved from http://scholarworks.umass.edu/eng_faculty_pubs/5
- Fanon, F. (2004). *The wretched of the earth* (R. Philcox, Trans.). New York: Grove Press.
- Goffman, E. (1959). *The presentation of self in everyday life* (First). New York: Anchor Books.
- Goffman, E. (1963). *Stigma: Notes on the management of spoiled identity*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
- Greene, M. (1995). *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Haylett, C. (2001). Illegitimate subjects?: Abject whites, neoliberal modernism, and middle-class multiculturalism. *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space*, 19(3), 351–370.
- Laberge, E. (2017). *The reverberations of childhood poverty: Composing lives in higher education* (Unpublished thesis (MA)). University of Alberta, Edmonton, Alberta, Canada.
- Lawler, S. (2005). Disgusted subjects: The making of middle-class identities. *The Sociological Review*, 53(3), 429–446.
- Orwell, G. (1963). The Lower Classes Smell. In L. A. Coser (Ed.), *Sociology through Literature: An Introductory Reader* (pp. 145–149). Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall.
- Power, N. (2009). *One dimensional woman*. Washington: Zero Books.
- Steedman, C. K. (1987). *Landscape for a Good Woman*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.
- Swanson, J. (2004). *Poor-Bashing: The Politics of Exclusion*. Toronto: Between the Lines.
- Tyler, I. (2013). *Revolting subjects: Social abjection and resistance in neoliberal Britain*. New York: Zed Books.
- Tyler, I. (2018). Resituating Goffman: From stigma power to black power. *The Sociological Review*, 66(4), 744–765.
- Tyler, I. (2017). *From Revolting Subjects to Stigma Machines* [Academic]. Retrieved November 3, 2017, from The Stigma Doctrine website: <https://thestigmadoctrine.wordpress.com/>
- Wray, M. (2013, June 21). White Trash: The Social Origins of a Stigmatype. *The Society Pages: Social Science That Matters*. <http://thesocietypages.org/specials/white-trash/>
- Wray, M. (2006). *Not Quite White: White Trash and the Boundaries of Whiteness*. Duke University Press.