Exhibits of Truth and Reconciliation:

Creating Empathetic Spaces for Indigenous Narratives in Canada

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Abstract

This essay examines what the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has achieved and failed to accomplish between 2009 and 2015. The TRC's exhibits are testaments to the ongoing colonial traumatization among Indigenous peoples in Canada expressed through survivor statements in non-conventional forms of art in a space that has been historically biased against them. I study the importance and value of a sample of exhibits produced as a result of the Commission to argue that ongoing and systemic racism persists in 2020 and Canada needs broader participation in reconciliation forums. This project is an effort towards shifting post-colonial public dispositions that lack awareness of pervasive colonization-trauma or empathetic indignation.

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Introduction

In this research paper, I study Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) exhibits' value as testaments of trauma and as non-literary vehicles for disclosure that foster better prospects for reconciliation[1] among non-Indigenous[2] Canadians, who, I argue, must engage in hearing non-dominant truths and learn to listen to perspectives from experiences that seem removed from their own, and cannot be easily conveyed with words or conventional story lines. I further argue that the context of the post-colonial Canadian environment has created parameters that impede Indigenous recovery. As a consequence, the post-colonial public is not conditioned to identify with the perpetrators' legacy, and the disposition of Canadians towards the Commission reveals that Indigenous individuals lack the empathetic audience they need for the working through of their trauma.

By drawing on concepts from trauma theory in a post-colonial context, I analyze three exhibits that have been imbued with survivor[3] testimonies and reflect on their significant role in conveying truth and fostering reconciliation. The *Bentwood Box*, the *Witness Blanket*, and the *Living Healing Quilt* have been carefully crafted by Indigenous representatives who insist that non-literary storytelling is a more effective vehicle of their experiences than narratives modeled

[1] Two years after the closure of the last residential school in 1996, the term 'reconciliation' was coined for the Canadian political context in 1998 when the Indian Affairs Minister issued a Statement of Reconciliation that included a commitment to support healing for the abuse in residential schools that proffered a one-time $350 million reparation fund (Stewart). Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan, including the healing fund, and the Aboriginal Healing Foundation established to manage the funds, took effect March 31, 1998 (Archibald et al. 65; Kelly 27).

[2] 'Indigenous' means native locals of a region, or peoples original to the land, and is applicable in a global context (Vowel 10). For the purpose of this paper, Indigenous peoples are those whose ancestral land is modern-day Canada, those whose traditional and cultural heritage pre-dates the arrival of French and British colonials.

[3] Canadian Indigenous representatives prefer use of the term 'survivor' to 'victim,' and although similar, the two are not analogous. Survivors include those who have experienced direct and indirect victimization not only at or because of residential schools, but also the trauma of abusive legislative policies and discrimination, and who, through resilience, overcame or are overcoming the impacts of such experiences (Niezen 7). The use of the term *Survivor* in the context of the TRC is occasionally capitalized to designate a conceptual category that is emerging in the 21st century which incorporates persistence in the face of suffering as the shared experience of interrupted tradition. The 'Survivor' designates those who actively seek collective healing and social reform by participating in awareness-raising, litigation, lobbying, and protests (Canadian Geographic 68). The term 'victim' is outmoded because it can denote dysfunction or victimization, which are inaccurate and undesirable.

on Western frameworks. The *Bentwood Box* became a numinous object[4] for Canada's Commission, the *Witness Blanket* is the first exhibit of its kind to be vested with legal rights and as such is a model for university law curriculums, and the *Living Healing Quilt* is a self-conscious gesture of interpellation[5] by Aboriginal[6] women, on whom I am focussing in the closing section because of the ongoing MMIWG (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls) crisis and in the context of 21st century women's issues.

Interpellation is a social process that appeals to the receiver on an emotive level in order to generate and accept ideas that are not consciously constructed. This process appeals to the frontal lobe of the brain and elicits a heartfelt response that can provoke empathy and indignation, and ultimately lead to social change. I will study these three artistic expressions of Indigenous trauma to demonstrate the value of testimony towards creating a Canadian forum that confronts unpleasant truths in a constructive and empathetic manner. My goal is to offer an academic study of the context and function of non-written testimonies in an implicit attempt to engage the readers' concentration and appeal to their use of logic, an effort to motivate indignation and a sentiment of empathy that can lead not only to a better and fuller understanding of the long shadow of colonization trauma in Canada but generate resolve toward constructive change.

[4] Numinous objects are products of material culture that have accumulated significant symbolic value over time, such that they become worth collecting and preserving (Maines and Glynn 10). Numinous objects do not contain inherent value for the information or function they provide, nor their aesthetic qualities, but only for their tangible or iconographic association with something of social value. Kalbfleisch details how the *Bentwood Box* is such an object because it amassed its worth through use as the receptacle for Gestures of Reconciliation (295-97).

[5] Interpellation is a 20th century concept regarding the notion of dominant social ideology and its communicability. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin define interpellation as a process whereby people are recruited into identity positions operating on the psyche to impose a structured tradition of representation that occupies public symbols, images, and myths (94, 107, 203). Interpellation is the manner of transmission whereby ideological state apparatuses are received, internalized, and reproduced within the society via individuals. The use of state apparatuses can be repressive but is not necessarily so. Means of dissemination include the media and politics, but also more inconspicuous constructs like familial social norms or religious doctrine.

[6] 'Aboriginal' is a legal term in Canada defined by the 1982 *Canadian Constitution of Canada* to designate the group that encompasses First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples (Vowel 10).

Brief introduction to the works studied

The guests who attended TRC events[7] included First Nations,[8] Inuit, Métis, and non-Indigenous Canadians. The audience was invited to participate in the reconciliation process by listening to survivor stories, viewing educational exhibitions and films, and taking part in sharing circles, workshops, and performances. From the outset, the committee commissioned artists to produce exhibits that could capture and convey the current Canadian dynamic revealed in the culmination of these events and testimonies. The objective of most of those contributing to the TRC was not to find themselves exhibited in museums; rather, for survivors and their descendants it was an opportunity to memorialize a traumatic episode in a safe, respectful, and culturally appropriate manner. The mediums contributors used to express themselves were left to their creativity and preference, and many submissions were not in the form of large exhibits.

The *Bentwood Box* was the vehicle that carried tokens from participants who testified for the Commission to their destination at the National Research Centre at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, and it became the numinous object symbolic of the TRC. Unlike its name suggests, the *Witness Blanket* is not made of fabric; it might best be described as a free-standing mural that looks from afar like a mosaic of wood. It is an assemblage of artefacts crafted into a large carving shaped like outstretched arms curving outward in a motion welcoming for a hug, enfolding the viewer as a blanket might. Finally, the *Living Healing Quilt* is not a single quilt but rather a project to rethink the role of beadwork, quilting, and sewing, skills which are not considered traditionally Indigenous, as these forms of handcraft were introduced into their communities as manual labour intended to habituate girls to European household chores. The

[7] TRC National Events were held in Winnipeg, Inuvik, Halifax, Saskatoon, Montreal, Vancouver, and Edmonton (chronological order), between June 2010 and March 2014.
[8] 'First Nations' is a Canadian term that emerged in the 1970s when Indigenous leaders spoke up in defence of their rights to Canada as the First Nations here. The term was adopted to represent the original rights and titles to the land of Indigenous people as a collectivity.

project invites reflection over the abuse and indoctrination of Indigenous girls at residential schools.[9] The three primary sources I use for my analysis are endeavors enabling underrepresented Aboriginal voices to share their personal experiences and stories of transgenerational trauma and survival through artistic media and artefact assemblages.

Literature review

Critics have challenged the feasibility of reconciliation in the current Canadian context, which lacks public awareness-building measures and audience education goals that are, according to international precedent, fundamental to the success of truth commissions. Anne-Marie Reynaud and Ronald Niezen present constructive criticisms of the process which if unrecognized could limit the country's reconciliation effectiveness. Reynaud highlights the emotive aspect, typical of truth commissions but uncommon at Canadian TRC events, and how the Commission's imperative of seeking reconciliation impeded or mitigated expressions of reaction to injustice, such as sorrow, outrage, and indignation. Niezen outlines how the TRC provided templates for comportment when attending or participating at its events, and how this had the unanticipated repercussion of shaping and limiting the content included in testimonies to dramatic and violent episodes, those that elicited the strongest visceral response. For this reason, when contributors opted to devote precious testimonial time to sharing seemingly mundane examples of common settler[10] offences, we must recognize these expressions of dismay, exasperation, and frustration, as legitimate sentiments that if left unaddressed are impediments to forgiveness and recovery. I intend to emphasize such

[9] The term 'residential school' includes a variety of institutions established to impose assimilation on the Indigenous children of Canada. Historically such religion-based, government-funded industrial boarding schools had many designs and names: day schools, industrial schools, manual labour schools, religious schools, and residential schools. Four such institutions pre-date the official program based on the Ryerson Report that would become so-called 'residential schools': the Mohawk Institute, Wikwemikong, Mount Elgin, and Shingwauk (Fortune 14-15).

[10] The term *settler* refers to "peoples who occupy lands previously stolen or in the process of being taken from their Indigenous inhabitants or who are otherwise members of the 'settler society' which is founded on co-opted resources" (Barker 328). In the context of this paper, the term 'settler' applies to non-Indigenous Canadians of all generations, including newcomers.

expressions of heartfelt indignation at the seemingly more mundane offences (compared to the physical, sexual, psychological, and cultural abuse that took place in residential schools), which continue to occur in the contemporary lives of contributors.

Kay Johnson examines how Canada failed to adapt to the post-colonial era in a way that recognizes the contributions of Indigenous peoples to the nation's success, its cultural wealth, and the construction of a polyethnic Canadian identity. Because of this, Canada faces substantial challenges in repairing and transforming relationships with Indigenous peoples. 21st century non-Indigenous Canadians are complicit beneficiaries of colonialism. As pointed out by Burton and Green, before settler Canadians can speak of liberating Indigenous peoples, they must learn to speak of settler privilege, instrumental racism, and normalized bureaucratic discrimination (15). Johnson adds that the underlying ideologies of colonialism remain embedded in the country's laws and institutions even long after the official legislative policies, with their forced 'civilization,' doctrinal inculcation, cultural re-education, imposed wardship, and physical elimination, were terminated (178). Burton and Green draw attention to the sad fact that Canadians tolerate the continuation of insufferable conditions on reserves, such as inadequate access to housing[11] or water,[12] and the disappearance of over six hundred missing or murdered

[11] Nearly 20% of Aboriginal people live in homes that require major repairs and 18% live in overcrowded conditions (UN Special Rapporteur 8). Discriminate municipal land-grabs and the prejudices of racist landlords that result in forced evictions are among the systemic challenges Indigenous residents face (8-9). Housing shortages in the northern territories are so severe that fifteen can cohabit living quarters the size of a trailer, without enough beds for all the occupants (Statistics Canada, *The Housing Conditions of Aboriginal People* 3-4). Homelessness is disproportionately high among Indigenous communities both on reserves and in urban centers. In cities, Indigenous vagrants constitute up to two-thirds of the homeless population, as is the case for Winnipeg (UN Special Rapporteur 11). Indigenous homelessness is exacerbated by other contributing factors such as lack of housing support services, unaffordable housing, home foreclosures, displacement precipitated by family breakdown, and eviction due to violence (6-7).

Indigenous women and girls (Jacobs and Williams; Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs), which are examples of the continued subjugation of and injustice towards Indigenous peoples (16). Johnson concludes that dominant colonialist discourse stifles the preparedness of Canadians to work towards reconciliation. She considers museums a crucial site for the necessary education of adult settlers as we decolonize ourselves and our society (190).

Deborah Yashar explores the less overt forms of pervasive and ongoing cultural genocide perpetuated against Canada's Indigenous communities. Although human rights violations in the form of physical elimination, torture, and the removal of children from their communities are now a thing of the past, political disenfranchisement and suppression through physical displacement remain effective (7). There have been few or no reversals of Indigenous land deprivations, minimum reparation for environmental hazards, and Indigenous applicants are continually denied economic opportunity through debt bondage and institutional injustice (UN Special Rapporteur 8, 11, 15; United Nations, *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples* 25). Administrative bureaucracies, banking institutions, schools, and places of employment discriminate in the evaluating, awarding, hiring, and remuneration of Aboriginal individuals (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, sec. II). Yashar lists contemporary attempts to weaken Indigenous culture in the form of informal racism like ridiculing Indigenous clothes, limiting access to ancestral languages, foreclosing Aboriginal ceremonial customs, and blocking traditional authority systems by imposing settler elections and laws.

[12] One of the most outrageous findings in the 2019 Adequate Housing report was the fact that Indigenous communities in Canada have drastically limited access to clean running water (UN Special Rapporteur 8): three-quarters of reserves are relegated to contaminated bodies of water, over 10,000 homes on reserves are without indoor plumbing, and a quarter of reserves have substandard water or sewage systems (United Nations, *State of the World's Indigenous Peoples* 25)—in a developed country with the world's largest quantity of fresh-water bodies (Statistics Canada, *Freshwater in Canada* 6). At an average annual water yield of 3,478 billion km^3, Canada has one of the largest renewable water supplies in the world, with the most renewable freshwater per person each year at 104,000 m^3 (*Freshwater in Canada* 10).

Theory and methodology

Although the TRC's scope was limited in time to the period of residential schools in Canada (1830s[13] to 1996), and although the testimonies incorporated into the exhibits selected for this study are those of school survivors and their descendants, this analysis focusses on the recurring expressions of ongoing trauma that occurred at TRC venues. Many participants used the Commission's events as platforms to express their more mundane frustrations, thus raising awareness of current examples of their struggles with discrimination that are only indirectly related, if not unrelated, to the residential schools that were precursors to the IRSSA. By drawing on concepts from trauma theory applied in a postcolonial framework, the analysis that follows demonstrates that transgenerational trauma among Indigenous peoples in Canada cannot be reconciled with the ongoing slights that are perpetuated in the untenable 21st century *status quo* situation.

