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What's Behind the Dream of Colonizing Mars?

Theresa Klaver¹

This paper will explore my intentions in creating my art piece “*What’s Behind the Dream of Colonizing Mars?*” the questions I asked while creating it, and how these questions are meant to connect to themes and readings in the course [art piece on next page]

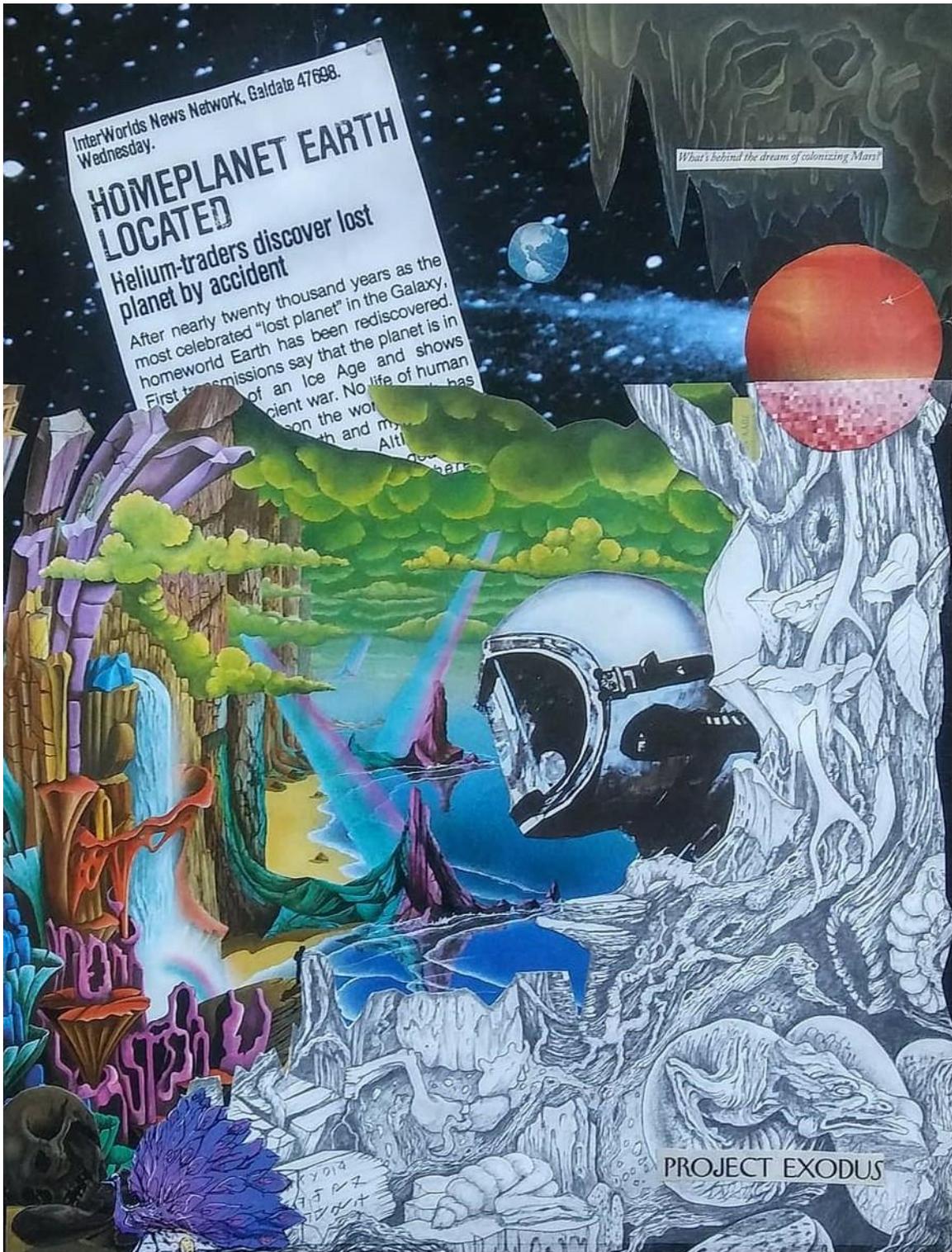
The essential question I intended to ask within the art project is “For whom are our current cultural narratives of salvation built for?” I ask this question within my own modern cultural context, against a background of constantly increasing community anxiety. In my community – an overlap of LGBTQ+ identities, political activists, the poor, and people with disabilities – there is the widespread recognition that “The master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house,” (Audre Lorde as quoted by Douglas, 2015, pg. 183). Climate change is unlikely to be addressed through government means when the officials in government are primarily elected based on campaigns run on the funding of corporations (Klein, 2015, pg. 18). Racism, homophobia, transphobia, and misogyny are alive and well, often cloaked under the guise of polite inaction, allowing more virulent and violent forms to propagate under the headings of free speech and a focus on property over personhood (Macedo & Gounari, 2016, pg. 8 and Teal & Conover-Williams, 2016, pg. 12). The things we are told to put our trust and hopes in (government, the free market, changing attitudes) are not moving fast enough, or are in fact causing us direct harm. Thus, the current offerings of what will rescue us from pain, oppression, and disaster are not intended in the modern day for those who suffer the most; they seem intended for those who might see oppression, be concerned about it, and thus need to be lulled back into security and complicity.

