

A Tale of Two Hamlets: Emergence of the Carnavalesque at the Keady Market

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Abstract: The Keady Farmer's Market is an uneasy hybridity of flea market, livestock sale, and farmers' market. A weekly occasion in the small Ontario hamlet, the Market is also a site of ethnography; offering up a rich field of study, with windows into the realities of collectivity, capitalism, and race relations. This paper, not so much a critique as an attempt at critical understanding of the event, seeks uncover what aspects of self, culture, and society can be understood through a critical assessment of the Keady Market. Interpreted through a marrying of the academic literature on Bakhtin's carnivalesque and the literature of farmers' markets, vignettes of the author's personal experiences of the Market serve as points of entry into a discussion of the politics at play in this festive occasion.

The Keady Farmer's Market¹ is an uneasy hybridity of flea market, livestock sale, and farmers' market, held every Tuesday from the early weeks of April until inclement weather makes its continuation impossible until the spring. Founded in 1950, specifically as a weekly livestock sale, the Market has subsequently grown year-over-year.² Today, the Market draws more than 250 vendors during its peak weeks, and enough patrons to make the tiny Ontario hamlet for which it is named "barely recognizable."³⁴ Moreover, the Market is becoming increasingly unique amongst farmers' markets, as it has not been gentrified and retains a particularly filthy and gritty atmosphere. While permanent residents view it as an annoyance, the Market leaves an indelible mark in the community. Its silhouette dominates the map of Keady, encompassing a large portion of the hamlet's territory. One quarter of the area included in Google Earth's portrait of Keady is

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¹ This paper will refer to it as the 'Keady Market,' as it is colloquially known, or simply 'the Market.'

² Catherine Jheon, "Guest Blogger: Ontario's Keady Market," *Food Network*, <http://tinyurl.com/mswdrao> (accessed April 9, 2014).

³ "Keady Farmer's Market," *Keady Livestock Market*, <http://www.keadylivestock.com/farmers.html> (accessed April 9, 2014).

⁴ Katherine Martinko, "Trip to Keady Market," *Feisty Red Hair*, <http://feistyredhair.wordpress.com/2012/08/22/trip-to-keady-market/> (accessed April 8, 2014).

filled by the Market.⁵ Aside from its physical impact, the Market is also a site of ethnography. It offers up a rich field of study, with windows into the realities of collectivity, capitalism, and race in rural Ontario, all filtered through a carnivalesque experience.

This paper is an attempt to uncover what aspects of self, culture, and society can be understood through a critical assessment of the Keady Market. My purpose is not, therefore, a critique so much as an attempt at critical understanding of the event. Efforts are made to interpret personal experience through a marrying of the academic literature on the carnivalesque, rooted in the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, and the literature of farmers' markets. Bakhtin examined the concept of the carnivalesque in a body of literature that was centuries old, however his intent was to deploy the idea as a critique against the prevailing order of the day under Stalin, showing how the organic enactment of folk culture often parodies and subverts sanctioned values.⁶ While the original carnivals are gone, "carnavalesque moments do arise which share some fundamental elements" of the old popular spirit.⁷ In this paper I assert that, as it regards performances of collectivity, and in relation to the capitalist order of the day, the Keady Market is a rekindling of Bakhtin's subversive spirit. However, I further assert that while the Keady Market reenacts certain aspects of the carnivalesque, it also carries the seeds of reactionary politics, reproducing racially coded spaces and inspiring a conservative defence of place. I seek to elaborate upon this ironic juxtaposition of emancipatory and reactionary politics existing in the apparent mundanity of the every day. Ultimately, as Bakhtin wrote, the "popular-festive images became a powerful means of grasping reality;" as such, the personal and collective responsibility for interpreting and situating these images is of the utmost importance.⁸

As a research methodology, the carnivalesque has a strong tradition within critical literature. As Thompson explained in his analysis of the politics of consumption, the carnivalesque method seeks to avoid critiques that are both "moralistic and ideological."⁹ Instead, a carnivalesque analysis brings the rarified values of a society back to their base and bodily foundation. This holds off the tendency in academic work to engage in high-minded utopic theorizing, which can "facilitate grass-roots political action and can empower" subjects to seek redress against injustice.¹⁰ As it relates to my work, the carnivalesque method necessitates a foreclosure of moral absolutism in favour of a critical understanding of the complex and often contradictory elements at play in the Keady Market.

