



## **(En)countering Inclusion. Repeating: Refrain**

—Louise Saldanha

Once upon a time, in a northern land both white and great, there lived a dusky, raven-haired girl—although, by the time of this telling, she was hardly a girl any longer. Nevertheless, because she was brown and small, it remained easier to think of her as such. Besides, she read children’s books a lot. Thus, she was smiled on fondly as but a little, delicate, gentle creature with surely only the prettiest words for everyone falling from her lips.

Now, it so happened that, in the country where she lived, many of her compatriots, who were, together, all the colours of the rainbow, had worked long and industriously to weave a rich and comforting tapestry of inclusivity large enough to cloak the entire land.

***Inclusion:***  
**commitment, policy, template, practice, activity,**  
**provision, and**  
**strategy**  
**to**  
**incorporate diversity and multiplicity**

Meant to beautify not just the place but the people as well, this warm and fuzzy fabric threaded together all the colours and stripes in which we all come and just melted the hearts of everyone upon whom it came to be draped. The showy mesh was much celebrated, for the country had previously been most horribly and oppressively bland.



This is where all the troubling must start. One day, the dark-skinned girl was walking in this liberal and expansive land while reading a children’s book featuring some sort of diversity (she cannot remember which

sort—they all blurred, by now, into the same story of initial alienations and final reconciliations), and she tripped.

***Inclusion:***  
**“c. 1600, . . . from Latin *inclusionem* . . .**  
**‘a shutting up, confinement’”**  
*Source: Online Etymology Dictionary.*

All this inclusivity had made things crowded—both on the pages of the books she was reading, and now, she noticed as she got up and dusted herself off, among the many people of all shapes and colours surrounding her.

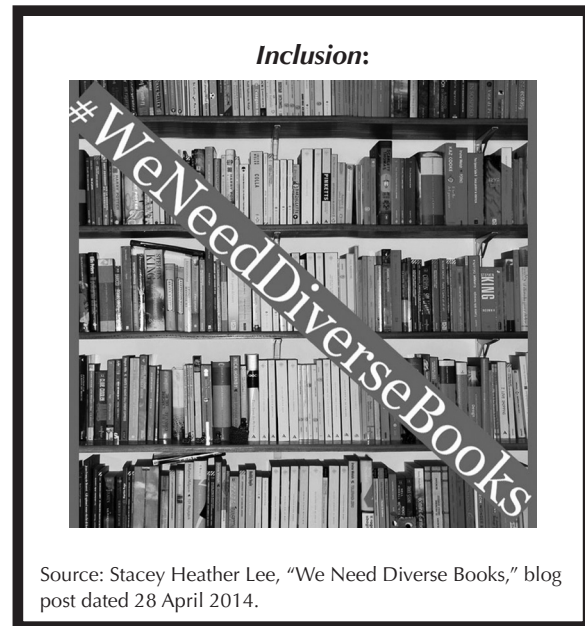
Moreover, despite the inclusivity and belonging, the visibility and the presence, the warmth of recognition the tapestry provided, the girl now realized why she had always felt it hemmed her in, tripped her up, made it difficult to breathe. All these identities—personal, national, cultural, religious, racial, gendered, dis-abled, generational, trans—such good, good

***Inclusion:***  
**It’s what’s inside**  
**that**  
**counts**

company, but really, what difference have these differences made? Despite all this good, good

company, the world does not seem to be, as a system, as a structure, all the better for it.

Inclusion might well make it possible for the systems and structures arranging the welcome to be thought of as progressive and just, but the difference the different can make is regulated, sorted out, and contained in ways that ensure the maintenance of certain priorities and logics of equality, market, freedom, and choice, orchestrating knowledges and experiences and bodies into coherent citizens. Inclusion, the girl sees now, is what holds her and her good company in place. Inclusion amends the social, cultural, and political fabric.



It is a generous enfolding, a tenacious enfolding, that the included—as those who also belong—cannot always afford to undo without choosing their own undoing as well. Inclusion confirms the expansiveness of the state while replicating its power simultaneously. Inclusion is how the state repeats its power.

Facts, histories, lived experiences of dispossession, colonization, racism, homophobia, ableism, and classism are met with impatient sighs, evidence of being outdated, personal shortcomings that need to be got over and moved on from in a way that “everybody else” seems to have no problem doing. Even here in this forum, I am included.