The most important concepts from trauma theory for the study of post-colonial settings are ethnostress, lateral violence, and transgenerational trauma. The 'talking cure'[14] widely-accepted among Western trauma therapists builds on a mechanism labelled 'working through' the trauma, which requires the survivor to formulate their past traumatic experience in a narrative form. Ideally, in this process the traumatized individual arrives at claiming ownership of their story and shares it, first with a confidant and gradually more liberally, so that feelings of guilt, humiliation, and shame may diminish until the moment when the account, which had been repressed, can be shared with an empathetic public (LaCapra 57-59). Survivors of colonizer-trauma have the need to commemorate those who passed and convey their experience in a manner that is accepted by their former oppressors and their descendants, while shielded from residual colonial or neo-

[13] Canada did not officially exist until 1867, but religious-based, British-funded industrial boarding schools date back to the 1830's, thus pre-dating the Canadian Confederation.

[14] The 'talking cure' is a concept in psychology originally developed by Sigmund Freud. Expressing one's thoughts and emotions, to a therapist or to non-skilled confidants, is considered an act of healing, cleansing, or redemption. In this model an empathetic listener is required to facilitate recuperation.

colonial judgements. Western frameworks, including artistic media like song, theatre, and film, require language, script, and models that are a legacy of colonial education, and fail to satisfy the Indigenous need to express their thoughts and emotions in a way that provides cleansing, closure, healing, and redemption.

'Ethnostress' is a term that encompasses the results of colonial trauma. It is the response within a community that has been injured, oppressed, and dehumanized by colonization. Ethnostress refers to the communal disharmony that comes from the loss of cultural identity and pre-colonial traditions like ceremonies (Antone and Hill). For example, the prohibition against Aboriginal potlaches prevented the transmission of culture, rituals, and a sense of belonging, while banning gift-giving undermined communal reciprocity and healing (Linklater 26). The imposition of colonizer religious holidays while preventing communal ceremonies ruptured the security that comes of occasions for spending time together. Alcohol and drug abuse are the most pervasive symptoms of ethnostress, however addictive behaviors of other types are also symptomatic including gambling, overeating, and wasteful spending (48-50).[15] Renee Linklater is a therapist and practicing clinician, and she advocates that professionals in the medical field who are working with Indigenous communities should distinguish between general symptoms of PTSD[16]-trauma and colonial trauma, which she views as a specific and separate instance of

[15] The Canadian federal government commissions the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) which produced a final report in 1998 with the following conclusions: a) various forms of addiction including alcohol, bingo and gambling, illegal and prescription drugs, are serious problems in Indigenous communities, and b) legally-obtained and illegally-produced alcohol in particular is a pervasive issue that affects Aboriginal communities (NNADAP Review Steering Committee, sec. 3.2.1).

[16] PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) was formulated in the 1980s by the American Psychiatric Association and defined as a response to overwhelming events that is commonly delayed and takes the form of repeated intrusive memories, dreams, hallucinations, and sleep-disruptions, that can elicit self-effacing thoughts and violent or addictive behaviours, as well as emotional numbing, and possibly also increased sensitivity to (or avoidance of) trigger-objects that stimulate the intrusive thoughts about the events (Caruth 4).

traumatization among sufferers of ethnostress.[17] Linklater explains that Western theories of psychiatry and psychology can further pathologize the traumatized, rather than recognizing the cause of their suffering for what it is: colonizer trauma.

Trauma initiated outside the community, for example in a residential school or in the past, can create a cumulative wound in the community that can be transmitted from parent-to-child, from patient-to-elder, or from confidant-to-confidant (Mussell 39). Individuals in such environments adapt to the violence and internalize the injustice of their oppressors towards them as self-negation (Linklater 51–52). This creates a situation where entire generations and communities can become accustomed to living in an environment of no concern for their security. In this abusive environment the cycle of violence initiated from an external group repeats itself within the community, which in trauma-theory is called *lateral violence* (Middelton-Moz 116).[18] Members within the community show hostility towards each other in the form of belittling, humiliating, shaming, and verbal abuse, which are aspects of lateral violence that are common among victims of long-term oppression (Middelton-Moz 116). In the Canadian context, Indigenous groups have disproportionately high rates of child neglect, domestic violence, juvenile crime, substance abuse, and suicide. Although addiction is most common, being a victim of lateral violence has many indirect effects besides substance abuse, like depression, relationship troubles, poor parenting, and difficulty having a healthy sex life (Mussell 26). The traumatized acting out evidenced by lateral violence on reserves reveals that the Indigenous state of mind is suffering from cultural shock.

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[17] Linklater's research demonstrates how as a direct result of colonisation, the majority of Indigenous communities are suffering from multigenerational colonization-trauma (13).

[18] Examples of victims of lateral violence in Indigenous families and neighborhoods are those who were sexually molested as children, and victims of or witnesses to spousal abuse and domestic violence.

Marianne Hirsch examines how the descendants of victims, perpetrators, and witnesses can identify so strongly with the trauma of a parent generation that it becomes a shadowy form of memory—proof, in her estimation, that under extreme circumstances memories can be transferred (105-06). In the words of Dori Laub, "the historical imperative to bear witness can essentially not be met during the actual occurrence" ("Event Without A Witness" 84), i.e. trauma elides its own witnessing. The trauma is thus suppressed (for the sake of self-preservation during the actual traumatic event) and can resurface later or be passed down to the next generation(s).[19]

Intergenerational trauma can result from unresolved ancestral, historical, or communal experiences, and can be transmitted to individuals in the present (Linklater 19-20). If the traumatic episode is constrained to a period in time and has ended, i.e. if it is finite, and the aggression was enacted by an external antagonist, as in the case of genocide or colonization, then acknowledgment can lead to memorialization, recognition, and assurances for the future that address and prevent any repetition of the injury. The second generation acts as a prism creating the 'history' of the event, or more accurately, a near-historic version with almost mythic qualities. In the collective imagining of the second generation, the traumatic experience of receiving the transferred knowledge of the events is shaped into a new memory of the past that is affected by their personal relationships and their duty as vessels for the stories of their forebearers (106-07).

[19] Social trauma challenges the sufferer's cultural concept of time; a breach in the coping mechanism of the victims' mental defense apparatus causes them to fail to cognitively register the event on the occasion as it happens (Kaplan 30). A traumatic event is a powerful stimulus that overwhelms the brain, flooding the amygdala with electrical and chemical signals that are linked synaptically to the sights, sounds, smells, and other sensory impressions that reach it. Overcome, the amygdala's cognitive processes are recessed, directly affecting where in the brain memory of emotional events is stored (Ledoux 165, 285). At the same time, the sensory images have such urgent potency that they bypass the cortex and reach the thalamus (165). This region of the brain records the sensory inundation as emotions; fear, shock and terror, feelings too powerful for the cortex to register cognitive faculties (298-99).

However, left unaddressed, trauma festers and transmutes into something more culturally pervasive and increasingly invisible. If there is a conspiracy of silence imposed by the perpetrators' social group, it causes damage beyond the individual victim; the consequence is damage to the individual's family, community, and society, and possibly to the perpetrator as well (Hamburger 68). The involvement of an entire social environment as victims, and the participation of a significant hostile group, for example in cases of religious war, genocide, or in totalitarian regimes that practice ethnic, political or racial persecution, deprives survivors and their descendants of the security and resources needed to build resilience[20] from within a community (69). The annihilation of a reparative social network makes it difficult for Indigenous communities to address and rework their experiences into the social narratives necessary for a successful coping process (70). The second-generation imperative to translate an episode of trauma into a postmemory that can someday take narrative shape is blocked.

According to clinical therapy, in theory and in practice, recovery from colonization-trauma requires public acknowledgment of the traumatic events and the legacy of damage in the social spaces we share, addressing the deep societal need for survivors of colonial trauma to be heard by empathetic listeners. The Western paradigm for the treatment of trauma is the 'talking cure,' as mentioned. The premise is that narratives of trauma provide relatable frameworks and structure to unsupportable, horrifying, or overwhelming experiences such as war, persecution, and oppression (Hamburger 134).[21] However, the 'talking cure' only works if the victims retrieve their voice and feel empowered by listeners who enable them to share their story (Laub, "Bearing Witness" 70-72). Betty Teng, a practicing trauma therapist, outlines the phenomenon

[20] Linklater describes *resilience* as the "ability to withstand trauma and turmoil and be able to proceed with living and engaging in a productive life" (Linklater 40). Experiencing a vibrant and healthy lifestyle with happy relationships despite being subjected to intense colonial oppression requires a measure of resilience (41).
[21] Sharing and repeating everyday narratives grants coherence within a social group; the story of the hero and their enemy conveys meaning to experiences that are relatable for individuals within the community.

whereby a non-violent event, such as the omission of a genocide from official acknowledgment, can generate trauma responses like high anxiety and stress in traumatized, latent-traumatized, or recovering individuals, such as those who were indirect victims of colonization or of the residential school system that ended as late as 1996. [22] Aboriginal members of communities that suffer from generalized lateral violence and transgenerational trauma may be hyper-reactive to political discourse, such as Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apology of 2008[23] and the disclosure that accompanied the Commission's work from 2009 to 2015.

The International Center for Transnational Justice (ICTJ) emphasizes that it is of crucial importance for the TRC to go beyond compiling archival and written sources of the more than 6,750 statements it received ("Rethinking Truth Commissions" 4-5).[24] Traumatized communities need to celebrate the survivors, to commemorate those who passed, and to convey the horror and terror of their experience in a manner that allows them to be believed but at the same time shields them from prejudice and misinterpretation. Survivors recovering from colonization feel compelled to express themselves using the structures of the dominant culture, which can prove problematic. Indigenous residential school experiences can be too graphic, disjunct, chronologically removed, and latently repressed to interpret in writing or in words (Fortune 91). In this respect, it seems that the script and language of colonial education fail to comfort the

[22] Seeing one's collective experience discussed for the benefit of political agendas despite the government's continued inaction on their behalf is enough to cause distress, hypervigilance, insomnia, irritability, lack of focus, spontaneous tears, and volatility (Teng 220-21).

[23] Harper's apology included the explicit recognition of a pervasive pathology of "killing the Indian in the child" in Canadian policies (para.2). Residential schools were only one facet of the unethical settler mentality of a society that for hundreds of years deemed Indigenous peoples uncivilized savages with no rights to land or even rights as adult citizens, but only as bands under the administration and authority of Indian agents who mismanaged reserves and rendered them veritable internment camps (Kelly 20).

[24] The Commission received approx. 6,750 statements: 3,576 in the form of Private Statements, but others were provided in the contexts of its 105 Sharing Circles, in one of 146 Sharing Panels held with a TRC Commissioner, given publicly at any of 202 special events, provided in an interview for one of 141 mini-documentaries produced by the Commission, or shared otherwise at one of the National Events. Much of the testimony was not in written form, creating 1355 hours of audio and video recording.

Indigenous need to express their thoughts and emotions in a way that provides closure, healing, cleansing, or redemption.

The TRC held a number of major art exhibits at national events to showcase the artistic and cultural expressions of school survivors and intergenerational survivors. Recurring themes include apology, complicity, denial, and government policy, along with more contemporary concerns and sentiments of ongoing injustice (TRC Canada, *Honouring the Truth* 281). David Garneau is a Métis artist who struggles to portray, both in his paintings and in the words he publishes to accompany them, his experience as a survivor of the residential school system. Garneau is critical of the colonial attitude characterized as he sees it as scopophilia,[25] the urge to know and exploit, own, penetrate, translate, or traverse the Indigenous will (23). Truth commissions like the TRC must not transform testimonies into artefacts to be catalogued, or display memorabilia in a manner that commodifies the culture to which the tokens belong. In this manner, stories shared by contributors at the venue could transition from personal ownership to public interpretations subject to misrepresentation. Weariness of the colonial precedent of invasive voyeurism and intrusive scopophilia led some survivors to choose not to participate in reconciliation by testifying at TRC events, to resist the publication of their stories in translation, and decline invitations for interviews (35).

The role of storytelling in non-literary formats functions for Indigenous communities in the same way that literature serves non-Indigenous cultures. In Indigenous custom stories are everywhere, animals and ordinary objects have stories; they open a mediated narrative space that is related to the storyteller's community, culture, family, history, home, and/or interests in ways that evoke sharing. Mussell and Honeyford elevate oral tradition, artefacts, and other non-literary mediums like art, music, and performance, as modes of education and transmission better suited

[25] Scopophilia: the desire to objectify and commodify the seen or heard event.

to Aboriginal frameworks (333-36; 122-23). Indigenous stories are prompts for literacy pedagogy; they describe critical inquiries, cross-cultural connections and ethnic traditions that need to be incorporated into academic curriculums to disrupt dominant narratives and draw attention to issues of inequity and social justice. By creating assemblages, artefacts, and artworks that share Indigenous narratives and resist translation into Western frameworks, contributors like Luke Marston, Carey Neman and Alice Olsen Williams enabled the working through of some transgenerational trauma. In the following analysis, I demonstrate that reconciling Indigenous peoples with settler Canadians requires exposure to non-dominant truths, educating the public to hear perspectives from survivors who struggle to convey their experiences with words, and an audience sympathetic to interpreting art forms unfamiliar to Western paradigms.