⁵ For a comparison of Keady with and without the Market please see in the Image Appendix, Images 1 and 2. Image 1 was taken from the Keady Market Facebook page, while Image 2 is an edited screen-capture from Google Earth. Note that the area highlighted in Image 2 is the site of the Market.

⁶ Renate Lachmann, "Bakhtin and Carnival: Culture as Counter-Culture," *Cultural Critique* 11, Winter 1988-1989, 118.

⁷ Richard A. Quantz and Terence W. O'Connor, "Writing Critical Ethnography: Dialogue, Multivoicedness, and Carnival in Cultural Texts," *Educational Theory* 35:1, Winter 1988, 104.

⁸ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1968), 211.

⁹ Craig J. Thompson, "A Carnavalesque Approach to the Politics of Consumption (or) Grotesque Realism and the Analytics of the Excretory Economy," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 611, May 2007, 114.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 123.

Awoken, as was usual on these days, by the sounds of music, shouting, laughter, and raucous crowd, I sprang from my bed and over to the window to peer out into the warm early summer morning. Barely 7.30am, and already the streets were over-packed with cars and teeming with excited visitors. All this I see, but cannot take in because of the overwhelming sight that looms on my horizon. Peeking above the rooftops that separate my parents' house from the bombastic crowds just below the hill, is the top of a multi-coloured hot-air balloon. This is the first time I can remember seeing a hot-air balloon in real-life, and it was a dramatic break from a life where the skyline is usually dominated by silos and church steeples. At seven - maybe eight - years old, my mind races with the chance to sail above everyone else and see the entertainment in its entirety. Pyjamas still on, I run down the hall to my parents' room, burst through the door screaming in anticipation, eager to make my way down the hill to the land of infinite fun and possibility.

This scene could easily be one of a small child encountering a particularly important or significant event. It is, however, the earliest memory that I have of an event that became a staple of my early years. Indeed this became such a frequent event for me that its mundanity glossed over a truly unique character. While the portrait of the Keady Market which this paper posits is my own, and is not meant to be universally representative, it carries validity as it operationalizes Farrar's assertion that memory is not "as simple as a story we tell... it lives in us in ways that we do not fully control."¹¹ That is, the memories of the Market that I recall so vividly help constitute my way of being in the world. As such, memories find themselves interspersed throughout my academic ruminating, as a playful foil to the apparently more serious political work. While what follows may be contestable, it emerges from the complex nexus of experience, memory, and materiality that has come to shape my interpretations of the Market. The body of the researcher - my own body - is meant to be a "tool of the interface between theory and research" as it embeds experience, while also uncovering certain truths about the Market through my reoccurring encounters.¹² The initial investigation into the Keady Market, this paper has only an intimately personal body of knowledge and experience through which the academic literatures can be interpreted.

Throngs of people part milling about the crowded aisles between rows of vendors, and I dart between them as quickly as possible. At top speed I move easily through the mass of bodies pressing upon one another in the pulsating heart of the Market. The person I'm with - a babysitter I think - can't keep up and their feet shuffle along with the bulk of the crowd. I can remember thinking, even then, how unfamiliar this babysitter must with at the Market to be so overwhelmed by the crowd. Nearly ten years old and I've been going for years now. As I duck and weave around people I feel almost as if I'm anticipating the ebbs and flows of people in the same way that one can predict the tides. A practical

¹¹ Margaret E. Farrar, "Amnesia, Nostalgia, and the Politics of Place Memory," *Political Research Quarterly* 64:4 Dec. 2011, 724.

¹² Divya P. Tolia-Kelly, "The geographies of cultural geography I: identities, bodies and race," *Progress in Human Geography* 34:3, 2010, 363.

oneness overtakes the sweaty people around me, as they move in uncontrived coordination, and it's as if I'm one of the few who really feels it.

