

No landscape for a good underclass woman

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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

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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

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The unwashed
The lower classes that smell (Orwell, 1963)
The hated, despised, ridiculed white trash
The deserving—undeserving
 poor
 battled out in the centre
 while we live in the shadows and margins

You degrade me
 call me (and my ancestors) white trash (Wray, 2013, 2006)
 and then y'all hold white trash-themed parties

welfare queens

where're the Welfare Kings?

We're stigma machines (Tyler, 2017)
"Branded with infamy" (Adair, 2008, 2001)

Leaves me with bruises
 a bloodied bloody mess
 of bruise-stained hurts

my knees are shot to shit
 from trying to cross the wrong side of the social class tracks
 "Stay in your lane!"
 you say

Slivers that crowbars
 can't dislodge
 from trying
 to climb the broken class ladder
 "Back down to the bottom rung from whence you came!"
 you say

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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

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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

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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)

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