Section I: Truth Commissions & the *Bentwood Box*

Truth and Reconciliation in Canada

The circumstance of Canada's TRC is unique in multiple respects. It is the first worldwide case of a truth commission initiated outside the aftermath of a brutal war, without media-hyped cases of journalist death, and with no affiliated disruptive regime change. The truth and reconciliation committee was commissioned in response to Canada's largest class-action lawsuit, the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) which came into effect in September 2007.[26] The scope of the commission is narrowly tailored to accompany the settlement, and is limited to wrongs committed at or by those 140 institutions listed in the IRSSA

[26] The IRSSA, the settlement to Canada's largest class-action lawsuit, was signed by the Government of Canada, Anglican, Methodist, Presbyterian, Roman Catholic, and United churches, the Assembly of First Nations, and the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami (University of Manitoba "About-Our Mandate"). Besides establishing the Common Experience Payment and the Independent Assessment Process, the settlement prompted the Prime Minister to present an official apology in 2008, initiated the Truth and Reconciliation Committee (TRC) which operated from 2008-2015, and created the National Center for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR) a permanent archive to house the collected testimonies and materials, which would launch in 2015 to preserve the memory of Canada's Residential School system and legacy (Find & Connect Project Team).

as federally mandated residential schools.[27] Specifically, the parameters restrict the TRC's scope to Indigenous individuals who attended an institution, excluding the claims of Métis plaintiffs or responses from non-Indigenous culprits, despite having shared the same experiences. This subset represents 86,000 survivors who attended residential schools in the past and were alive between 2009 and 2015.[28] Their testimonials bring to the surface more than the violence perpetrated against them. Time and again, testimonials express the survivors' experiences during the interim period between the traumatic event and its telling. What truly prompted them to speak out publicly is the ongoing injustice they and their communities continue to experience.

Most significantly, the Canadian TRC is unlike every other commission worldwide concerning, as Niezen calls it, "naming names" (2). Officially, Canada's TRC has no judicial principles. It is exceptional in its preclusion from holding formal hearings, engaging in public inquiries, or conducting any judicial undertaking representing the victims of the crimes exposed in testimonies (Indian Residential Schools Adjudication Secretariat, [IRSAS] *Schedule "N,"* secs. 2b, 2c). Creating a precedent in stark contrast to most other truth commissions, when Canada's TRC was established the decision was made to prevent it from publishing the names of those identified as abusers (*Schedule "N,"* sec. 2h). The committee claims its purpose is not to take a position on the legal responsibility of individuals, leaving judicial powers to the settled lawsuit (IRSAS, *Schedule "N,"* sec. 4). Unlike other cases worldwide, the Canadian committee is prevented from exerting subpoena power, obliging attendance, or compelling participation in

[27] The list of institutions eligible for the settlements excludes many applicants with legitimate cases because they attended institutions not listed as residential schools, such as convents, day schools, juvenile prisons, orphanages, schools for the deaf, or tuberculosis wards. To date, 9,471 individuals have asked for 1,531 institutions to be included in the IRSSA's eligibility list (Government of Canada; Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc, Sechelt, and James Bay Cree). Although most residential schools were federally funded, several were church-backed or provincially funded, and these are excluded from the federal settlement.

[28] In sum, an estimated 150,000 pupils attended the 140 Canadian institutions listed in the IRSSA during their 130 years of operation. Approximately 86,000 of them were alive and either contributed or opted not to provide testimony during the period of the Commission's activities (Niezen 1).

any form. Testimonies are voluntary, and participants are discouraged from identifying their aggressors. When they do, TRC editors redact the names from those passages of testimony included in their report. This has prevented the TRC from addressing the survivors' need for restorative justice.

Indigenous peoples' conception of the inherited responsibility for residential school crimes against humanity differs significantly from the mainstream discourse and perceptions held by dominant sectors of society. Because some Canadians have the impression that Indigenous individuals were fairly or even generously remunerated by the government for their time in school, it is worth briefly outlining how IRSSA financial compensations were settled.[29] There are two independent payment processes with different eligibility criteria. The first is the Common Experience Payment (CEP), which applies universally to all students who attended a residential school.[30] The other is the Independent Assessment Process (IAP), a case-by-case process for compensating victims of egregious infractions against human rights.[31] The former requires no proof of harm; applicants need only prove their attendance at one of the eligible institutions. They receive $10,000 for having been enrolled, and an additional $3,000 per year they attended after the year of enrollment (IRSAS, *Schedule "D"* 5). The average payment per CEP recipient was $20,457, for a sum of $1,622,422,106 in settlements (Government of Canada). To some taxpaying Canadians, this quantity may seem high, but to survivors who endured not only abuse but decades of repressed trauma under a conspiracy of silence, it cheapens or undervalues their

[29] Note that a significant portion of dispensations went not as awards to survivors, but to legal fees and affiliated disbursements thus benefiting lawyers and civil servants rather than survivors (Dickason and Newbigging 327).

[30] By the deadline on September 30, 2012, the CEP had received 105,530 applications. Of these, 79,309 were deemed eligible and received payments. The remaining 23,927 applicants were ineligible either because of their Métis or non-Indigenous status, or because the institutions they attended were not included on the list (Government of Canada).

[31] By 2020, the IAP has received 38,275 cases, of which 38,268 are currently resolved (99% of all IAP claims have been resolved) and nearly nine out of ten applicants received settlements. The average disbursement value is approx. $91,471 per case. The final sum to date has been $3.232 billion (IRSA S, *IAP Statistics*).

ongoing unresolved troubles.[32] Use of the word ‘common’ in the title of the CEP minimizes and normalizes the experience of aggravating factors including degradation, failure to provide care, intimidation, physical violence, racist acts, sexual abuse, threats, and verbal abuse. Unlike the CEP, the IAP does not assign a dollar value but a point system to be used as a matrix for establishing settlements. A brief outline of the mildest cases listed in “Schedule D” reveals much. The category ‘Acts Proven’ contains seven subsets, graded from five to sixty points in severity. The mildest subcategory, worth five to ten points, lists the following: adults exposing themselves to pupils, fondling or kissing, inappropriate touching including with objects, and nude photos taken (*Schedule “D”* 3).[33] The next category, ‘Consequential Harm’ has five subgroups, on a scale of one to twenty-five points. The mildest category, worth one to five points, is labeled ‘modest detrimental impact’: chronic aggression, anxiety, bed-wetting, depression, hypervigilance, loss of self-esteem, nightmares, panic states, or retaliatory rage (*Schedule “D”* 4).[34] The final category, ‘Consequential Loss of Opportunity’ has five subsets, ranging from one to twenty-five. The first bracket, worth one to five points in severity, is described as “diminished work capacity by reduced strength or attention span” (*Schedule “D”*

[32] For example, malnutrition and undernourishment were so severe and ubiquitous in the mismanaged church-run and under-supplied government-funded schools, that they had lifelong consequences on pupils. As a result, pupils graduated with eating disorders like binge-eating and compulsive-eating, and developed long-term health issues like cardiovascular problems, diabetes (Aboriginal people older then forty-five have twice the rate of diabetes as the non-Indigenous Canadian population) and what has developed into an ‘obesity epidemic’ (Mussell 325).

[33] The most extreme category of ‘Acts Proven,’ graded from forty-five to sixty points in severity, lists repeated and persistent anal or vaginal intercourse and/or anal or vaginal penetration with an object. For comparison, physical injury that led to (or should have led to) hospitalization, which caused permanent or demonstrable long-term physical injury, impairment, or disfigurement, resulting from severe beating, whipping, and second-degree burning, is graded a far lower 11-25 points in severity (*Schedule “D”* 3).

[34] The most extreme category of ‘Consequential Harm,’ scaled from twenty to twenty-five, is labeled ‘Continued harm resulting in serious dysfunction’: chronic post-traumatic state, eating disorders, forced termination of a pregnancy, having been forced to give an infant up for adoption, inability to form or maintain personal relationships, pregnancy resulting from sexual assault, self-injury, sexual dysfunction, and suicidal tendencies (*Schedule “D”* 4).

5).[35] For example, Ruby Firth, a former pupil at Stringer Hall in the Northwest Territories, had pneumonia seven times while attending school, and 50% of her lungs have permanent scarring due to lack of treatment, which has led to chronic bronchitis as an adult (TRCC, *Honouring the Truth* 159).[36] For most applicants, making a claim was not about receiving financial compensation (Reynaud 373; Joseph 213, 221); even more than seeking justice, many sought to have their families and names represented in the first and only judiciary avenue available to them (Gaertner 126; Neu and Therrien).[37] In offering financial compensation for intolerable acts of inhumanity perpetrated against Indigenous pupils, the IRSSA gave Canadians an impression of justice that is not shared by survivors who were prevented from naming their aggressors in a judicial process that continues to avoid prosecuting perpetrators (Niezen 18).

In Niezen's estimation the truth project was distorted from the outset by publicizing displays of victimhood but not perpetrator accountability, which he labels a "victim-centred" commission (5). The outcome was skewed towards survivors willing to engage in a theatrical iteration of their experience without the possibility of restorative justice. The TRC is a project of

[35] The most extreme category of 'Consequential Loss of Opportunity,' ranging from twenty-one to twenty-five, is described as "chronic inability to obtain employment," which is problematic because it requires proven actual income loss from those who sometimes were never able to position themselves on the labour market. For many, the schools did not teach them a skill or train them for a trade but destroyed their bodies and made them permanently incapacitated for the Canadian labour market (*Schedule "D"* 5).

[36] Residential schools were designed hastily with little consideration for sanitation or ventilation, and constructed of cheap building materials (TRCC, *Survivors Speak* vii). Pupils lived in cramped conditions, were malnourished and underfed. Where clinics or infirmaries were available, they were undersupplied and not staffed by trained professionals (Fortune 29). Administration ignored any health legislation, if it was not omitted altogether (TRCC, *Honouring the Truth* 94-96). Half the deaths were attributed to tuberculosis, but there were also extremely high rates of smallpox, influenza, pneumonia, and lung disease.

[37] There are those among settler Canadians who have the impression that Indigenous parents did not resist the residential school system but welcomed it and are now pursuing litigation against the government only out of financial motivation. While it is true that in remote communities where no education was accessible, parents petitioned for residential school accommodation, there is a growing record attesting parental opposition to the schools. The low voluntary attendance and high drop-out and runaway rates attest to passive forms of resistance to these institutions. Parents and grandparents who had experienced the schools themselves were prevented from pursuing grievances against the government. An amendment to the Indian Act in 1927 prevented anyone from soliciting funds for Indigenous legal claims without the permission of the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, effectively barring Aboriginal people from representing children against the schools. This impediment to justice was amended in 1951, and only then did it theoretically become possible to pursue justice, but this was not widely disclosed and thus rarely pursued (Niezen 27).

collection and recording, but with no prosecutorial power and prevented from litigation. The educators and administrators of the genocide, the nuns, priests, and government officials, are hardly attested in the TRC's proceedings, underrepresented in the media, and not being confronted with legal consequences. Because the TRC's awareness-raising and truth-gathering priorities emphasize horrific practices and obscure injustices of assimilation policies, it simultaneously disregards the survivors' need for legal due process, for the public disclosure of perpetrators' identities, and for justified retribution (Niezen 148-50). Worse, it attaches the stigma associated with sexual abuse unjustly to the victims and their descendants but not to the priests, brothers, nuns, and administrators responsible. In addition to the failure to address restorative justice, Jennifer Llewellyn points out that the TRC made no attempt to restore Indigenous peoples' territory, land, or natural resource rights. Her concerns are shared by César Rodríguez-Garavito and Yukyan Lam, who conclude that going forward the reconciliation process must include a new criterion of collective ethnic justice for reparation and assignation of territory, land, and natural resource rights in Indigenous cases (23-31).

Conspiracy of Silence

Previous research into truth and reconciliation projects has shown how fraught the process can be for post-colonial states where the Indigenous populations have been subjected to genocide (Ross 147; Mussell 325). The act of speaking, sharing, and witnessing, however cathartic, was shocking in the Canadian context. Until the 1960s, the settler public was either willfully oblivious or complicit in a conspiracy of silence, and survivors repressed their feelings as much due to oppression as out of trauma-related inability to express them.[38] After the international Human Rights laws of the '40s and '50s, gradually secret meetings began to occur in isolated

[38] Those few movies on the topic in the '60s, like *Powwow at Duck Lake* from 1967 (National Film Board of Canada), omit any mention of sexual abuse (Niezen 27).

pockets of Canada among sexually abused residential school survivors who were breaking their long-held silence. Human rights policies regarding assimilation and dispossession did not incite the settler public's reaction. Niezen's analysis bluntly reveals that despite new human rights standards that defined residential school abuses as crimes against humanity, "public opinion in Canada was either uninformed or steadfastly in support of residential school policy for the greater part of the century or so in which they were in full operation," up until the mid-1990s (27). It was outrage at the sexual abuses that would eventually prompt the public's disavowal. In 1990, Chief Phil Fontaine became the leading prominent figure to disclose his experience publicly and candidly—including the sexual abuse. "In my grade three class... if there were 20 boys, every single one of them... would have experienced what I experienced. They would have experienced some aspect of sexual abuse" (Fontaine and Frum). By 2003, the *Boston Globe*'s coverage of the Catholic clergy sex abuse scandal finally elicited sufficient indignation to raise public awareness and willingness to address the mistreatment of Indigenous children ("Church Allowed Abuse"; "Geoghan"). Still, it was not until repeated UN denunciations, such as those in 2015,[39] 2018,[40] and 2019,[41] that the same indignation would extend to the failures of law

[39] In August 2015, the UN's Human Rights Council (UNHRC) expressed concern about Canada's reluctance to comply with the full implementation of the rights of Indigenous Peoples as listed in the 2007 UN declaration (sec. 26). It lists specific areas where human rights violations persist: abuses by Canadian companies operating abroad; persisting inequalities between women and men, including a significant pay gap; the underrepresentation of women in leadership positions in the public and private sectors; high prevalence of violence against women and girls; disproportionately high life-threatening forms of violence, homicides and disappearances among Indigenous women; excessive use of force by law enforcement officers during mass arrests in the context of protests at the federal and provincial levels, with particular reference to Indigenous land-related protests; and more (*Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of Canada*, sec. C).

