

## **An Emotional Passage into Intergenerational Storylines: Creative-Critical Reflections on Antonakos Boswell's *Inheritance***

**Antonakos Boswell, Angeline. *Inheritance: An Intergenerational Story of Greek-Canadian Success*. Self-published: Angeline Antonakos Boswell, 2020, 166 pages.  
<https://inheritancegraphicnovel.wordpress.com/>.**

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The immigration story carved out by Antonakos Boswell within *Inheritance* (2020) is one that many Canadian families of settler origins will be able to appreciate. Most of them, I would wager, have pondered over the intimate circumstances and troubles around how their families immigrated to Canada as fourth-to-third generation settlers. These stories as a living, oral archive may be rudimentary, distant, and unclear to their members and familial networks, but they run deep with potency as Antonakos Boswell (2020: 105) demonstrates in reminding the ethnography's reader of their ramifications from one generation to the next. And, in briefly pausing between the pages, I could not help but wonder if one of my own familial lineages—those exiled from Russia as Doukhobors and who painfully found their way into Canada—followed a similar pattern of capital accumulation priorities: such that, my ancestors, like many other settler-immigrant families, struggled through each successive generational transition by stockpiling wealth (security), then education, and finally emotional well-being if they were lucky enough to *make it big or simply break even* in Canada. And, pausing further within that line of flight, I surrender to thoughts of how much first-generation immigrants have sacrificed through their unfathomable work efforts, energies, and magnanimous souls and will continue to do so in pursuing an unfathomable level of hope and moxie for a better life.

Antonakos Boswell traces and illustrates her family's migration from Greece to Canada, where her autoethnographic fieldwork takes place in Ottawa as it unravels these movements via a mix of oral life histories, familial interviews, and visual research-creation methodologies. The text, *Inheritance*, is divided into twelve sections, 166 pages, that speak to three generations of Greek-Canadian settlers. It starts with the Antonakos line as Angelo—affectionately referred to as *Pappou* or “grandfather” throughout the text—embarks to Eastern Canada at the behest of his new wife and falls into the heavy rigours of the restaurant and hospitality industry. Later, as the story evolves, we discover how Angelo, after an initial failed immigration attempt labouring in Montreal, manages to return from Greece and open his own diner and bar in Spencerville, Ontario (near Prescott, the US-Canadian border, and Montreal). This juncture, Angelo's story, becomes the first point of entry for Antonakos Boswell's fieldwork, which grew from a senior-level Anthropology of Work course offered by Dr. Larisa Kurtović at the University of Ottawa. *Inheritance* tracks the effects of this immigration on Antonakos Boswell's mother and herself in sussing out relevant intergenerational patterns and ways of being that Angelo unwittingly and intentionally passed on to them. And, while Antonakos Boswell's research and fieldwork begin with questions centred on economic concerns, the exploratory (and unravelling) processes of her anthropological encounters and arts-based expressions delicately realign and hyper-attune this attention onto psychological and intergenerational foci. This expansion of how Antonakos Boswell learns to (re)define “success” leaves the reader holistically and emotionally enriched as each comes to grasp the shifting context from which a successful life emerges.

The pivotal impression that I wish to transfer upon potential readers of *Inheritance*—within this brief creative-critical reflection—is that it imaginatively succeeds in re-positioning the ambiguous, even somewhat nebulous, term of what is *intergenerational* within anthropology from the purely theoretical domain of print analysis to something pleasantly palpable, storied, and sensed throughout the passages of this text. It illuminates the journey of what “kind of life you leave for others to pick up from... What direction you moved the stream towards... What you built for those who will come after you” (Antonakos Boswell 2020: 14). That is, *Inheritance* excels as a pedagogical example and tool for getting into those imaginaries and making them connect to a grounded, poetic, and sensorial understanding of how intergenerational storylines might flow from one person to the next. Not surprisingly, readers and anthropology as

an affect-centred discourse benefit twofold by embracing how intergenerational work expands in light of the personal immediacy, beyond-the-page energy, and visual animacy that the author brings to *Inheritance*. This intimate and familial framework situates the relevance of what it means to be intergenerational; it celebrates the seasons of how a “successful life is one that builds upon a future inheritance. A real legacy is one made springing from love” (Antonakos Boswell 2020: 142) that is shared and tended to across its extended membership.