In *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin analyzes the carnival motif structuring the work of 16th Century French author François Rabelais. Portrayals of carnival, Bakhtin notes, emphasize that the festivities had a “certain extraterritoriality in a world of official order and official ideology.”¹³ Within the space of the carnival, a society’s norms, values, and hierarchies appeared to melt away, as they became subject to mockery, parody, and deliberate blasphemy. Quantz and O’Connor write that in the mediaeval world, the carnival represented the “freest, most democratic, [and] most social” space, precisely because of its irreverence.¹⁴ Moreover, carnival represented a time to revel in the most bodily aspects of life. For example, excrement - the surest indicator of an embodied life - became an important symbol of the carnival’s festivities, given position alongside God himself.¹⁵ The intent of this scatological jocularly was the temporary toppling of the regular social order, by revealing that everyone - even the king - engaged in the profanity of excretion. The carnival exemplifies social levelling through merriment and festivities rather than just serious revolutionary fervour.

As Jaguaribe notes, part of the carnival’s power is facilitated by the “bodily experience of sensorial enticement, by the unleashing of baroque imaginaries, and by the combustion of the partying crowd.”¹⁶ Indeed, carnival-goers are meant to totally imbibe the physicality of their experience. With the noise of the crowd pressing upon their ears, the colours upon their eyes, and the bodies of others upon their flesh, understanding where the individual ends and where the collective mass begins becomes fruitless. A more productive way to think of the carnival experience is through the “merging of the individual in the bodily maze” of the crowd.¹⁷ This mirrors the experience of my ten-year-old self, filtering effortlessly through the crowd. What for my babysitter was a labyrinthian mass of bodies, was for me an easily intelligible and singular organism.¹⁸ Subjectivized routinely in the Market crowds, my maneuverability was less the skill of an individual than of one in full identification with the collectivity. Reoccurring exposure to the carnivalesque mass of bodies that was the Market, imprinted upon me what Farrar calls a “body memory” of the crowd.¹⁹ This type of memory operates both prior to and underneath conscious thought and, as such, plays a major role in forming the ways in which our social being takes shape. Strongly influenced by the carnivalesque Market, a younger version of myself was able to find enormous satisfaction in crowds – in the creation of the collective, in place of the dominant individualism.

The carnival is, however, about more than just a levelling of the individual experience in the pulsing crowd. Historically, the carnival presented a degree of freedom that was shocking for “those mired in the status quo.”²⁰ Shock resulted from the openness with which prevailing norms

¹³ Ibid., 154.

¹⁴ Quantz and O’Connor, “Writing Critical Ethnography,” 100.

¹⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 160.

¹⁶ Beatriz Jaguaribe, “Carnival Crowds,” *The Sociological Review* 61:1, 2013, 71.

¹⁷ Ibid., 82.

¹⁸ To appreciate the impenetrability of the crowds one might experience at the Keady Market see Image Appendix. Image 3 gives a reasonably good indication of the Market’s chaotic nature.

¹⁹ Farrar, “Amnesia,” 724.

²⁰ Quantz and O’Connor, “Writing Critical Ethnography,” 100.

and hierarchies were subverted during the carnival. As Jaguaribe details, during the carnival the poor became temporary courtiers, while the aristocracy was subjected to ridicule; in short, normally dominant “social signs were inverted.”²¹ Similarly, the Keady Market often served to displace the common order of life in the area. A common sight on Tuesday at the Market has always been the Mayor of Georgian Bluffs Township (2001-2006), Carl Spencer; however, Spencer was never known to attend the Market on official business. Instead, Spencer traded in his Chain of Office for the day and replaced it with his cowboy hat as he sold maple syrup, which was brewed on his family farm.²² Though a political cynic might view this with skepticism, it is an example of carnivalesque performance. Putting aside his official status and embracing a place of debasement - equalized to the rest of the crowd - Spencer is one of the most consistently visited and beloved vendors at the market.

On a more macro level, the Market also inverts many of the tropes most commonly associated with rurality. As Hopkins suggests, a study in Southwestern Ontario of symbolism in tourist information packages reveals that the notion of the rural community is most commonly associated with “a family place to be, where there is clean and quiet” living.²³ The raucous Market, with its dusty paths, animal droppings, litter, and proximity to hundreds of livestock seems to be an obvious inversion of this idyllic country lifestyle. Tourists may come to the Keady Market expecting the serenity of a postcardesque farmers’ market, but what they encounter is carnivalesque grunge.