***Inclusion:***  
**what more**  
**do**  
**you want?**

Back to the girl and this inclusion she now wishes to trouble by making every effort to cast off the cloak and its trimmings. She demands: “Why is this supportive synthetic good for, say, warming the cockles on a bracing day of curry making or a day of pride marching but not for keeping away the chill of standards and ideals I must fit so as all the better to bask in its protection?” Now, the people of this land,

who were known for being a rather tolerant and decent lot, first considered this entire hullabaloo simply a phase through which she was going. They were bemused. They were amused. As time passed, however, her orneriness remained unabated, and the inclusive fabric so nicely woven for her became stretched to its limits. She began to tear holes in the whole thing, unmuffling herself from the layers of dazzling harmony. “Refrain,” she said.

***Refrain:***

- **To repeat**
- **To desist**

The weavers of inclusion found her difficult to understand. She was brown. She was small. She was supposed to offer comfort and reassurance of their goodness. Clearly, however, despite the children’s books she was always reading, she had not learned anything about playing nicely and getting along. Instead, she was making the weavers feel bad—and that was not good. Obviously, this ingrate was just angry, just biased, just making it up. Not hearing her was complete common sense. And so, they went on, the generous folk the inclusion weavers were, seeking out more and more diversely minded children’s books (which the girl no longer read) to include in their inclusion crafting.

**Refrain:**

When do I do “Tra la la”? When do I hum? I hum on three various occasions. I hum when I go around my territory . . . meaning, when I am at home. I also hum when I am not at home and I am trying to reach my home . . . when the night is falling, anxiety time . . . I look for my way and I give myself some courage by singing “tra la la.” I walk towards home. And, I hum when I say “Farewell, I am leaving and in my heart I will bring. . . .” This is when I leave my place to go somewhere else.

From *L'Abécédaire de Gilles Deleuze*, interview with Claire Parnet, transcribed and translated by Léopold Lambert (second and third ellipses in the original).

Still, she persists. The grounds underneath no longer hold her steady—a useful unsteadiness. As she unknots the ties that bind, she cannot quite think her way out of how a dogged refusal of inclusion—the word, the strategy, the gestures, the comfort—risks putting her nonetheless alongside some not very good company of people who are also wishing the word away, but for profoundly nefarious reasons.

And so, she says again, “Refrain.”

**Refrain:**

(v.) “mid-14c., . . . from Latin *refrenare* ‘to bridle, hold in with a bit, check, curb, keep down, control’”

(n.) “late 14c., from Old French *refrain* ‘chorus’ (13c.), . . . ‘repeat,’ also ‘break off,’ [as in] something that causes a song to ‘break off’ then resume”

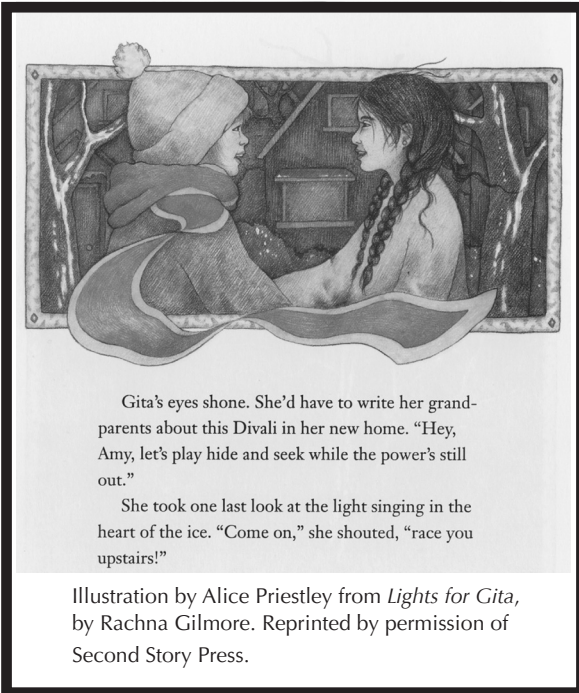
Source: *Online Etymology Dictionary*.