Antonakos Boswell offers a brief glimpse into these successions as she pinpoints part of her becoming through Angelo; she amplifies these junctures by pairing together narrative and autoethnographic frameworks that plot out the cumulative effects of generational choices made across three lifetimes. As such, *Inheritance* as a textual case study can provide novel insights into how to advance and deepen notions of intergenerational time within ethnographic storytelling. And, to further captivate the imagination of others in identifying and redressing any inherited traumas and barriers, anthropologists cannot consciously nor ethically limit ancestral work to unidimensional representations. These inked and pixelated accounts need to demonstrate both vitality and versatility; they need to sting with purpose.

The initial part of this textual appreciation and, more pressingly, arriving at new insights arises from dissecting what *Inheritance* is as an autoethnographic story—its format. Antonakos Boswell (2020: 12) mentions in a few places that *Inheritance* is a graphic novel and cites Sousanis’ *Unflattening* (2015) to make a brief justification for delving into illustration and visual thinking. And, while not being at odds with this direction (and, in fact, applauding it), I would say there is more to this text’s format, which defies any attempt at straightforward categorization, given that its overall makeup is more hybrid and intricate than canonical: it regularly shifts between brief stints of essay writing, illustrations, fieldnotes, comic panelling and lettering, poetry, and photography. It finds a centre in binding a holistic and composite story through these elements and forging its novel account forward. The dominant voice and authority throughout this text, however, comes from the text’s visual essay and its narrator-as-fieldworker standpoint. All of which thread and capture the story of Antonakos Boswell’s fieldwork encounter. It challenges the reader to expand upon how they might envision ethnographic art-making and comics to be presented within anthropology. Some examples of what that collaboration may look like have been put forward by Dr. Benjamin Dix and Lindsay Pollock’s “Memories of the Vanni” (2016) and *Vanni: A Family’s Struggle through the Sri Lankan* (2019) or Emily

Thiessen's "The Duck Pond: An Autoethnographic Comic" (2019). There is also no lack of examples from the contemporary comics community either when researching migration and intergenerational narratives: *I Live Here* (2008), *I Was Their American Dream: A Graphic Memoir* (2019), *When Stars Are Scattered* (2020), and *Welcome to the New World* (2020), to name a few. All in all, the *intertwining* of these elements within *Inheritance* speaks to the potential strengths and benefits of the research-creation process if each aforementioned format finds balance with its counterparts in braiding the continuum of knowledge forward (Atalay et al. 2019: 770). Antonakos Boswell endeavours here.