[40] In March 2018, the UNHRC denounced Canada's treatment of Indigenous people and criticized government policies for ignoring favourable Supreme Court rulings by continuing to impose unwanted decisions that affect Indigenous peoples' use of their lands (*Universal Periodic Review*, paras.3-6, 39, 66, 75).

[41] In July 2019, the UN General Assembly published a report on adequate housing as a human right and the lack thereof as a form of discrimination. One of most outrageous findings in the 2019 *Adequate Housing* report was the fact that Indigenous communities in Canada continue to have drastically limited access to clean running water (8). The report further outlines a correlation between the 'abhorrent' housing conditions and adverse health effects (UN Special Rapporteur 4).

enforcement,[42] the inexistent or unjust judicial process,[43] and the disproportionately high number of missing or murdered Aboriginal women and girls.[44]

Like many settler Canadians, the apology of 2008 was the first time I heard of the mismanagement and mistreatment at residential schools. I was then a second-year student of Liberal Arts in Cégep, and it was as a student of post-secondary education in Québec that, along with my professors and peers, I wrestled with the disclosure of residential school atrocities that momentarily dominated public discourse. My position in shaping this academic argument is as a witness and empathetic audience member actively processing non-literate testimonies and engaged in sharing them within a Western educational framework. I have undertaken this project of adapting and translating mixed-media Indigenous exhibits into the academic record because, as Mussell explains, enabling personal growth and communal development for First Peoples requires active support from those who have confidence, social standing, and a secure sense of their public identity (335). My goal is to make a case for the importance of non-written and non-Western forms of Indigenous testimony for an academic audience, a literate public, and in written format familiar to Canadians. The images attached in the appendix are an invitation to explore the media and sample the visual testimonies crucial to this topic. My objective is to share with a literate audience and translate in an academic framework testimonies communicated

[42] Already in 2015, the TRC urged for immediate steps to be taken in the form of 94 actions (TRCC, *Calls to Action*) to protect Aboriginal women and girls and prevent violence against them (*Honouring the Truth* 223-43). That same year, the UNHRC similarly denounced the low number of cases reported to the police by victims; the insufficiency of shelters, support services, and other protective measures for victims; and a failure to effectively investigate, prosecute, convict, and punish perpetrators (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Concluding Observations on the Sixth Periodic Report of Canada*, sec. C.8). Rather than become alert for cases of disappearances and abuse among Aboriginal women, law enforcement overlooked and ignored reports of violence, rape, or abduction (Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs 9-10, 14, 17, 21-22, 46-50).

[43] In Aboriginal communities, loved ones and neighbors grew reluctant to contact authorities for help because of the juridical discrimination with which they are familiar (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, *Universal Periodic Review*, para. 68) and because they feel their testimonies will be discredited, that they ultimately do not matter (Linklater 158).

[44] The Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) report published in 2019 revealed the disregard for the truth that pervades the judicial system, notably the negligence towards disappeared women and girls (*MMIWG 1a* 73, 96, 102).

through mediums that are popular oral and audiovisual artforms rather than written sources familiar to an educated settler public.

The Bentwood Box

Commissioned by the TRC, the *Medicine Box*, more commonly known as the *Bentwood Box*, travelled with the Commission to its seven national events throughout Canada between 2009 and 2015. It attended the first Sharing Circle the TRC ever hosted, in Winnipeg on June 16, 2010, and witnessed proceedings at each event thereafter (Figure 1). In all, the TRC received over 1,300 items and accompanying testimonies from honorary witnesses who deposited their contributions into the *Box* onstage (Head). The *Bentwood Box* became a central component of the events hosted by the Commission as the receptacle in which contributions were placed, in what was called a "Gesture of Reconciliation," accompanying commitments to make concrete improvements towards relationships between Indigenous and settler peoples (Kalbfleisch 293).[45] Such became the symbolic value of the Box that in 2018 when *Canadian Geographic*[46] published the encyclopedia *Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada*, they selected the *Box* for the cover image of the first volume (see Figure 2), and immediately after the first 59 pages of the atlas portion, the opening entry of the encyclopaedic section leads with an image of the *Box*, top left, and beneath it a picture of its creator, Luke Marston, next to the entry titled "Truth and Reconciliation" by Ry Moran, director of the National Center for Truth and Reconciliation (NCTR)[47] (60). The *Box's* visibility was such a key component of TRC events that it has become

[45] For example, after performing at the inaugural TRC event in 2010, the country rock band Blue Rodeo offered a handwritten copy of the lyrics of their song *Fools Like You*, explaining that the verse "What you preach for others / Why don't you practise that first-hand?" applies to the government's contemporary relationship with the TRC (McCue).

[46] In partnership with the Assembly of First Nations, Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the Métis Nation, NCTR, and Indspire.

[47] The NCTR was conceptualized in the IRSSA settlement of 2007 but launched only in 2015, upon the completion of the Commission's work. The NCTR's mandate is to house statements, documents, and other materials gathered by the TRC and to make them accessible to the public so the survivors and educators can access historical records and the legacy of the residential school system is never forgotten (University of Manitoba).

a mnemonic device[48] for the Commission (Kalbfleisch 298-99) and a numinous object, synecdoche for the act of sharing truths, witnessing, and the approximately 1,300 contributions the TRC collected (295-97).[49]

Beyond a mere receptacle, the *Bentwood Box* is a tribute to Indigenous survivors of residential schools and their descendants. It was designed and constructed by Luke Marston, a Coast Salish artist who steamed, bent, and carved the box from a single piece of red cedar; a ubiquitous and sacred material in Northwest Coast cultures.[50] Unlike other multi-purposed decorative customary artefacts, such as an Abenaki woven basket or a stitched Inuit skin bag, the panels of cedar medicine boxes are ideally suited to storytelling (Kalbfleisch 286). On his cedar canvas, Marston carved contemporary stylized reinterpretations of traditional models and conventions. For example, he expanded the colour palette beyond the black, red, and white customary to Coast Salish boxes (290). The *Box*'s four sides are carved to represent First Nations, Inuit, and Métis cultures, and their descendants, respectively. Geographically, they are the peoples of the Northwest Coast, the North, and the Woodlands-Interior, while the front panel represents survivors and their descendants collectively.

The front panel is the most well-known (Figure 3). It depicts Marston's grandmother, a pupil of Kuper Island residential school in British Columbia. As a child, a nun pushed her down the stairs, leaving her with broken fingers that were never treated and healed crooked, as

[48] Mnemonic device: specific objects serve as mnemonic devices to people present at those ceremonies with which they are associated, such as the "Gesture of Reconciliation" in the case of the *Bentwood Box*. Attendees recall the relationship to the activities, sights, songs, smells, and stories surrounding the event. The object comes to represent the encounter between it and the viewer, hence a mnemonic device is a dynamic, like a relationship, between the object and the event it evokes (Meuli 117-28).

[49] All these objects would not fit inside the box at the same time; they were placed into the *Box* temporarily and transported to be archived by the TRC. In this sense, the *Box* was less a container than a vehicle.

[50] The bark, roots, and wood from cedar were used ubiquitously in traditional Aboriginal custom, for longhouses, pit houses, canoes, paddles, storage, clothing, and mundane objects like utensils and tools, as well as sacred items for ceremonial use (Kalbfleisch 287). Cedar was also used in traditional medicine for its healing properties, to store food for its vermin-repellant qualities, and boughs were burned for spiritual cleansing. Traditional medicine boxes served as many purposes as the cedar from which they were crafted, including for cooking, drinking, eating, seating, storage, and transportation.

Marston's mother described, in "a cramped position" (Narine, "Bent Box").[51] The panel depicts a white-haired woman with both hands raised palm-forwards in supplication, the digits of her left hand misshapen. According to Marston, who is a member of the Stz'uminus First Nation, the elderly woman represents more than his grandmother's experience: her painted tears symbolize "all the Elders that lost their children and were persecuted or arrested for trying to stop the people who came to take their children away" (Narine, "Bent Box").[52] The veil of silence surrounding the subject was such that it was not until his work for the TRC that Marston's mother revealed to him stories of his grandmother's experience at Kuper. It was important for Marston, and for his mother Jane, a respected carver herself who helped in the making of the *Box*, not only to depict his grandmother's abuse and trauma, but also to highlight her dignity as a survivor (Kalbfleisch 289).

On the Northern-themed left panel, one of the two narrower side-panels, a stylized face with a black notch for a beard on its chin wears a white parka hood under the starry night sky (Figure 4). Marston included stars to remind Indigenous viewers of the box that "we come from the star people" (Narine, "Bent Box").[53] He claims an Inuk woman once told him that northern lights symbolize ancestors dancing across the sky. Diagonal green stripes in the background represent an aurora borealis, symbol of ancestors in the sky in Inuit custom (Kalbfleisch 289). The contrast of light against dark evokes a sense of hope. The inclusion of the northern lights might represent the metaphorical light the TRC is shedding on repressed history and on the unpleasant social dynamics that persist through this time of reconciliation. It is an artistic example of re-claiming agency and portraying an identity that was all but destroyed through decades of traumatization.

[51] Marston quoting mother, Jane, in statement to Opening Sharing Circle, Winnipeg National Event, July 16, 2010.
[52] Marston, statement made to Opening Sharing Circle, Winnipeg National Event, July 16, 2010.
[53] Ibid.

The Woodland right side-panel is the most colourful of the group (Figure 5). Whereas the other panels are tricolour, black-red-white for the front panel, black-white-green on the left side, Marston uses black, green, light blue, navy blue, peach, red, yellow, and white, in the medicine wheel that frames the face of a Métis child. The panel depicts a young boy with a fringe of hair draped across his forehead, the fresh haircut given to all children upon arrival at school. Many accounts of residential school attendance begin with recounting first the impression the imposing red-brick building made upon them when they approached it, and then the cutting of their hair, sign of their subjugation to church and settler authority (TRCC, *Honouring the Truth* 38, 81, 103,145, 159).[54] Despite the haircut, the child depicted in the panel is wearing colourful war paint, echoing the colours of the medicine wheel. Marston explains that the war paint symbolizes "the strength of youth," [55] evoking those children who were taken away from their communities never to return (Narine, "Bent Box"). A hand covers the youth's mouth, symbolizing the collective silencing of Indigenous voices, a reminder of the languages lost due to forced assimilation, and the silencing of Aboriginal ceremonies, culture, and traditions altogether (Kalbfleisch 290).

The back panel is unlike the first three because it does not portray a stylized human face. Its design is unpainted and relatively unadorned in contrast to the front and side panels, and the imagery does not directly reference residential schools. A Thunderbird and Whale fill the wide cedar canvas space, symbols of strength and nourishment. The Thunderbird's wings span the sky while the Whale stretches across the sea, depicting the interrelation of sky and water, the careful complementation of above and below. Aboriginal myth holds that the Thunderbird's strength

[54] Returning children to their communities after the semester with their hair bluntly chopped was a cultural affront intended to assert assimilationist goals (Fortune 116). It elicited a visceral response in Indigenous parents and grandparents for whom long hair was a symbol of status, and braids a source for pride (TRCC, *Survivors Speak* vi, 32, 40). Many expressed feeling long-lasting shame as a result of the humiliation in the cutting of their hair.
[55] Marston, statement made to Opening Sharing Circle, Winnipeg National Event, July 16, 2010.

causes thunder when it claps its wings and lightning bolts from its eyes, whereas the Whale dies with dignity knowing its death feeds a community.[56] Although the thunderbird is particularly prominent in Northwest Coast storytelling (the carver's ancestral legacy), Marston "wanted something that would encompass all of the natives from all across Canada, North America, and even South America"[57] (Kalbfleisch 292). The Thunderbird is such a symbol, with communicative power spanning two continents.[58] From the Pacific Northwest to California and beyond, Indigenous legends refer to the struggle between the Thunderbird and the Whale metaphorically to represent ground shaking (earthquakes) and flooding from the sea (tsunamis) (Finkbeiner). By opting to incorporate elements of the broader colonial impact in an allusion to the environment on the back panel, Marston elevates his work beyond the TRC's scope, which is restricted to residential school survivors.

Contributions placed in the Box

The most common survivor offerings given as Gestures of Reconciliation were handwritten notes, photographs, archival mementos, and newly-made or procured gifts (Kalbfleisch 285). Other contributions include documentary films about Indigenous residential schools, numerous books, and several Indigenous-purposed school curricula or textbooks (293). Artists and artisans donated paintings, beaded moccasins, a hand-crafted flag with a custom design for the Mohawk nation, and a collage made from a shredded 2006 hearing transcript wrapped with sweetgrass and sealed in wax. Survivors contributed mementos from their school experience, like a red brick

[56] In Aboriginal stories the Thunderbird and the Whale are creatures of supernatural size and power. The Thunderbird clasping a Whale in its talons is a frequent motif for the top of totem poles (Canadian Military Police Association).
[57] Marston, statement made to Opening Sharing Circle, Winnipeg National Event, July 16, 2010.
[58] Lenik outlines examples of the Thunderbird motif found in northern West Coast, the western Columbia Plateau, throughout the central Great Plains, around the Great Lakes, in southeastern and maritime Canada, and in northeastern USA. In addition, the Thunderbird motif has been found in Paraguay and Brazil (Métraux). Thunderbird icons have been found on rock surfaces, carved in wood, sewn in fabric, crafted from shells, baked in clay, made of animal hides, engraved in metal, as earthen effigy mounds, and even as facial tattoos, spanning 3000 BCE to 1800 AD (Lenik 181).

from a demolished school, team jerseys, and school year books. The contributions presented to the Commission were carefully chosen by survivors who often had a strong attachment to them. At the Montreal event in 2013, Marcel Petiquay donated the child-sized suitcase that his mother had carefully packed for his departure to Amos Indian Residential School (Figure 6). As he placed it into the Box, Petiquay explained: "This represents the many suitcases packed by parents of the children, with ceremonial clothes, dried meats, beaded moccasins…" (McCue).[59] The suitcase was taken away from him upon his arrival. Twelve years later, it was returned to him empty. The donation of the suitcase symbolizes both the traumatizing impact of the emotional cruelty attached to parental separation and, figuratively, the cultural possessions and material quality of life which he was deprived during his academic incarceration.