This project started from the basis of transforming the question of “What does God’s gravity-bound love look like?” (Song, 1998, pg. 86) into “What does gravity-bound justice look like?” It is my opinion that God’s love manifests itself as justice. The corollary that I based my project’s image on was the question “What does gravity-free justice look like?” and where might this idea take us, in terms of our communities and our world? Gravity-free justice, as I choose to articulate it, is meritocratic justice. It is the idea that we all have the same opportunities, and that the shared human experience of pain means we need not look at who is subject to particular and repeated types of pain, violence, and denial of opportunity. It is the idea of justice without introspection of privilege and complicity, and without looking at injustice as structural phenomena. Just as “When [God’s love] becomes gravity-free, it is no longer love,” so too does gravity-free justice cease to be justice at all (Song, 1998, pg. 85).

The reality is that we have the means and the resources to lift everyone out of poverty, as 8 people in the world own more wealth than half of the world’s population (Hardoon, 2017, pg. 3). The reality is that we have the technologies to cut carbon emissions and begin living gently and peaceably with the world around us (Klein, 2015, pg. 16). Yet, we seem set on a path in which we deny these possibilities, instead barreling towards a perilous point in which the earth can no longer sustain us. As referenced in the articles *Trafficked Lands*, climate justice is intricately connected with global community justice, as those who are most

¹ TH530B: Introduction to Jesus and Salvation, Winter 2019.

severely affected by climate change and injustice are likely to be those who are already living in poverty and under the ongoing effects of colonialism (Kim & Koster, 2017, pg. 161).



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In thinking about this, I decided to look first at the gravity-free version of climate change salvation, literally: the idea of leaving earth because it is no longer habitable, in order to find other planets or places in which we could sustain ourselves. This is the essential image of my project, in which Earth is ‘re-discovered’, and again represents a point of interest for the astronaut who seems to move from place to place, using up whatever resources exist there. Perhaps this is too abstract. However, a very practical question that can come from this, and seems to be consistently answered by our society, is: who is worthy of being saved from death, pain, violence? If we were to go off-planet, who would be considered for that journey? What does that say about how we view people now, and who we consider worthy today? Who, today, does our government choose to give visas, permanent residencies, and asylum to – and which groups of people are targeted by politicians as a useless drain on our economy at best, violent and inhuman others at worst? Who, within our country, is viewed much the same even with birth citizenship? What do these two groups have in common in terms of skin colour, gender, sexual orientation, religion, and ability?

Articles *Trafficked Lands* and *Womanists and (Unfinished) Constructions of Salvation* both articulate the idea that through understanding suffering and sin as sites of injustice we orient ourselves towards paths of what salvation may look like (Kim & Koster, 2017, pg. 171 and Mitchem, 2001, pg. 89). If one of the methods through which we envision salvation is our relationship with our God(s), our holy texts, and our faith communities, then this context provides a clarification of why understanding Jesus’ identity as a person of colour, an anti-capitalist, and/or a political dissident is a critical task for understanding salvation in our own contexts. For Jesus to be a figure of justice, it seems antithetical that he would be imagined as a white man, a colonizer, and a passive figure advocating only “Turn the other cheek” and not “Drive the money lenders out of the temple with a whip.”

The essential message of *Could There Be a Badger Jesus?* Is that it is possible and necessary to look for iterations of God and Jesus that reflect those who *aren’t* given much representation in Church or society (Heath, 2017, pg. 13). To take this further, Christology and theological reflection are potential methods of articulating the humanity of oppressed peoples through the image of Jesus. I could not identify with a Jesus that looked like the people who had most often hurt me and the people I love. But, if asked “Who do you say I am?” regarding Jesus, I can reply: Jesus was subject to violence, displacement, and murder because he did not fit the political ideologies of his day. *That* Jesus is very much a member of my community, and the communities I seek to find salvation alongside, as our salvation is tied together thread by thread. *That* Jesus believes in the worth of people beyond their usefulness, believes in free entrance to safer borders without restraint, violence, or a points system. *That* Jesus believes in the right to safety, celebration, and support for queer and trans people, people with disabilities, and people of colour. It is these kinds of understandings of Jesus that serve to empower those who are marginalized, and provide hope and connection for people and faith communities that look towards Jesus as a source of strength.

My art piece intends the question “Who are our current visions of salvation for?” in order to orient the viewer towards who and what is left out of the current narrative of paths to salvation, and what that means for our communities today. In it, God’s love is meant to be not only gravity bound, but articulated as a praxis: a basis for justice as a path to salvation, oriented by our own contexts, as we come to understand how our struggles against injustice are tied together on a larger scale.

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