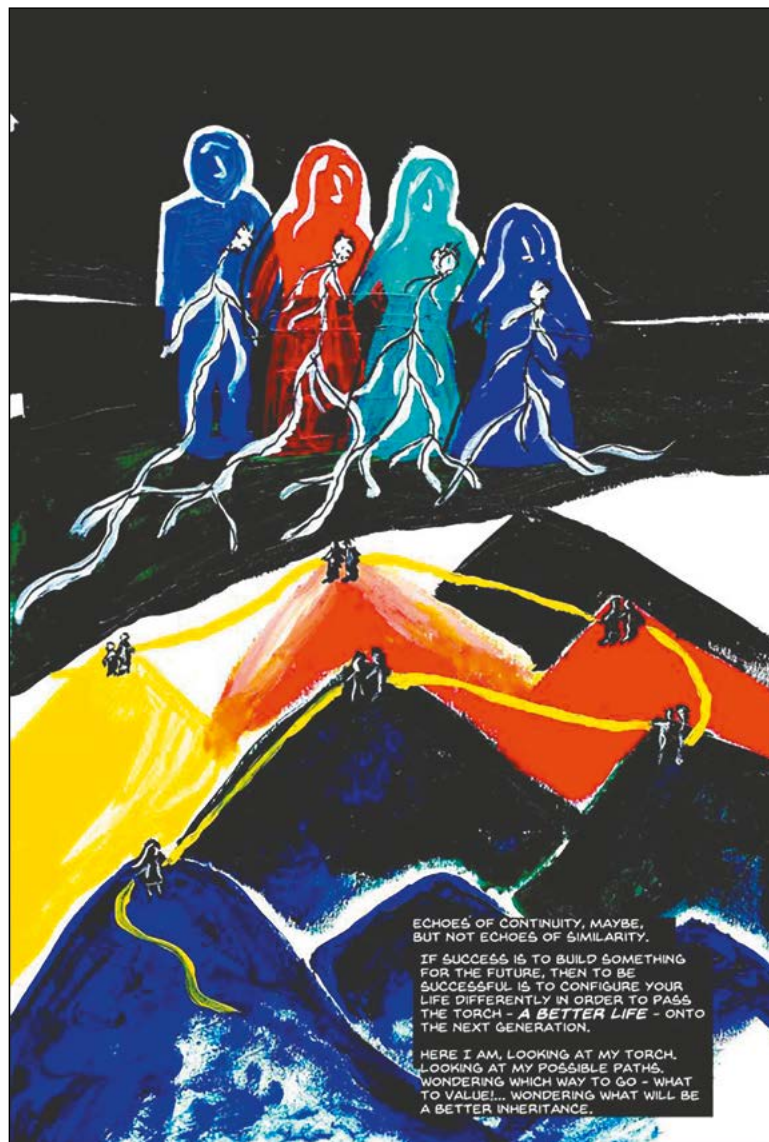


Figure 1: Page 94 reveals an India ink drawing from Antonakos Boswell (2020) that depicts her fieldwork in action, collecting intergenerational stories.

And, to engage closely with this textual breadth, I prefer to conceptualize it as *interstitial art*—for its ability and spirit to exist between ethnographic genre boundaries and recalibrate the medium’s orientation by taking novel chances with its media landscape and subverting its conventions (Pilinovsky 2004; Pilinovsky and Sherman 2004; Soyka 2007). These interstitial principles not only guide my reading and analysis of the text but also open a liminal (bricolage) space for surveying how Antonakos Boswell demarcates the borders between the story’s individual characters and their generational storylines presented in *Inheritance*. These configurations can grant access to theoretical insights by acknowledging how the author and reader readily bracket and pace components of the fieldwork—pausing their intake of meaning as one format intersects into another. And so, gleanings of intergenerational time within these *breakpoints* and *matrices of betweenness* become clearer as one renders the artful positioning of autoethnographic information. Such that a fuller grasping of these placements illuminates the whole (Schanoes 2004: 246). The reader can sense and experience how their witnessing of the author through her artworks and expressions creates a conduit for knowing an idyllic version of Antonakos Boswell who is in a living relationship with the host of her ancestral constellations as well as her intergenerational traumas.

What I admire about *Inheritance* is its creative spark and gusto to fearlessly synthesize, dare, and experiment with ethnographic writing—even if that engagement is imperfect. This sentiment is humbling as it underlies how anthropology is in flux and a “‘work in progress’ that traverses multiple collaborative platforms” (Collins 2017: 143) and media ecologies. Moreover, Antonakos Boswell’s work illustrates this point eloquently; her approach encourages the reader to uncover that ubiquitous “messiness” (Collins 2017: 143; Stodulka et al. 2019) in how her text re-arranges itself upon its own logic and expresses its interstitiality (Pilinovsky and Sherman 2004: 250). All of which stresses a creative-critical attempt to be more transparent about the emotional and psychological complexity of this topic and the distinct representational and interpersonal struggles of insider anthropology. *Inheritance* is, perhaps, then a calculated act of novel defiance upon the canon of classical, print-based ethnographic writing as it “signals a tearing down of outdated disciplinary boundaries” (Collins 2017: 146). However, this tearing away of convention, I would contend, is not so much an outcry to replace existing formulas of ethnographic writing and storytelling, but rather, this breath of ingenuity is tantamount to a call for alternate ways of knowing that are accountable to the fieldwork’s primacy and its slippery signification.