In September 2013, at the Pacific National Exhibition in Vancouver, Bev Sellars[60] spoke for only three minutes before placing a copy of her manuscript into the *Box*. In the hope that acting out a narrative performance of her experience would be cathartic and contribute to the working through of her trauma, she tearfully recalled her years between the ages of seven and twelve (Figure 7), without sharing any details of her personal stories with the audience. Although she had written a memoir of her account, she found it too difficult to voice her testimony in public, and despite believing in the healing that comes of sharing experiences, she admits, "I'll probably take some of my stories and memories to my grave" (Sellars, "Truth"). Instead, Sellars spoke about her negative experience in 2008 with the public's reaction following the publication of her memoir. She admits she was wary of the reaction to the TRC among Canadians, the majority of whom did not understand or know what such schools inflicted on their pupils. Despite her misgivings, she explained that she chose to participate in the Commission because of

[59] Petiquay, statement made at TRC National Event, Montreal, April 27, 2013.
[60] Sellars authored a memoir of the experiences across three generations that she, her mother, and her grandmother suffered at St. Joseph's Mission School in Williams Lake, B.C (*They Called Me*).

her understanding as to why the four First Nations of her community[61] have pervasive social problems, namely domestic violence, substance abuse, and suicide. In 1987 when she began her work, she had no concept of “how traumatic events could leave a lasting impression,” taking forms such as ethnostress, lateral violence, postmemory, and trans-generational trauma (“Truth”). What she discovered were the ongoing social conditions that continued to impede Indigenous communities. Her work in 1991 with Roland Chrisjohn, associate professor of psychology at the University of Guelph, concluded that in order to understand the contemporary situation, “all roads led back to the residential schools” (“Truth”). The people of these communities experience ongoing discrimination, oppression, and prejudice from settler institutions, and psychologically destructive experiences at the hands of band members in schools, within families, and among their community (Chrisjohn). Sellars, Chrisjohn, and other contributors in their project were not well received by some Canadians, who challenged them with disbelief and viewed them as ungrateful. “How dare we accuse the churches of these acts? How dare we not be thankful that we received an education from the schools? How dare we complain after all that Canada does for us?” (“Truth”) Sellars was impressed by the attendance at the Commission’s events and shocked by the audience’s diversity and its warm reception to testimonies. Instead of negative comments or hurtful remarks, her experience at the national event in Vancouver was among Canadians willing to listen empathetically, and she has since become hopeful that Canadian society is maturing towards true reconciliation.

Another moment of empathetic reaction from the audience occurred when Leanne Crowchief Sleigh, a member of the Siksika First Nations, deposited moccasins into the *Box* (Figure 8). Members of the audience listened with rapt sympathy and were patient with her as

[61] The four First Nations bands within the Cariboo Tribal Council: Alkalii Lake, Canim Lake, Soda Creek and Williams Lake.

she became inconsolable and was attended by a support worker who came onto the stage. The testimony that preceded her Gesture of Reconciliation was less about being sexually abused at school, the domestic violence of her youth, or her two young siblings who died from neglect, than it was about how she struggled with adult life. "I was faced with alcoholism myself, drug addiction, and teenage pregnancy. I abused my body, I couldn't care for myself because I was raised without respect, without love, without hugs, without ever hearing the words, 'I love you'." [62] The erasure of her Aboriginal identity began with the removal of familiar shoes and clothing to don uncomfortable Western garments, followed by the cutting of her long braids, and the suppression of her language. She explained that she chose the traditional footwear as an example of her experience because they are a symbol with universal appeal in Canadian Indigenous culture, representing not only herself but "all those people who walked the path before us" (Narine, "Siksika Woman Speaks").

In addition to survivors, a few spokespersons were invited to place contributions into the *Box* as advocates of the TRC.[63] Vancouver's Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, John Rustad presented a copy of British Columbia's "Reconciliation Week Proclamation" (Anton). The proclamation announced that the week of September 16 to 22, 2013, would include a series of initiatives at multiple venues throughout the province, starting with the *All Nations Canoe Gathering*. The week culminated with the *Walk for Reconciliation* in Vancouver (Figure 10), which was attended by tens of thousands of Indigenous, Métis, settler, and immigrant Canadians (Reconciliation Canada). Rustad stressed that the importance of the week was not finite in time; the week was intended to celebrate the start of a new impetus for reconciliation.

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[62] Sleigh, statement made to Sharing Circle, Winnipeg National Event, June 2010.
[63] For example, Saskatoon police offered a police hat as a Gesture of Reconciliation, to mark progress made and improvements necessary in the relationship between police and Aboriginal communities (Figure 9).

Commissioner Marie Wilson, herself of settler heritage and spouse of a survivor, donated a chichigun rattle she received from the Tsimshian people. When it had been given to her several years earlier, all the Tsimshian women had stood. As she bequeathed the rattle to the Commission during its closing ceremony, Wilson asked all the women in attendance to stand (Head). In that moment, Wilson recreated a Tsimshian custom among a mixed audience in a secular iteration of the ceremony. She intended the traditional baby rattle to function as a bridge connecting the missing children[64] who did not return from residential schools and her commitment as Commissioner to confronting and correcting the attitude among Canadians that Aboriginal peoples and their culture can (or should) be erased (NCTR 58).

Chief Wilton Littlechild, one of the authors of UNDRIP[65] and a Commissioner for the TRC, placed a basket with the ashes of the burnt tissues that had been used to wipe the tears of participants as they told their stories. Littlechild used the public venue to promote UNDRIP, the UN's declaration that stipulates the minimum international standards of rights governments are expected to grant to their Indigenous citizens. He used his precious minutes on the public platform not to chastise perpetrators or disavow the past, but to encourage the federal government to pass

[64] Over 3,200 First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children died at or around residential schools. Until the 1950s, the death rate in residential schools was up to 4.9 times the general death rate in the country. Parents were not advised of their children's deaths; in some cases, no record of death exists, while in others deaths are namelessly tallied in administrative logs (Fortune 30, 86). The TRC's work established a National Residential School Student Death Register with approx. 4,200 student death records, of which 1,600 were unnamed, a quarter did not record gender, and half did not specify the cause of death (*Honouring the Truth* 90-99). Tuberculosis is listed in nearly 50% of the logs that supply cause of death, however it is possible that, while the disease was rampant, it was also used as a 'catch-all' for death by neglect or physical abuse. For comparison, the next most frequent causes of death were influenzas and pneumonia, each at 9%. The discrepancy with rates at non-residential schools is because illnesses were often undiagnosed, treatment was unaffordable, qualified medical personnel were unavailable, or due to simple neglect.

[65] UNDRIP: *United Nations Declaration on the Rights for Indigenous Peoples*. The declaration states that Indigenous peoples must have free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC) with regard to decision-making that impacts their lives and communities (Fortune 65). When it was adopted on September 13, 2007, 144 members voted in favor while four nations opposed it: Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States of America. Canada officially removed its permanent objection in 2016 but has not since revised its laws to be consistent with UNDRIP.

Bill C-262[66] which requires that Canada develop a national action plan in "consultation and cooperation" with Aboriginal peoples to implement Indigenous rights (Saganash).

The tokens collected by the Commission are now housed by the NCTR at University of Manitoba's National Research Center in Winnipeg, where many are on display. According to Mieke Bal, collecting is an essential human quality that originates in the need to tell stories for which there are neither words nor conventional artistic modes (89). If collecting is an act of storytelling, then, according to Susan Pearce, it is a political one. At best, Bal contends, collections express a utopian impulse, but at its base collecting is a form of fetishism (91). According to James Clifford, in the West collecting has been a strategy for deploying a possessive self, culture, and authenticity (218); as such, collections are a form of subordination, appropriation, and detaching the subject from the objects (Bal 91). Collections are especially effective in cultures that value possessions, as in the capitalist West where everything that can be owned can be commodified. The items assembled by the NCTR are stored and displayed in Winnipeg, but they are intended to be catalysts for the meaningful and potentially transformative sharing of stories rather than a collection of tokens which is inherently politicized by possessive ownership.[67] A static assemblage only serves those with control and access to the objects. Placing the Gestures of Reconciliation in contextualized exhibits capable of touring among citizens is one way of maintaining their communicative legacy. Each item in the assemblage has been imbued with meaning as gestures; it is the ceremonial act of depositing the contributions

[66] Bill C-262 is a private member's bill aimed at implementing the global minimum human rights standards for Indigenous peoples in Canada as set by UNDRIP. The bill passed in the House of Commons, the final stage in Canada's legislative process, on May 30, 2018, but seems to have been indefinitely sidelined and has still not been enacted into law.

[67] The University of Manitoba, in Winnipeg, has partnered with the NCTR since its inception to house the artefacts and artworks collected by the TRC, including records, photographs, and memorabilia. They are tasked with not only safeguarding but also making accessible the cultural history contained in the contributions and testimonies of participants. The items collected in the *Box*, incorporated into the *Blanket*, or sewn into the *Quilt* were not knowingly created for the museum environment the way most curated assemblages are.

into the *Bentwood Box* and the visuality of sharing that act with an audience that made them significant, not their accumulation or display (Milton and Reynaud 527-29). Similarly, the *Witness Blanket,* discussed in the next section, is also a collection of artefacts, this time conceived in a static artistic assemblage with a clear set of objectives: to accept every contribution, incorporate all contributions, exclude no one, and represent every residential school.

Section II: Museum Spaces & the *Witness Blanket*

TRC contributors like Marston, Neman, and Williams created exhibits that were placed in the context of museum spaces, although post-colonial critics have traced the historical evolution and function of museums to show how they reinforce dominant Western perspectives (Preziosi and Farago 109). Museum space has been the subject of post-colonial criticism because, while it broadens the possible inclusion of testimonies to include art, oral recordings, and memorabilia, museum exhibits reflect a reformatted settler portrayal of the perspectives of subjects who relayed their experiences in non-literary formats like art, dance, re-enactment, or storytelling, which were translated and adapted to suit a literate settler public (Fortune 132-33). The *Witness Blanket* is a model for exhibiting Indigenous perspectives or Aboriginal testimony as it incorporates voluntary contributions from survivors and symbolic tokens from every residential school. In order to situate this artwork and the TRC's use of museums, we need to understand the changing Canadian museum landscape because exhibits are being viewed and absorbed by the public in the context of a problematized space.[68]

[68] Post-colonial criticism has changed the museum paradigm; the treatment of Indigenous cultures in 21st century museum spaces is evolving away from its 18th century inception in Western Europe as a product of Enlightenment ideology (Duncan). In the 19th and 20th centuries, museum spaces became increasingly democratic and populist in design and ideology. Reflecting the belief in progress, museums have increasingly been considered places for instruction and social improvement. However, within this evolving framework, settler states retain the tendency to appropriate Indigenous culture for the nation's own legitimizing narrative (Gordon-Walker).

Museum Spaces in the Post-colonial Context

Postcolonial criticism identified major issues in representing Aboriginal culture and history in Canadian museum spaces, and it led to the Canadian Museum Association (CMA) revisiting its guidelines.[69] Dismantling the nationalist legacy of accumulation and display necessitated the formation of a task force in collaboration with the Assembly of First Nations (AFN).[70] Collections are not simply a matter of artefacts; the assemblage itself generates information such as pattern analysis, lab-work results, and any other research related to pan-Indigenous historical trends.[71] If the assemblage is held in municipal or state-funded institutions, like archives, museums, or universities, access to such information is limited. The distance that physically separates the collections from the individuals is only a fraction of the roadblocks Aboriginal peoples face. Aboriginal representatives, educational groups, and other organizations have limited visibility with funding sources, little influence over policy development, marginal participation in locally-implemented affiliated activities, and minimal access to training, volunteer, or employment opportunities (AFN and CMA). Dhamoon argues that residual colonial logistics not only aim to perpetuate the suppression of Indigenous cultures but also enforce settler hegemony (7). The task force recommended the employment of Aboriginal staff and volunteers, a practice that would help educate other personnel on the value of Indigenous

[69] Until the 1990s, the common portrayal of Aboriginal roles in Canadian culture and history was stereotyped and limited to dying, primitive, and inferior customs. For example, Aboriginal exhibits were principally linked to 'pre-history' (Assembly of First Nations [AFN] and CMA 4). Despite a deepening disenchantment with the evolutionary theory, it remains the most prevalent means of categorizing ethnographic material (Coombes 284).

[70] In 1990, when it first met, the Task Force on Museums and First Peoples was presented with three areas of concern (AFN and CMA). First, the lacking or minimal involvement and representation of First Nations history and material culture in museums and curriculums. Second, the limited access Aboriginal people have to attending museums, due to financial means, proximity barriers, and lack of incentive. Third, the concerns of Aboriginal individuals and organizations who seek to repatriate artefacts or human remains.