The first thing that struck me about him was his size: an exceedingly large man, the hot August sun seemed to have taken its toll on him. Not only were sweat-stains beginning to show around his armpits, across his round belly, and through his makeshift headband, but his temper was also flaring. To be fair, the latter symptom was not altogether without provocation. A regular vendor at the Market, the gargantuan man was in a verbal altercation with a would-be customer. As I passed by with a friend, it appeared as if the customer was offended that the vendor was selling illegally copied DVDs. Sixteen years old, and eager for an argument, I told my friend to slow down as we perused the large vendor’s even larger collection of videos - each of them was indeed pirated. Able to hear the increasingly irate patron’s expletives clearly, I scoffed at the excessive moralizing he heaped upon a provider of weekly entertainment. Attentive to my scorn, the irritable man wheeled around, aiming his vitriol at me. He scowled at all gathered around the booth and denounced us for defiling - indeed, endangering - the Market by supporting open thievery. With the cocksure attitude that only someone of that age can have, I announced to the red-faced man that I, as a local, had much more right than he to speak in support of or against any vendor here. Throwing my support behind the grotesque vendor I watched smugly as the fuming man stormed away.

²¹ Jaguaribe, “Carnival Crowds,” 73.

²² Please see Image Appendix, Image 4 for a photo of Mayor Spencer at the Market.

²³ Jeffery Hopkins, “Signs of the Post-Rural: Marketing Myths of a Symbolic Countryside,” *Geografiska Annaler* 80, B, 1998, 70.

Looking back on this encounter with an academic sensibility, a particular question comes to mind: how do the actors in this scene relate to capitalism? On one side we find myself and the vendor, embracing the latter's right to sell goods and glorying in the wealth it brought to the Keady community. On the other an angry little man from out-of-town who staunchly defended the right of a corporation to its intellectual property. The Market's relation to capitalism, performed reflexively by myself and the vendor, follows the form of carnival; as it "mirrors the rules of society," rather than attempting to break apart these systems, it also instantiates "socially creative dimensions" within which it is possible to operate.²⁴ The vendor and I enact the capitalist drive for profit but with an ironic disregard for property. In relation to capitalism then, the Market is a place of subversion rather than revolution, as it operates with the appearance of capitalist values while opening spaces for new, non-capitalist relations.

Much of the literature on farmers' markets recognizes that they create "an alternative space" which challenges supermarket hegemony in food distribution.²⁵ While this is certainly true, farmers' markets tend to leave intact the "fragmented... individuality" and isolating aspects of modern capitalism, as they typically have a "rather restrained atmosphere."^{26 27} Such literature is reflective of farmers' markets, which have been gentrified spaces for high income earners; but the Market subverts this trend, as the raucous bodily contact it necessitates leaves patrons "shoulder to shoulder," thereby de-atomizing the consumptive experience.²⁸ Anything but subdued, the Market is endlessly abounding. Under the pretence of capitalist exchange, the Keady Market creates an engrossing marriage between consumption and communalism.

It is a mistake to try to understand a phenomenon like the Market without relating it to the wider economic climate within which it is embedded. Indeed, Bakhtin himself made sure to note that the festivities of the carnival were never "isolated from current events, from history."²⁹ As such, farmers' markets generally, and the Keady Market in particular must always be situated in their social and economic context. As Chalmers notes, the growing popularity of farmer's markets coincides roughly with the "post-productivist rural landscape."³⁰ This is a long-term trend in the global economy away from small-scale agriculture to large factory farming outfits. Its impact has been felt particularly hard in rural Ontario, which saw a more than 5% decrease in the number of agricultural workers between 2001 and 2006 alone.³¹

The collapse of a productive agricultural sector made itself felt within my own family decades ago. Aware of the economic realities facing him and out of a desire to be able to support

²⁴ Jaguaribe, "Carnival Crowds," 74.

²⁵ Lewis Holloway and Moya Kneafsey, "Reading the Space of the Farmers' Market: A Preliminary Investigation from the UK," *Sociologia Ruralis* 40:3 (July 2000) 293. For an example of the emphasis put on the locality of food at the market please see the Image Appendix: Images 5 and 6.

²⁶ Jaguaribe, "Carnival Crowds," 71.

²⁷ Holloway and Kneafsey, "Reading the Space of the Farmers' Market," 295.

²⁸ Cindy, "A Keady Market Morning It Was," *Just North of Warton & Just South of the Checkerboard*, <http://justnorthofwarton.blogspot.ca/2012/09/a-keady-market-morning-it-was.html> (accessed April 5, 2014).

²⁹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 185.