In the ensuing pause, the *refrain* is the moment before formulation—of an action, of a plan, of a strategy, of a dream. There emerges, in the refraining, a moment of productive hesitation from homogenizing, coherent visions of the future even while holding onto—tentatively, cautiously—the promise of radically intersectional and transformative inclusion. It is a perhaps or a perhaps not.

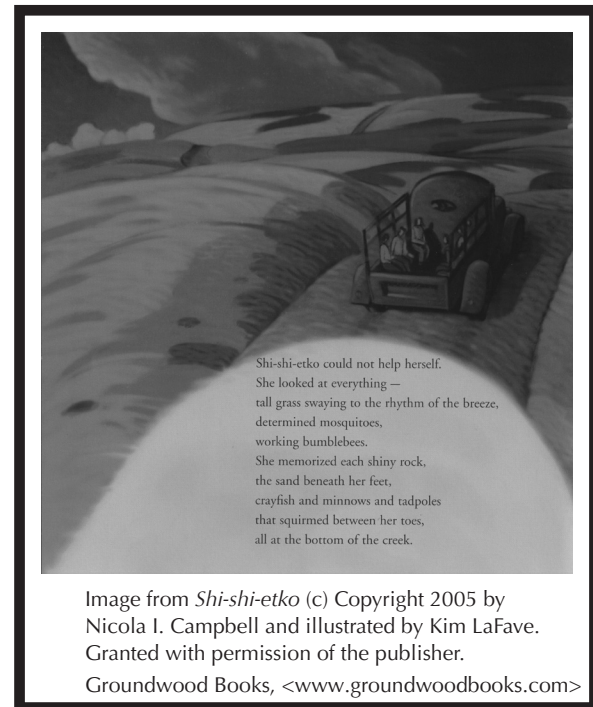
Refraining offers the chance to desist, to choose not to take action, just to be still. Refraining marks a point to recalibrate inclusion away from its pressures of happy endings, improved perspectives, and better behaviour. Differences might well be soothed and subdued by feel-good refrains of unity in diversity, levelled playing fields, “we are one” statements, or other sorts of final reconciliations, in the name of a “better” future. Yet, inevitably, such futures are always more “better” for

some than for Others. Rather, in refraining, there is the opportunity to wait for what is to come—for something always comes after the refrain. There is no need to name that future for any one or for any way.

In the space of that waiting, refraining leaves us the moment to look only here at our existing engagements against, for, and alongside each other. Refraining calls for a break in desiring a future such as the one appearing on the last page of Rachna Gilmore's optimistically multicultural picture book, *Lights for Gita*, which depicts a rosy future that, for many, never is.



Instead, in this pausing of the happy ending, a space opens up, demanding a different sort of attention to a present that is here and now, right where, for example, *Shi-shi-etko*, a picture book featuring an Aboriginal protagonist, ends. The last page of the book portrays the image of Aboriginal children thrown in the back of a cattle truck heading for residential school.



The text provides no next page of explanation, no resolution, no reconciliation. There is a refusal to resolve this moment into any particular future, a refraining by

this writer of Okanagan and Salish ancestry to provide any comfort for readers of survival or reconciliation. We are just not there yet. Here we are today, however, in the legacy of where this book ends. There is no offer of transcendence; instead, we are left uncertain in our reconfigurations, re-cognitions, revolutions. A transformative politics? Perhaps or perhaps not.

Either way, refraining invites us to have the courage to remain unaffiliated with any particular “better” future. To refrain respects the usefulness of dwelling in misgiving and hesitation without always reaching for

resolution, however difficult and humbling that pausing may be. Refraining allows us to witness the enabling possibilities of *the present*. As a term and as a practice, refraining thus invites us not to fill what comes next with hopes and dreams that risk repeating the same old song—and the hegemonies on which it depends—of perfect harmony. In the refrain, our plans are all unsettled. Being critically quiet, being critically still, being critically responsive, dreaming small, having second thoughts: this is how we pay attention differently to what comes next. . . .

## Works Cited

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Louise Saldanha teaches in the English Department at Douglas College. Her teaching, research, and writing—based in critical theories of race, pedagogy, and gender—concern how literary and cultural texts, particularly those produced for young people, can effect social change. In particular, her interest is the ideological work “the child” serves in establishing certain ways of thinking about “difference.” Her recent contributions to ARCYP include the facilitation of a round table on the intersection of critical disability and youth studies.