[71] Collected artefacts objectified the colonial realms they were meant to represent. The imposition of order in the presentation of objects, such as from simplicity to complexity, characterized disciplines like archaeology and ethnography (Duncan 5). The underlying scientific paradigm is the evolutionary model and when placed in this context, the material artefacts of a collection convey a secondary and simplified level of signification to the general public: that the museum's exhibition, and thereby its collector, claims knowledge of 'advanced' theories and perspectives (Miller, "Things Ain't" 15).

perspectives, and could imbue a greater sensitivity to Aboriginal interests. First Nations peoples would benefit from education in museology, while museum staff need training in partnering effectively with Aboriginal representatives. More crucially, the task force revealed that First Peoples express the desire to conserve and manage their own cultural assemblages and facilities.

In the 21st century, as Indigenous representatives take on authoritative roles in museum representation, the framework of the institutions is being reshaped to reflect their need to express relevant contemporary issues in Canadian society. The move away from exhibitionary halls like the World's Fair or evenly-lit 'white box' art gallery models has been redirected by the 'relic room' style of amateur collectors of Aboriginal archaeology, with quilt-like arrangements of objects and framed arrowheads (Berio and Phillips 709). The aesthetic, formal, rational templates of the 20th century remain, privileging sight and the ability to contain the artefacts for surveillance (Bennett 426, 436). From a non-Western perspective, this manner of display is similar to merchandise display in a jewelry store where items are visible but securely guarded. To add injury to the insult of seeing cultural objects reified,[72] since the early 20th century, primitivist collectors ravaged entire patrimonies in the name of salvage anthropology.[73] A century later, now that multiculturalism has replaced assimilation as the dominant ideology in Canada, Indigenous representatives seek to repatriate the numerous objects confiscated under mistaken ethical assumptions or acquired by coercion. The repatriation of historical objects is an

[72] Coined in 1923, the term *reification* emerged from Marxist ideology to describe the process that transforms human relationships or experiences into transactions, enticements, and commerce (Lukács). Analogous to objectification and commodification, reification is the process of reducing the value of a memorable event or site of wonder into something tangible like a souvenir or photograph. The term is encapsulated in the expression 'seen one, seen them all.' Iroquois *haidu* (face-masks) are an example of the reification of Indigenous cultural artefacts. *Haidu* are intricately carved examples of the finest Iroquois artistry and craftmanship, and reproductions were sold in museum gift shops, but Iroquois faith keepers and political leaders strenuously objected to their display in museum spaces (Berio and Phillips 712-13). These calls were addressed and the *haidu* in museum custody have been moved from public exhibits to restricted storage spaces.

[73] The excesses of collectors like George Heye (founder of the Museum of the American Indian) in their zeal to obtain 'salvaged' artefacts included blackmail, hostage-taking, imprisonment, even murder (Berio and Phillips 710).

especially important step in the Indigenous context, as a tool to rearticulate Aboriginal paradigms after suffering interruptions of historical memory, paralysis in the generational transfer of political autonomy and sacred authority, and the disruption of organic communal growth (Berio and Phillips 715).

Museums are key sites for transforming Indigenous-settler relations and creating empathy for Indigenous trauma and concerns, with the ultimate potential to reshape national and cultural identities (Yashar). Institutions that manage collections of cultural artefacts can contribute to public education, and therein lies the importance of museology. Museums engage with living Aboriginal culture by shaping general awareness of the significant role First Nations cultures hold in Canada's composition (AFN and CMA 4). Both for Indigenous and settler citizens, cultural objects in museum collections are sources of learning, pride for those represented, and self-esteem for managing bodies. The three examples presented in this paper show how ethnographic objects that comprise a museum's collection engage immediate concerns, not just history.

One of the innovations in museum design that makes 21st century museum spaces more amenable to cultural expositions is increasingly interactive concepts (Lavrence 629-31). By encouraging visitor participation, museums are adapting towards principles of collaboration and consultation,[74] the two components established in the guidelines set out by the Task Force (AFN and CMA). The framework in which Marston, Neman, and Williams created their exhibits, commissioned as they were by the TRC and themselves being Indigenous artists, makes them collaborative representatives of the Aboriginal subject matter. Their inclusion of multiple

[74] According to the Canadian Archaeological Association guidelines, museums, archaeologists, and galleries must apply a two-way process of collaboration and consultation when working with Indigenous subjects, in order to incorporate the perspectives and voices of Indigenous peoples as partners and curators in the museum framework (Fortune 135).

testimonies is a consultation effort that creates place for collective empathy and the working through of the legacy of trauma.

The Witness Blanket

The *Witness Blanket* is not a garment made of fabric, as the name suggests, but a monumental wooden tapestry that is a testament to the breadth of impact the residential-school system had on its victims and survivors (Figure 11). The *Blanket* is an exhibition the length of a wall, and its purpose is to stand as a lasting witness to the residential school system.[75] It is a patterned collection of nearly 900 items donated from 77 communities, souvenir artefacts and tokens reclaimed from the physical schools, churches, government buildings, and other colonial structures that represented Aboriginal cultural oppression. Its objective is to commemorate those who suffered trauma, while bearing witness to particular traumatic episodes.

The artist behind this truly monumental project is Carey (Hayalthkin'geme) Newman, a Kwagiulth from the Kwakwaka'wakw Nation and Coast Salish of the Stó:lō Nation, but he is also part descendant of English, Irish and Scottish settlers. He lives in Vancouver and works in the Tsawout Reserve on the Saanich Peninsula. In 2008 Newman led a team of thousands as the Master Carver of the Cowichan 2008 Spirit Pole, a project which incorporated touring 55 Indigenous communities in British Columbia. In 2010 he was selected by the Vancouver Organizing Committee for the Winter Olympics to create a large installation, called "Dancing Wind," which would feature in the games. Newman works with cedar and adheres to traditional customs, conscious of the significance of wood grain as a key component of his art. In his words, "I'm careful to adhere to traditional rules and values. Finding ways to innovate without disregarding history is important to me" (Tammemagi). Newman dedicated a year to the *Witness*

[75] 11.96 m long, 3.33 m high and framed in cedar, the *Witness Blanket* houses 889 items, labeled "Pieces of History," in an intricate pattern that, when assembled, weighs an impressive 1.8+ tonnes (Newman and Hudson 17).

*Blanke*t before beginning to work on carving the cedar frame and managing the reception of hundreds of memorabilia, during which he toured communities across Canada to collect artefacts from abandoned, decommissioned, demolished, and remote sites linked with the residential-school era.

Newman takes limited credit for his role in bringing together the enormous project that became the *Witness Blanket*, explaining, "I knew that I didn't want to sell it like a normal transaction; I didn't want to set a price and negotiate that and deal with copyright issues" (Lederman).[76] This artwork is unique in Canada insofar as it is a contractual testament without credit going to the artist who created it or the Canadian Museum for Human Rights (CMHR), in Winnipeg, that houses it.[77] In an unprecedented legal agreement, the exhibit is under collective stewardship (Fitzhenry); legal rights have been vested into the artwork to speak for itself as a living entity that honours the stories of Indigenous survivors (R. Johnson).[78] A federal Crown Corporation[79] ratified the exhibit as the first non-written document and non-oral testament that constitutes a legally binding contract with the Canadian government (Young and Newman), which is in keeping with Indigenous oral and gift-giving customs rather than colonial administrative models (Smith).[80] The agreement vests legal rights with the artwork itself, not its creator nor the organization that commissioned it, effectively empowering a medium without text, audio, or video, to communicate testimony.

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[76] Newman, statement made in an interview for the *Globe and Mail* after oral ceremony ratifying the transfer of custody for the Blanket from Newman to a partner of the NCTR.

[77] The *Blanket* was set to go on a second Canadian tour (after a period undergoing conservation) from June 2019 to December 2022. See http://witnessblanket.ca/touring-information/ for detailed dates and locations.

[78] The University of Victoria's faculty of law has since incorporated the *Witness Blanket* agreement into its curriculum as a model of new and hopeful possibilities for wielding Canadian law in creative and expansive forms for the future (Threlfall).

[79] The legal agreement was signed by Heather Bidzinski on behalf of the CMHR.

[80] Newman explained in an interview in the days leading up to the ratification of the agreement, "It's a Crown corporation really following through on the idea of being Indigenous-led, of reconciliation" (Bresge).

The idea of a collection of tokens from residential schools across Canada dawned on Newman in his living room, and was part of his submission to the TRC's call for proposals of commemoration projects, but this concept was not yet a blanket. At this stage, he conceived of it only as an assemblage. He vowed to himself to accept contributions from everyone who chose to donate a token, to incorporate all contributions, to exclude no one,[81] and to include something from every residential school that had existed in both English and French Canada.[82] Newman and his team were surprised to discover that not only survivors but also their children, grandchildren, friends, neighbors, therapists, and many others who were directly or indirectly affected by transgenerational trauma wanted to contribute (Newman and Hudson 11-17). Newman widened the parameters of his original project to include 889 tokens of history, including braids of hair (Figure 12),[83] piano keys (Figure 14),[84] and merit badges (Figure 16).[85] The artist admits he struggled with some pieces, such as two '50s dolls his cousin Phyllis

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[81] Unlike the TRC, Newman did not exclude those who identified as survivors and were excluded from the IRSSA for a technicality such as the institution they attended, or their Métis and non-Indigenous status.

[82] Newman's original objective was to collect objects from every residential school—and only residential schools. The need to include and incorporate elements from day schools, government buildings, and churches came to him later, directly from interacting with survivors (Newman and Hudson 16-17). Still later on, it became increasingly important to him to represent the survivors' own cultural elements alongside and equal to representations of colonial life and residential school, so he collected and incorporated pieces from big houses, sweat lodges, tipis, and Native Friendship Centres.

[83] Newman's sisters Marion and Ellen decided to honour their father Victor, a survivor of Sechelt Indian Reservation School, by cutting their hair and donating the braids, symbols of strength customarily only cut in mourning, to the *Blanket* (Newman and Hudson 134-39). Preparation for the ceremonial cutting began a year prior, and the ceremony was a powerful and emotional moment (Figure 13).

[84] As a piano-player himself, Newman felt sympathetic to musically-inclined children who used music as an escape (Newman and Hudson 74). Few instruments were available to residential school pupils to express their suppressed anger, loneliness, and sadness (Figure 15). Five piano keys salvaged from the chapel room of the residential school in Lesock, SK, are incorporated into the *Blanket* as reminders of those who sought release for muted voices in music.

[85] Merit badges was a system implemented in Canada in 1942. Students were given red or green badges as rewards for successfully completing homogenizing menial tasks meant to habituate them to a lifestyle assimilated to Western customs (Newman and Hudson 55-57). Examples for girls included cooking, gardening, housekeeping, knitting, sewing, and weaving; for boys, carpentry, dairy work, leatherwork, metalwork, and poultry keeping. Children were forced to master skills unfamiliar to their culture, for example girls were taught to sew tea towels which were sold at the market, but not moccasins for home use. Often meeting objectives for earning a badge meant calculating profits and reducing costs for the institution; for example, for the third year poultry badge, students had to feed the flock, gather eggs, pluck a hen, handle broody hens, grade eggs, disinfect poultry houses, grow and store feed, and rear the turkeys, geese, and ducks, enabling them to do profit-analysis.

contributed,[86] a pair of skates from the '70s,[87] a stone from the recommissioned site of Grollier Hall arena,[88] and a large charcoal drawing by George Littlechild,[89] which were particularly difficult to incorporate. Having experience carving 36-feet tall totem poles, Newman knew how to think big, large enough to incorporate contributions on a national scale. He toyed with sculptures, masks, and totem poles as options for his assemblage.

Once the thought of a blanket occurred to Newman, he did not know how he might translate that into a sculpture, but he knew that it had to be a blanket. "The blanket is a universal symbol of protection," he says. "For many of us, they help identify who we are and where we're

[86] Phyllis Olney, Newman's cousin, is one among many children and grandchildren of survivors who wanted to contribute a token to the *Blanket*. The two '50s dolls she donated were cold and impersonal reminders of her absent mother and an unhappy childhood (Figure 17). Newman found that the pale blue, plastic period pieces did not match his artwork, but it was important to Phyllis that they should be on the *Blanket*, and it was important to Newman to remain true to his commitment to accept contributions from all those who desired to do so (Newman and Hudson 104-05). As Newman's collection grew, he began to draw links between Phyllis' experience and those of others, like the authors of the autobiography *A Stranger at Home*, whose parents were distant seemingly loveless strangers.

[87] The pair of skates mounted in the *Blanket* are from a Muscowequan residential school, and date back to the 1970s (Figure 18). Although cumbersome to incorporate in artwork, their inclusion was important for reflecting how hockey and skiing were exceptional in residential school life as opportunities for unregimented fun (Newman and Hudson 72-73). Daily school life was dominated by a grueling schedule of church, chores, and school: rise at 5:00 a.m. until 9:00 p.m. (Fortune 28).

[88] Grollier Hall in Inuvik was a particularly abusive residential school, one frequently mentioned in the testimonies of survivors. Pupils were trained at additional and unusual tasks, like grooming the ice rink and maintaining the arena, and mandatory skiing every night, even in 40˚C below (Newman and Hudson 76, 116). Instead of being demolished like most buildings associated with the era of residential schools, or being commemorated as a memorial, the building was repurposed into a greenhouse and the land has been reclaimed by the Inuvik community (Figure 19) as a place of sustenance and a communal gathering space (118).