³⁰ Lex Chalmers, Alun E. Joseph, and John Smithers, "Seeing Farmers' Markets: Theoretical and Media Perspectives on New Sites of Exchange in New Zealand," *Geographical Research* 47:3, Sept. 2009, 321.

³¹ "Farm population and total population by rural and urban population, by province, (2001 and 2006 Census of Agriculture and Census of Population)(Ontario)," *Statistics Canada*, www.statcan.gc.ca/tables-tableaux/sum-som/l01/cst01/agrc42g-eng.htm (accessed April 9, 2014).

his family, my father decided to sell his nearly 100 acres of farmland in 1989. This abruptly ended a history of three generations of Hendersons tilling the same earth.³² Highly intelligent, but only high school educated, my father sought seasonal and self-employment to remedy the loss of the job which he had once believed was his vocational calling. Although it occurred years before my own birth, and had little impact on my actual quality of life, I was acutely aware of this loss growing up as it was spoken of often. My maternal cousins, close in age to me, grew up on my uncle's farm, and were deeply involved in the farming community, joining 4H clubs and attending county fairs. They made friends and learned labouring and mechanical skills that I never could because they retained their agricultural roots.

An accompanying effect of the agricultural jobs loss is an increasingly mobile rural labour force - that is, one forced to travel for work. Unable to find employment on the shrinking farms around Keady, many residents travel to Owen Sound, Hanover, or even further for a gainful career. These trends have turned Keady and places like it into 'bedroom communities,' thereby producing what Farrar calls landscapes of the temporary.³³ Such landscapes are occupied only fleetingly with residents, who come home from work simply to eat and sleep before returning early the next day. The result has been the death of a strong sense of community. The Keady Market seems to parody these trends in its typically carnivalesque way. Inverting the dominant landscapes of the temporary, rather than emptying out of people as is its wont during the workweek, on Tuesdays Keady becomes temporarily choked on the glut of bodies pouring into its Market. Permanent residents leave for their jobs, just as a vastly larger number of vendors flow in. The result is a net gain in workers (without even counting the potentially thousands of patrons who attend). Most tellingly, while those who undergo the daily exodus of mobilized labour are deeply attached to their homes, those who come in follow what de Bruin and Dupuis call the "hit and run" tendency of market vendors.³⁴ Their dearth of fidelity to place only inspires ire in locals. In such circumstances the emergence of the Market would perhaps have been predicted by Bakhtin, as he noted that the "death of the old world and the merriment of the new world are combined" in the carnivalesque experience.³⁵

The Market's carnivalesque relation to capitalism may contain yet another subversive element, which is formed through its presentation of excretory consumption. Today, Marx's commodity fetishism functions as the repression of social relations of domination through the creation of relations between things. As Žižek explains, this is exemplified in the difference between what we *think* and how we *act*; we think that we relate to commodities as rational, self-interested consumers, but we act towards them as if they are sacred objects.³⁶ Indeed, many commodities that are simply necessities of life take on a religious quality. This accounts for the overbearing emphasis on the 'localness' or 'organicness' of food at farmers' markets generally,

³² I should note two points here: The land on which the Market sits had at one point belonged to my own grandfather before he sold it to the Kuhl family. Furthermore, my family's treaty rights to this land may be contestable and that as a white settler I have inherited a legacy of dispossession too long to give proper credence to in this paper.

³³ Farrar, "Amnesia," 725-726.

³⁴ Anne de Bruin and Ann Dupuis, "The Dynamics of New Zealand's Largest Street Market: The Otago Flea Market," *International Journal of Sociology and Social Policy* 20:1/2, 2000, 66.

³⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 210.

³⁶ Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, (London: Verso, 2000), 27-30.

turning basic foodstuffs into deified commodities.³⁷ Such a relationship to things as essential to survival as carrots or potatoes defies rational explanation, and is an expression of fetishism. This mystifying hold of the commodity over the consumer is impervious to direct assault, but it can be subverted by revealing the true mundane worldliness of these commodities - through the carnivalesque. Thompson explains this point most succinctly in relation to the cheapening of food quality:

If you tell consumers that they are being disenchanting and dehumanized by McDonaldized cuisine, they probably will not look up from their ketchup-stained Big Mac wrappers. If you tell them that they may literally be eating shit, they will see a different kind of red.³⁸

Bakhtin also recognized that excrement had powerful demystifying properties, calling it “that most suitable substance for the degrading of all that is exalted.”³⁹ As it happens, the Market has no shortage of excrement; located only feet from the rows of vendors is a barn that houses piles of faeces produced by livestock.⁴⁰ The juxtaposition of the ever deified commodity with base excrement serves to potentially disrupt the symbolic order that characterizes our post-industrial societies as clean and aesthetic. Indeed, many times in the course of a Market day - particularly in the summer heat - one can hear visitors complain about the filth and stench they have endured.