So, without these set breakpoints and genre reconfigurations, Antonakos Boswell would have been ill equipped and severely hard-pressed to tell her family's history in an equivalent vein of searing emotionality. If this text were to be cooked and savoured in this manner, it would have tasted radically different—to borrow such a metaphor—and harboured an alternate array of epistemological conclusions. A comparison of the representational styles used to articulate the characters and make them come to life, for example, would highlight this difference quickly: the familial photographs in favouring ethnographic realism and in their “death mask” (Berger 2006: 42) stillness shoulder an opaque veil that can obfuscate some of the same brilliant visage of inner light and alterity as one of the author's ink drawings. This variance is due to how the punctum (Barthes 1982: 26-27) operates and proportionately hits the author, who is far more connected to the affect and memories within the personal sites of departure-arrival which link and mark these photographs. This spectral transference between these two expressive modes—drawings and photographs—provides vital insight into how each element plays off one another as the reader uncovers how to relate to them. Such that I begin to consider how the wavy bleed and oneiric offset of how her dark India inks and lines fade into a calming blue accent *capture this more-ness* as the story initiates the reader into its archive.

*Inheritance* unsettles conventions in the way it animates and ruptures the spectrum of interior spaces (Vannini 2015: 318) held by the fieldworker and her family members across the illustrated pages and sectioned comic panels. The power of this arts-based, ethnographic text centres in Antonakos Boswell's ability to imaginatively depict an intergenerational storyline that can “[enact] new relations, new narratives, new possibilities” (Dattatreyan and Marrero-Guillamón 2019: 220). This search for *Inheritance's* form as a graphic narrative and a multimodal text is akin to an immigrant's struggle, that of balancing the old with the new. The metered way that classical, multimodal, and interstitial aspects of this text entangle and run parallel to one another underscores how disciplinary precedence haunts the present, and as a hunger for more exists, so does escape (and hope). *Inheritance's* visual motifs of foundational bricks and flowing streams reinforce these contrapuntal tensions which echo migrating ontologies in flux. More importantly, I do not believe that Antonakos Boswell would have become who she is now if she wrote *Inheritance* as a brief monograph—the art grew her spirit.