[89] Littlechild is a Cree artist from Alberta whose mother and siblings are survivors, while two of his uncles died at residential schools. His charcoal drawing *The Priest and his Prey* portrays a priest in his white collar, with a young Indigenous youth lying under a checked blanket in front of him (Figure 20). The priest lays a possessive long-fingered hand on the boy whose eyes are tightly shut, which suggests sexual or other abuse. The only colour in the drawing, juxtaposed to the greys and black of coal, is the blue of the priest's eyes. Newman had collected the door to the infirmary from the demolition site of St. Michael's residential school because it was the predatory site of a now-infamous serial predator, and he decided to imprint Littlechild's large canvas on the back of the door, symbolic of what happened behind the closed doors at St. Michael's and elsewhere. Newman met the artist long after having received his contribution and since solved its incorporation into the *Blanket*. Newman was shocked when Littlechild made a confession of a personal nature relating to the artwork: "Carey, that Survivor is your uncle" (Newman and Hudson 131). Newman's uncle Edwin had been a pupil at St. Michael's and testified for the Commission, which had inspired Littlechild. The coincidence of Newman's placement of the image on an object he unknowingly salvaged from the site of the crime is uncanny.

from—we wear them in ceremony and give them as gifts" (Tammemagi).[90] In Kwakwaka'wakw culture, Newman's father's heritage, blankets are adorned with tribal icons (like totems and family crests) and worn as emblems of band identity in ceremonies (Newman and Etmanski 236). In Salish culture, the culture of Newman's paternal grandmother, blankets are gifts of honour, they are given to uplift and protect the recipients; the community wraps someone in a blanket to acknowledge their achievement as a sign of gratitude and honour (236). In many First Nations and Inuit traditions, babies are wrapped in blankets after birth, and the bodies of loved ones are wrapped in shawls after death (Kalbfleisch 294). Everywhere, if someone has been through trauma, experiences a heartbreak, or feels insecurity, it is a universal human reflex to wrap them in a blanket as a gesture of protection, security, and warmth.

Barbara Atleo, of the Nuu-chah-nulth, noted the importance of having blankets available at TRC events with which to wrap individuals after giving testimony (Kalbfleisch 294).[91] In traditional medicine, the gesture of being wrapped in a blanket is believed to be a component of healing and apology (Linklater 85; Hodgson 375). For those familiar with the crafting of knitted and crocheted prayer shawls, the link between blankets and healing is apparent. The intention of a knitted shawl is to offer comfort during illness, periods of duress, or grief (TRC Canada, *Survivors Speak* 17). From an Aboriginal perspective, prayer shawls, also sometimes called 'comfort shawls,' date to the Anglican Church's custom of donating handmade articles of clothing that were put aside for those who had need of them (Kalbfleisch 294; Campbell 28). Blankets are universal, and it seemed to Newman that they universally signify protection after a traumatic event (Newman and Hudson 7). Because of the universally relatable symbolism of the

[90] There is cruel irony in the historical use of blanket gift-giving by European colonizers who deliberately gifted blankets as carriers of smallpox and tuberculosis to Aboriginal communities to accelerate the decimation of their population (Waldman 108).
[91] Telephone conversation with Ruth d'Hollander, member of Parish Council, St. Peter's and St. Paul's Anglican Parish, Esquimalt, B.C., May 22, 2012.

blanket in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, he deemed it a particularly conducive allegory for an empathetic space of healing from and relating to trauma.

Garnet Angeconeb's story beautifully illustrates the importance of the blanket in Indigenous cultures. A survivor of Pelican Indian Residential School, Angeconeb was alcoholic at twenty, when he had a life-threatening experience. A brief drunken exchange in the bar that night reminded him of his tormentor, Leonard Hands,[92] the Senior Boys Dormitory Supervisor hired by the Anglican church. Angeconeb tried being dismissive of the mention, replying "He didn't have the last name Hands for nothing. Why don't you forget about that useless piece of shit?" (302) However, mentioning his abuser triggered traumatic acting out in Angeconeb and, distraught, he was compelled to leave the bar. Drunk, he drove his snowmobile alone into the night during a blizzard. His sled became bogged down and he was stranded on a frozen icy bay. He walked to keep himself warm but became hopelessly lost in the whiteout. He lay down and covered himself in snow for shelter, and as he awaited the blizzard's passing, he had a vision. A woman who resembled his mother came to him and wrapped him in a blanket of rabbit skins, and spoke to him in Anishinaabe, "Here, I have come to cover you with this blanket so you don't get cold out here. This blanket will keep you warm" (303). Angeconeb believes she was the spirit of his mother and that her blanketing gesture saved his life. He was rescued by an OPP airplane the next day. He had such severe frostbite that he was unable to walk for three months and was nearly amputated, but he survived a night in a blizzard at 40° C below, and he believes that he owes his survival to feeling the presence of the woman, and that her rabbit quilt represented hope. This episode illustrates how blankets connote resilience and recovery.

[92] Hands' name is in the public record because Angeconeb pressed charges against him. By 1993 Hands had nineteen additional allegations in the case, including public allegations that he was abusing an altar boy at his Anglican parish in Kingston, Ontario. The proceedings revealed that two of Angeconeb's brothers, who had not initially disclosed it or participated in the lawsuit, had been assaulted by the same perpetrator. Hands was found guilty on all counts in 1996 and sentenced to four years in jail (Angeconeb and Akiwenzie-Damm 307).

Newman chose to title the blanket he would design the *Witness Blanket* because participation was a key component of the TRC's mandate. When interviewed at a TRC event in 2009, a priest answered, "I'm here to bear witness" (Newman and Etmanski 236). The statement echoed with Newman's wife, Elaine, who called him shortly after hearing the priest's words to quote them to her husband. It was in that conversation that Newman realized that the project he was designing was about bearing witness. Newman invites us all to bear witness, to be witnesses: "The people giving us the pieces are witnesses and, at some level, we are all—or we should all be—witnesses" (Newman and Hudson 8).

Reconciliation is not only a matter of words; apologizing, acknowledging wrongs committed, expressions of regret, and even forgiveness, fall short of commemoration, and here lies the symbolic value of objects given. In Aboriginal custom, potlaches are opportunities for reconciliation over wrongs committed (Hodgson 375; Newman and Hudson 9). In this tradition, apologies for injurious actions are accompanied by a non-tobacco gift,[93] often a blanket or household item, as a token of sincerity (Fortune 101). The exchange of words and parcels is witnessed by clan members, and often family members of the injurious party will contribute additional gifts as well. The visibility of the gesture is intended as respect, and the gifts are not intended as equitable compensation; rather, the generosity is a conciliatory gesture. At the Montreal event in 2013, Justice Murray Sinclair presented each of the honorary witnesses with a gift: a small rock from Lake Superior painted by an Anishinaabe artist.[94] Outlining their purpose and function, Sinclair explained that rocks are like grandfathers, they are ancient and contain

[93] Tobacco is one of the most frequently gifted items (Angeconeb and Akiwenzie-Damm 301); it is given to elders, healers, traditional teachers, or other Indigenous knowledge keepers, as a token of appreciation for time and experience shared, and in gratitude for knowledge, expertise, and guidance, however less in the context of apology (Linklater 78,83,234).

[94] To incorporate pan-Indigenous elements in his gift-giving, Sinclair included a tobacco pouch, tea, and a pin, along with the rocks, to acknowledge the varied First Nations gift-exchange customs (Kalbfleisch 301).

knowledge and wisdom.[95] It is believed that stories of everything they have witnessed throughout history are stored within rocks, like memories. The day they were gifted to the honorary recipients, the stones witnessed the testimonies of Indigenous survivors. The tokens were meant to help the witnesses on their healing path and as reminders of the truths witnessed that day, symbols that could be carried and maybe one day bequeathed along with the stories they carry (Kalbfleisch 299).

Architecture of the Blanket and the Door at its Core

Across the country, almost all residential schools were built with the same architecture, the same floor plan, the same red brick façade, usually with a central spire above the door. This type of structure was unfamiliar for Indigenous children used to Big Houses, log houses, longhouses, sweat lodges, tipis, or igloos—none of which come in shades of red. The floorplan of the schools was an 'H,' with the boys' and the girls' dormitories on either axis, connected by the communal building in the middle section (Figure 17). Right in the middle of the building, the main door and its central spire (usually capped with a cross) were the first things newcomers to the school would see upon their arrival, looming tall and austere ahead of guests (Figure 18). These buildings were modeled after 'industrial schools' designed in America, and were not intended to feel home-like or comfortable (Rice and Snyder 52; Fortune 14-15, 18-19; Miller, *The State, the Church, and IRS* 110-11; TRC Canada, *Honouring the Truth* 57-59). Newman wanted to invert that hug-shaped image of a red-brick façade with its central door, and represent that image of the settler structure stripped from its context and repurposed to empower Indigenous culture rather than colonial oppression. Harmonized in natural shades of wood, the blanket mimics the 'H' shape of the boarding school buildings, but softened by curvature, like open arms extended in a

[95] Justice Murray Sinclair in a public address at TRC event, Montreal, April 24, 2013.

welcoming hug, enveloping like a blanket; everything 'homey' that industrial schools deliberately lacked (Figure 19).

Newman had a vision of collecting door handles, doorknobs, hinges, and other pieces related to entryways, lintels, and thresholds. For him doors were symbolic of opportunities that schools should open for pupils, and the metaphoric closures and impediments that residential schools constituted for the development and health of its pupils.[96] He had recurring visions of small hands leaving unhappy fingerprints as they stepped from one space into another, towards safety or away from it. As he visited the sites of former schools, he asked himself, "When those kids turned that doorknob, what did they think?" (Newman and Hudson 33) As the door from St. Michael's stood in his office waiting to be incorporated into the whole, Newman developed the notion that it should never be shut, because tragic and terrible things happen behind closed doors.[97] In black paint, just at the height of a child, there are two prints on the back of the door trying to keep it open from the inside. Newman incorporated his four-year-old daughter's handprints into the exhibit as representative of the next generation. Wherever it is displayed, the door is accompanied by a doorstop to keep it open, so that there is nowhere for secrets to hide.

When the project was nearly complete, and ready to submit, Newman was still missing pieces from six schools that had existed, but for which his team could find no physical evidence.[98] The *Blanket* was already complete when the NCTR employed researchers who

[96] Children were locked in at night to prevent the frequent attempts at flight, but many tied bedsheets together and climbed out through windows, or attempted escape by other means (Fortune 31; TRC Canada, *Survivors Speak* 93, 135; TRC Canada, *Honouring the Truth* 104).

[97] The expression 'behind closed doors' is both figurative and literal in the context of Canadian residential schools. "In contrast to human rights violations that occur through visible violence [war and acts of terror] in which cameras are at the ready, the harms that took place in and through residential schools were mostly invisible" (Niezen 38).

[98] The demolition of former residential school institutions is only partly to blame for the loss of information documenting most establishments (Newman and Hudson 111). In many cases, the documents were inexistent to begin with, destroyed in school fires, left unsorted in storage spaces where the quality degraded to illegibility, or were deleted by administrative decision (TRC Canada, *Honouring the Truth* 91).

supplied Newman with any and all documentation they found attesting the existence of the six missing schools(Newman and Hudson 94). Newman incorporated them in a slideshow projected on an old school desk, in an adjacent but disconnected exhibit that is behind the *Blanket*, through its central door. There was one school for which only a single piece of evidence was found; no enrollment forms, no government bills, no parent letters, it is only mentioned in a single document: a waybill invoice for coal to heat the school one winter (92). It was important that the *Witness Blanket* should be a lasting testimony to the truth of an episode that many would like to forget. If we are to walk the path of reconciliation, we must commemorate those who were lost and never forget the transgressions committed, and acknowledge the ongoing policies of discrimination that enabled them.

One of the unanticipated consequences of the predominantly "truth-telling" purpose of the TRC's testimonials is that it emphasizes corroborating the premise, namely the genocidal mistreatment and mismanagement of Indigenous Canadians, and leaves room for doubt and contestation over institutional involvement and governmental responsibility (Llewellyn 191-92; ICTJ, "Rethinking Truth Commissions" 30-31).[99] The TRC's emphasis on persuading the public of the abuses of the state and church, and of the call for national shame, leaves room for the casual observer to overlook the need for redress. The parameters of the IRSSA, precursor to the TRC, are tangled in the legal requirement to distinguish eligible claimants, which undermines the unambiguously universal legacy of discrimination shared by transgenerational survivors and witnesses. Litigation was limited by parameters that arbitrarily excluded institutions or individuals, whereas its conclusion acknowledged the uniformity of the significant systemic

[99] The Canadian TRC's concern for persuasion (of the validity of a historical atrocity that has been called into question for decades) is unusual but not unprecedented, and stems from the government's need to redress the depiction of historical reality in the dominant settler narrative (Niezen 77-79, 146-47, 112). This quality in Canada's commission is partially due to the greater expanse of time elapsed between the personal experience of harm and its narration in the Canadian circumstance (4, 150).

harm done to children. The limitations and exclusions built into the IRSSA created the appearance of illegitimate claims or unfounded allegations which are not born out by the findings of the proceedings, and which were carried over into the TRC's scope. The abundant evidence permanently incorporated into the *Witness Blanket* leaves no room for contesting or questioning the human rights abuses of residential schools, or their legacy of harm. A model in cooperation and consultation with Aboriginal representatives, Newman's exhibit not only speaks for itself but also corrects the erasure of historical conflict and ongoing discrimination, expressing pan-Indigenous culture and artistry for an authoritative public space. The *Witness Blanket*, *Bentwood Box*, and, as the following section will demonstrate, the *Living Healing Quilt Project* are all examples of collaborative partnerships with Aboriginal communities in civic institutions whose mandate is cultural, historical, and political.

Section III: Interpellation & the *Living Healing Quilt*

Interpellation

Museum spaces are educational institutions that employ quasi-religious[100] settings to incite interpellation in visitors. The term 'interpellate' originates from the Marxist principle that a ruling class imposes ideas on the general populace in an appealing manner so as to instill voluntary consent, appearing to be both accurate and intrinsic (Ashcroft et al. 107). Theoretically, interpellation works the way parental modeling does, so that the repetition of ideas is received as true and remains unquestioned (156). Interpellation is pervasive and inevitable,[101]

[100] Despite being secular spaces governed by the scientific paradigm, Western museum culture encourages the notion of visiting museums as a quasi-religious aesthetic encounter with art and architecture. Museum architects, professionals, and critics employ the verbal and visual language of the sacred when describing exhibits and spaces yet avoid direct or overt expressions of religious devotion (Buggeln 33).