My cousin and I approach the booth as casually as we can, though both of our hearts are racing uncontrollably. In a poor attempt to be nonchalant we begin to peruse the brightly coloured items on the table: Screaming Schoolhouses, Tasmanian Devils, Blackcats, and Bottle-Rockets are just a few of the options. It is a double-wide booth and the tables practically groan under the weight of the explosive toys that await us - if we can pull this off. Suddenly a gruff voice interrupts our daydreams, “Hey! You know you gotta be nineteen to buy anything here right?” growled the surly vendor as he ambled towards us - thirteen and fresh faced, we were very out of place out a fireworks booth. Under his suspicious glare I took a steadying breath and launched our plan. “Oh sure,” I said nervously, “but we were down here last week with our mother, don’t you remember? She came with us, talked to you and bought some stuff, but because she’s a vendor she couldn’t come over this week... Too busy you know?” He looked at us, clearly considering everything I was saying. But didn’t respond, so I plunged on with the lie, “Anyway, she said she’d try to come over if you really wanted, but it would make things a lot easier for her if we could just buy the stuff.” The vendor’s eyes narrowed as he looked us both over appraisingly. His pause seemed to last an eternity, until he said slowly

³⁷ Alison Hope Alkon and Christie Grace McCullen, “Whiteness and Farmers Markets: Performances, Perpetuations... Contestations?” *Antipode* 43, no. 4 (2011), 955fn.

³⁸ Thompson, “A Carnivalesque Approach to the Politics of Consumption,” 121.

³⁹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 152.

⁴⁰ For a shot of the barn please see the Image Appendix, Image 7. Please note that the specified barn is also marked by an asterisk on Image 2.

“Yeah... Yeah, I remember you two. If your mom says it’s alright I guess I can make an exception, but let’s keep this quiet.” Ten minutes, and nearly \$30 poorer, we walk away from the booth grinning and loaded down with fireworks.

Easily read as a youthful misadventure, this story embodies the white privilege that is written into the Market’s social fabric, accurately encapsulating its ironic position *vis-a-vis* emancipatory politics. That I was able to purchase fireworks consistently from the age of thirteen onwards was the result of insider ambiance. A term used by Alkon and McCullen, insider ambiance refers to the feeling of comfort that follows those in sites that are coded to their own demographic, often to the exclusion and discomfort of others.⁴¹ In places of whiteness, this means that those with paler skin experience preferential treatment, and relaxation of rules or norms. Farmers’ markets are widely recognized in the academic (and popular) literature as white spaces.⁴² Not simply the result of a “clustering of pale bodies,” the whiteness of farmers’ markets emerges from the enactment of “white cultural practises.”⁴³ Things like higher priced foods, remote location, and infrequent operating hours often necessitate a certain degree of affluence for participation in farmers’ markets.⁴⁴ Indeed, Keady Market falls into many of these traps. As it is more than 20 km outside of the nearest major urban area and no transit operates in the area, the Market necessitates some form of personal transportation. Additionally, held on Tuesday mornings into the early afternoon, Market attendance requires a flexible employer willing to offer time off. Anecdotally, it is difficult to even recall the presence of non-white persons at the Market - with the exception of several vendors.⁴⁵ This despite the fact that Keady’s home township (Georgian Bluffs) and its nearest metropolitan centre (Owen Sound) have a total population of 31,375 of whom 710 are visible minorities and 815 are aboriginal.⁴⁶ Statistically speaking, were the Market not coded as a white space, slightly more than one in every thirty patrons ought to be non-white. This is, however, not the reality.

That my cousin and I were able to convince this vendor to ignore provincial law was due in part to an uncanny resemblance that meant we really could be brothers (thereby giving our story some credence), and to the carnivalesque nature of the Keady Market, which translated into an already relaxed atmosphere. However, it was due in largest part to our utterly unremarkable presence at the Market. Snared in a crowd of bodies identical to our own, we gave no heightened cause for interest or concern, because of our apparent belonging in the sea of whiteness that is the Keady Market.