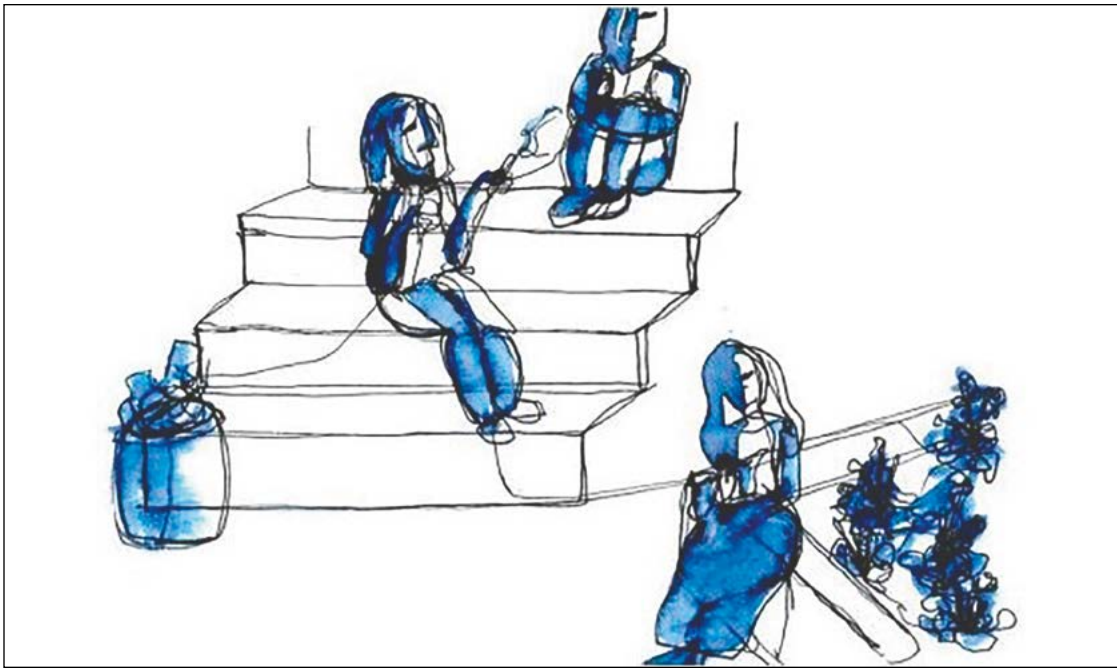


Figure 2. Page 80 contains an exquisite artwork which captures the spirit of Antonakos Boswell's *Inheritance* (2020) as well as the concept of intergenerationality.

From this vantage point, the reader, I believe, can sense the mounting impact, toll, and challenges that this artistic journey took in re-shaping Antonakos Boswell. Autoethnographic storytelling and its associated fieldwork is certainly no exception: it presents a psychological container for individual musings and transformation. A unique inward pressure that reveals the edge of who one is. Some of the artistic choices that Antonakos Boswell makes throughout her fieldwork and research-creation activities intensify throughout the text as it depicts and reveals certain ethical dilemmas of representation. There is a short panel caption that piques my interest in chapter six: it speaks to the attitude that “narratives of Greek diasporic immigration and success [...] are largely male-dominated” (Antonakos Boswell 2020: 88). And, as soon as I read that, I paused to wonder how much of her grandmother or mother’s perspective and story was she able to capture through her interviews of each. This concern comes from how much of the text’s recounting of their immigration focuses on Angelo, the grandfather. This sentiment is charged by how its comic panels can at times feel stiff like snapshot illustrations—or icons of Greek Orthodoxy—rather than sequential art which delves seamlessly into a character’s point of view and story-world. This choice may also be a reflection of how Antonakos Boswell places *Inheritance* inside the narrative of her fieldwork, not the first-person viewpoint of her relatives living out sections of their individual immigration stories.

There are countless versions of the *possible* stories Antonakos Boswell could have told us, and each of these hard-thought decisions can become a vital point of conversation around research-creation and representational practices. The vast possibilities for exploring the depth, range, and nuance of these characters and their agency in what arts-based mediums allow could be a site for how storytelling expands and redresses these familial dynamics. My educated guess is that Antonakos Boswell saw how much her own family conforms to these patterns of whose story matters first and foremost (the patriarchs'), and as such, it became an impetus for exploring and naming the effects of intergenerational trauma and resilience that she describes toward the text's closing chapters. The brilliant result of which births a memorable sequence of interview moments with her mother. They both acknowledge how anxiety and workaholicism co-interact and function in them and have been passed to one another. The reader shares in this discovery, and its residue is endearing and healing as it crosses over from the page. So, in being fully taken into this psychological turn (and seeing the olive fruits of this labour), I have immense respect for how Antonakos Boswell positions herself as a trauma cycle breaker (Braga et al. 2012; Dixon 2021) in the family's lineage. She demonstrates courage.

This pairing of ethnographic storytelling and arts-based methods in *Inheritance*, I would argue, eloquently speaks to how anthropology can address intergenerational issues. This text is one that deserves further consideration for what it sets out to accomplish and disrupt. I would recommend seeping into it to confront and broaden how anthropology conditions one to create and read ethnography given its interstitial and multimodal qualities. Beyond that, the text as it embraces art and curiosity will not disappoint. There is an immense pleasure in seeing how an amateur anthropologist and illustrator finds the love and grit for their respective crafts. And, if you have a long-standing fondness for Greek culture like I do, then this book will certainly meet that itch. I cannot tell you how many times I was caught in the library reading Greek myths or epics. Or that I grew up on a Greek-named street in Saskatoon (Girgulis). So, when given the chance to review the book and delve into the lives of Greek Canadians, I was overjoyed to put a living face and proper name to those stories and their diaspora.

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