Uncovering this racial positionality has been a difficult, painful, but also rewarding experience, one that would likely have been impossible if not for the consistent help of another. I

⁴¹ Alkon and McCullen, “Whiteness and Farmers Markets,” 949.

⁴² Christian Lander, *The Definitive Guide to Stuff White People Like: The Unique Taste of Millions*, (New York: Random House, 2008), 6-7.

⁴³ Alkon and McCullen, “Whiteness and Farmers Markets,” 938.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 941.

⁴⁵ Disbelieving readers are encouraged to peruse photos made available by the Market operators themselves at: <https://www.facebook.com/KeadyMarket> They will note that almost without exception all patrons are white.

⁴⁶ “Owen Sound, Ontario - Ethnicity Statistics and Information,” *Yourneighbourhood*, <http://www.yourneighbourhood.ca/ontario/Owen-Sound/ethnicity> (accessed April 5, 2015).

have been in a long-term mixed-race relationship with a woman of Sri Lankan descent. Bringing her to events in Keady has without exception elicited a great deal of interest and talk amongst the local residents. Indeed, she once remarked to me after a community event that the looks she received from local children were of those seeing a person of colour in the flesh for the first time. It is largely because of our relationship that I have been able to begin the job of reading the racial coding that surrounded my early experiences and continues to surround my home spaces to this day. My love for her and my desire to see her embraced and welcomed into the community that welcomed me *a priori* necessitates an understanding of the privileges that my whiteness has given me. Without her love and support I can only shudder as I imagine what my sociality or politics might look like.

Ironically, the privileges I have begun to read are the same markings which allowed me to meld to the crowd so effortlessly, which had made the vendors of the Market a set of approachable figures: it is a privilege inscribed into my very flesh. It was not to be had by others unlike myself. But it is a privilege that was passed over in the moment, an interpreted simply as cleverness on my part. A rereading of this scene revealed the privilege underwriting it only once my disassociation with the Market was complete, and was possible only after I had become immersed in spaces and experiences that are distinctly non-white or at the very least offered a challenge to white hegemony.

Rolling over in bed I groan with the inevitable realization that there is no return to sleep now. Begrudging the overly loud music of the Market blasting through the window, I check my phone and note that it's only 8.13am. 'Why,' I think to myself, 'must they play that god-awful stuff so loud and so early in the morning? Don't they know people are still sleeping!' Having returned from the night-shift at Sweetwater Restaurant around 2.00, and knowing that this was my day-off for the week, I felt as if I'd been cheated out of hours of rest. After drinking my coffee and flipping through the TV, I look outside for the first time. Discontent to park on the shoulder of the road like every other tourist, I notice with annoyance that some inconsiderate jerk has driven their car directly onto my parents' lawn and left it parked there as they mosey through the Market. Infuriated at the disrespect that this person must have, I decided to teach them a lesson. Within five minutes, my car was parked behind the offending vehicle in such a way as to make their escape an impossibility. Pleased with myself, I pulled up a lawn-chair and a book, awaiting the market-goer's return. Several hours later, when he came back to his car, I admonished him for parking on someone else's lawn and extracted an apology before allowing him to leave.

At some point before I turned nineteen, I also turned against the Keady Market. As this story relays, I now express little if any tolerance for the carnivalesque spectacle that occurs just outside my door. However, in this intolerance I am not alone; many, if not most, of the permanent residents of Keady will tell you how much of an annoyance they find the Market to be, and how rarely they even bother attending what is commonly seen as a 'junk market.' This trend is likely

consistent beyond just the Keady Market, as Farrar notes that locals have a tendency to avoid sites in their communities that draw in outsiders.⁴⁷

What concerns me upon reflection is that our collective rejection of the Market does not come from a critical position that rejects the privilege of the institution or offers some other radical critique. Rather, we (and I deliberately include myself) reject the Market from a position that is totally reactionary. In the face of someone partaking in the carnivalesque experience of the Market crowd, my response was the embodiment of the most negative type of defence of place, which Farrar has described as “narcissistic patriotism or a reactionary nationalism.”⁴⁸ In what remains of this paper, I examine how I - a self-declared leftist - came to embody this position.

Part of what draws people to farmers’ markets is the appeal of experiencing remnants of an idyllic past. This popular conception of farmer’s markets is formed by what Alkon and McCullen call the “white farm imaginary.”⁴⁹ It includes a series of tropes that valorize the myth of the hardworking farmer and his family. While it is true that the Keady Market does much to subvert and undermine these tropes, its organizers still tend to employ them as marketing techniques. Hopkins notes that logos are most often used to relay the core meaning of the thing with which they are associated, and it is common to attract visitors by making the signifiers “more ‘mild’ than ‘wild.’”⁵⁰ Take, as an example, the signs that advertise the Market, which are posted on the outskirts of Keady.⁵¹ The farmer who is featured prominently on each of these signs is nothing more than a cartoon buffoon. A stereotypical friendly yokel, his hat, overalls, and pitchfork signify rurality and his bemused face indicating the harmlessness that permeates his character. Additionally, one could consider the aprons worn by female employees of the Market as they collect rent from vendors.⁵² Unnecessarily heavy, and impractically warm during the summer months, these aprons are nonetheless worn as a uniform. As it turns out, this type of apparel is commonplace at farmers’ markets, a performance piece used as homage to the domestic farmer’s wife of a rustic past.⁵³ While these features draw in tourists, they often repel locals, who see themselves as the victims of mockery.

As Hopkins says, rurality becomes a “commodified sign and a consumable, imaginary, symbolic place,” when revealed in its alterity to the urban.⁵⁴ Becoming aware of this deliberate stereotyping was problematic for me, not because what it presents is untrue, but because it so accurately represented how I related to world. Many of the adults in my childhood and adolescence were warmhearted yokels or farmers’ wives. Rejection of the Market for employing these tropes came not from the position of someone who had experienced the vicious racism, sexism, or homophobia of rural Ontario (that is, of yokels and their wives), but from the position of someone in full identification with this community. It is perhaps this uncovered positionality that raises a reactionary ire; no longer able to feign normalcy, the rural is localized in all of its quirks and idiosyncrasies. Manea writes that as we reach a “routine cohabitation with the

⁴⁷ Farrar, “Amnesia,” 728.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 727.

⁴⁹ Alkon and McCullen, “Whiteness and Farmers Markets,” 938-939.

⁵⁰ Hopkins, “Signs of the Post-Rural,” 75.

⁵¹ Each of the signs is identical, for a photo please see the Image Appendix, Image 8.

⁵² For an example of these aprons please see the Image Appendix, Image 9.

⁵³ Holloway and Kneafsey, “Reading the Space of the Farmers’ Market,” 294.

⁵⁴ Hopkins, “Signs of the Post-Rural,” 77-78.

outrageous,” the blasphemous or the carnivalesque loses its subversive potential.⁵⁵ In this context, he seems to lay blame for faltering subversion at the feet of the Market itself. Instead, I would argue that it is the seriousness with which whiteness is taken and the fullness by which rural subjects identify with their community that transform the Market from a potentially liberatory site of the carnivalesque into the grotesquery which locals perceive it to be.

A project of memory and politics, this paper examined the Keady Farmer’s Market as part of the project of constructing self, culture, and community. Understood through Bakhtin’s notion of the carnivalesque, the Market is a deeply complex and often contradictory experience. Liberatory, communal moments emerge in the pulsating oneness of the bodily mass that forms the Market’s crowds. Capitalism is performed, inverted, and perverted in the basest of ways. Yet, race remains a stumbling block, as whiteness is written into both the Market itself and even more deeply into its reactionary opponents. It is this juxtaposition that characterizes the irony of the Keady Market, at once emancipatory and exclusionary. Such contradictions may appear impossible at first, but they are truly expressive of day-to-day life. Ultimately, we must read the Market in its totality with all of its ambiguousness, contradictions, and contestations – the very things that most exemplify the carnivalesque.

⁵⁵ Norman Manea, “Blasphemy and Carnival,” *World Policy Journal* 13, no. 1 (Spring 1996), 81.

Image Appendix



Image 1: © Facebook

Image 2: © Google Earth





Image 3: © Facebook

Image 4: © Facebook





Image 5: © Facebook



Image 6: © Facebook

Image 7: © Google Earth





Image 8: Photo Credit: Anna Henderson

Image 9: © Facebook

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