[101] While avoiding interpellation altogether is impossible, there is a response that counters its effectiveness. Acknowledging its occurrence and reciprocating in kind undermines its effect, as satire can for a political speech or position (94).

and not altogether nefarious; sharing ethical and moral codes like ‘seatbelts save lives’ help society function smoothly, and their continued reinforcement can be beneficial. Broadly speaking, the term is especially applicable in the contexts of gender studies and for social studies of subjugated and marginalized groups.

Just as art museums are shaped by cultural, social, and political determinants, so too are historical museums, civilization museums, and the exhibits suited to them (Duncan 7-20). Museums are capable of and responsible for expressing settler-Canadian as well as Indigenous identities, of incorporating Indigenous voices and perspectives in the general portrayal of Canadian nationhood, and the inverse, preserving the diversity of collective traditions in the portrayal of what it means to be Canadian and how Canadians express their multiple ethnic heritages (Gordon-Walker). The absence of technological sophistication among native communities when early settlers encountered them has persistently been interpreted as a civilizational deficiency and interpellated as such (Ashcroft et al. 80). Rupert Ross argues that on the contrary, their lack of preoccupation with technological advancement and the sciences allowed Aboriginal social philosophy to develop sophisticated cultural, psychological, and spiritual constructs that would be beneficial for settler society to adopt (158). Therefore, to Indigenous contributors, claiming museum space for the presentation of their own voices is about confronting and correcting misconceived myths and stereotypes in an effort to subvert the portrayal being interpellated in these key spaces.[102] Aboriginal women in particular can benefit from museum floorspace to express publicly their need for safety and calls for restorative justice. This section will discuss the *Living Healing Quilt Project* as one that contributes to remedying

[102] “Centuries of myths about Aboriginal racial inferiority have laid the foundation for negative stereotypes of Aboriginal people that are used to justify domination today” (Rice and Snyder 54). Examples include the ‘incompetent Indian’ and ‘alcoholic Indian’ stereotypes.

the imposition of heteronormative gender roles on Indigenous communities, and to repair ruptured familial and communal support networks.[103]

Until recently, museum-goers would have interpellated Canada's foundational myth as the benevolent peacemaker, which is untrue from an Indigenous perspective, and toxic to multiethnic social cohesion (Regan 83-110).[104] According to Johnson, "This myth sanitizes Canadian history by contrasting Canada's supposedly just and orderly settlement with the violence of the American frontier, and it continues to shape settler identity and relations with Indigenous peoples" (178). There are some who feel that the ravages and pain of colonization were somehow deserved, and there remain those among settler Canadians who cling to the myth of colonizer superiority and Indigenous inferiority (Mussell 332).[105] The myth of 'civilized' settler and 'savage' native needs to be redressed—the truth of the diversity and richness of Aboriginal cultures needs to be emphasized along with and above the atrocities of colonizer ideology (Ross 158). Acknowledging that colonial harms continue to live in present-day injustice is a prerequisite for adapting the dominant national narrative to instill an understanding of the past that lauds diversity in its portrayal of what it means to be Canadian. The justice system in Canada is far from equitable towards the Aboriginal constituency, to such an extent that there is

[103] Since 1857, the *Gradual Civilization Act* has promoted the absorption of Indigenous men, women, and children into settler lifestyles. The *Act* created rules for enfranchisement so that Aboriginal men could voluntarily gain citizenship and renounce their Indian status. It also legislated the default loss of status for Indigenous women who married non-Indigenous men. Similarly, babies and children adopted from Aboriginal parents into settler families lost their Indian status. After Confederation, the 1869 *Act for the General Enfranchisement of Indians* maintained such policies. By 1884, ceremonial gatherings, potlaches, costumes, and dancing were prohibited.

[104] For example, myths circulate in Canada that First Nation membership grants free housing, free money, and tax exemptions from a seemingly benevolent and generous government, which is "damaging and completely inaccurate" (Fortune 143). Another pervasive myth claims that chiefs and band council members "are corrupt and steal money or otherwise profit, while their communities suffer," based on a few over-propagated stories that are filibustered by corporate mainstream non-Indigenous media (149).

[105] "Racism has at its core an absence of belief in the worth and capabilities of those who are its target" (Mussell 332). For First Peoples, the repeated betrayal of treaties has left lasting mistrust of non-Indigenous officials. For settler Canadians, the impression of Aboriginal dependency on governmental welfare programs left the legacy of the 'lazy Indian' stereotype, when in actuality administrative policies actively prevented Indigenous self-sufficiency and the sustainability of Aboriginal lifestyles. Unemployment benefits and welfare programs have created dependency and social disintegration on reserves where employment opportunities are limited (McKay 109).

a widespread "lack of trust in the justice system" (National Inquiry, *MMIWG 1b* 234, 253).[106] Such is the police-perpetuated discrimination towards Indigenous women and girls that they are subject to "retribution and bullying when reporting" crimes against them or in their communities, if their testimony is heard at all (Buller 30).[107] In 2015, Call to Action 41 of Canada's Action Plan[108] affirmed that Indigenous peoples and communities themselves must participate in reforming judicial policies (TRC Canada, *Calls to Action* 4). Indigenous representatives have been suggesting the implementation of restorative justice[109] as a solution since the mid 2000s (Fortune 51, 55-56). It is up to provincial, federal, and territorial jurisdictions in Canada to function more cohesively to benefit Indigenous communities by entering into collaborative partnerships.

Women's Issues, MMIWG, and LGBTQ2S

In the ancestral tradition of Indigenous peoples, women held an important political and sacred role.[110] Colonial patriarchal social patterns disrupted and undermined the role of women

[106] Substance users avoid dialing 9-1-1 "in the event of an overdose and/or the administration of Naloxone because of a fear of police involvement" (National Inquiry, *MMIWG 1a* 441); in the North, people living in isolated areas have a "real fear of filing a complaint because there are only [approx.] two police officers [and everyone in] the community is very identifiable, and if you suffer any kind of abuse at the hands of police officers […] it'll be very clear who you are to the community" (*MMIWG 1a* 482).

[107] "Women who sell sex are reluctant to report violence for fear of mistreatment and punishment by law enforcement officials" (National Inquiry, *MMIWG 1a* 590); "women do not report sexual harassment and assault because of fear of reprisals [losing their job, being ostracized by employers in their industry, or jeopardizing their reputation for future employment prospects]" (*MMIWG 1a* 591); mothers fear "contacting the police in relation to violence… [then] child protection organizations may become involved" (*MMIWG 1a* 632); "women involved in the sex trade are reluctant to report to the police for fear of being ridiculed, enduring racist or sexist commentary and harassment, and of possible arrest" (*MMIWG 1a* 633).

[108] Produced in consultation with Indigenous representatives.

[109] Rather than treating crime as an act against an individual or an entity, *restorative justice* posits that crime causes damages but that the legal system should not punish these but see opportunities in need of healing. This concept, popularized in the 1990s, would require complex and sweeping change to the legal systems. The goal is to identify a healing methodology for victims and offenders that reduces the likelihood of recidivism, while mitigating the impact of the crime to the community. This model is more akin to traditional justice systems prior to settler models.

[110] Until the imposition of 'Indian status' laws and regulations in the mid-1850s, ancestral heritage, what might be considered patrimony in European terms, was not associated with the male line of descent, and transmitted by matrilineal descent (Jacobs and Williams 122).

within their communities.[111] In the 21st century, Aboriginal women continue to suffer the repercussions of this social disruption in the shape of addiction issues, domestic violence, gang involvement, human trafficking, organized crime, poverty, sex work, and lack of access to trauma support (Buller 38). By 2016, there were 4,232 Aboriginal women and girls listed by the *Walk 4 Justice* initiative as missing or murdered in Canada since 1980 (Tasker).[112] Reported cases of violence against girls and women are three and a half times the norm for non-Indigenous Canadian constituents, incidences of death resulting from physical abuse occur five times more frequently, homicide rates are seven times higher, and criminal incarceration is ten times that of non-Indigenous Canadians (Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs 9, 48; Buller 8-9; National Inquiry, *MMIWG 1b*).[113] This violence extends to bisexual, gay, lesbian, queer, transgendered, and Two-Spirit[114] people. These high rates have been known to Canadians for over six decades, but despite the media attention of a few infamous cases in the '50s and occasional news coverage since, the epidemic received little public response (Fortune 42). The MMIWG report published in 2019 stressed that violence directed against Inuit, Métis, and First Nations urban and rural

[111] After the *Indian Act*, an Indian woman who married a non-status man lost rights as an 'Indian'; women lost their treaty annuities if they divorced; widows were denied inheriting their late husband's property except in specific circumstances, like the arbitrary determination that she was "of good moral character," i.e. a Christian with Victorian moral standards; and the children of unmarried women were deemed illegitimate and were not entitled to Indian status unless the chief and council explicitly accepted them, a decision subject to the Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, who could deny their band membership (Stevenson 71).

[112] The statistics on missing and murdered Aboriginal women collected by the *Sisters in Spirit* initiative revealed notable demographic patterns: many of the victims had been forced into the child welfare system and opted out; a further trend showed that many had a juvenile or criminal record, and had spent time in a federal or provincial jail; most were victims of poverty on reserves or in cities and were not able to support themselves or their families (Native Women's Association of Canada 18-30).

[113] Indigenous women constitute only 4% of the Canadian population but 24% of female homicides, and although the Indigenous population constitutes 4% of the overall constituency, they represent 23% of incarcerated inmates.

[114] Ancestral Indigenous tradition was aware of non-binary genders and sexualities that are today defined as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgendered and queer (the modern-day acronym 'LGBTQ') and had a term to describe them which is neither diminutive nor pejorative: 'Two-Spirit.' The term refers to a person possessing both a male and female spirit. "An umbrella term used to describe the fluidity of First Nations/Native American gender identity and sexuality with respect to traditional tribal roles" (Fortune 159-61).

women, girls, and LGBTQ2S[115] people across Canada is a direct result of colonization. Women's issues, Indigenous masculinities, and Two-Spirit identities are not defined along a binary framework as understood in European heteronormative concepts of gender. Traditional Indigenous cultures were flexible about gender roles and had fluidity in ways that allowed individuals to transition within their lifetimes. This was a social environment within which each could participate in the economy of the community according to their preference, not as best suits a social norm. Rigid gender roles rooted in heteronormative patriarchy were imposed on Aboriginal communities, and churches and schools were key sites for the enforcement of dress code, segregated seating, and gendered tasks (Fortune 160). Non-binary non-patriarchal notions of identity were strictly supplanted by structures aimed at destabilizing Indigenous leadership by imposing patriarchal patrimony and male representative leadership systems.[116] The result of the accelerated erasure of marginalized identities and imposition of conformity to unfamiliar social norms was aggressive masculinity and the promotion of gendered violence (Morgensen 43). Within generations, the outcome was toxic Indigenous masculinities.

The dismantling of Indigenous womanhood was restrictive; women and girls were denied political and social standing and patrimonial rights by heteropatriarchal legislature.[117] Their opportunities to participate in the community's economy and labour were drastically diminished,

[115] LGBTQ2S (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Two-Spirit): Indigenous Canadians are active and vocal advocates of the 21st century LGBTQ movement, and while embracing use of the modern terminology, they also ask that in the Canadian context the abbreviation '2S' be affixed to the acronym to represent them more inclusively.

[116] Imposing patrilineage elevates the power and authority of men over women (Stevenson 68). The objective was to reduce the number of status Indians toward whom the federal government had financial obligations. Over generations, additional measures to this effect were implemented: status Indians could voluntarily sell their status under enfranchisement provisions; volunteering to fight in WWI or WWII meant automatic enfranchisement; and enrolling in university, becoming a doctor or lawyer, and joining the clergy required involuntary enfranchisement (Jacobs and Williams 123). The voluntary enfranchisement provisions were in effect until 1985, when the implementation of Bill C-31 amended the *Indian Act* to abolish the concept of enfranchisement.

[117] Aboriginal women were dispossessed from their ancestral territories, dissociated from their traditional roles within the community, deprived from learning homesteading customs, barred from participation in politics or band decisions, and in many cases abused physically by family members, besides being subjected to residential schooling (Jacobs and Williams 121).

and their spheres of influence were reduced to the household (Fortune 146). From status to inheritance, Aboriginal women's identity became and remains entangled in legislative policies.[118] One of the colonial tactics employed to accomplish this shift was the vilification of Aboriginal women.[119] The negative portrayals created lasting social barriers, which is part of why they are especially targeted for abuse (Anderson 111).[120] The discriminatory stereotypes continue to bar them from being heard, believed, helped, or supported by law enforcement.

The Living Healing Quilt Project

The *Living Healing Quilt Project* (*LHQP*) is an exhibition of deliberate and self-conscious Indigenous interpellation led by Alice Olsen Williams, the head quilter who conceived of the project. In order to understand the relevance and meaning of this project, it is important to understand the historical background of how Indigenous girls were treated at residential schools. Sewing and quilting were skills nuns taught their female pupils at schools, but unlike the chores and catechisms, girls tended to enjoy these tasks.[121] Over generations, quilting was interpellated

[118] The 1869 *Act for the Gradual Enfranchisement of Indians* had drastic and lasting negative impacts for Aboriginal women. The 1876 *Indian Act* intensified the statutory female subjugation by passing regulations which discriminated against women in an effort to undermine their customary roles and traditional authority. As Winona Stevenson writes, "Almost every aspect of women's lives was directly impacted by the *Indian Act*" (66).

[119] "The overrepresentation of Aboriginal women in Canada as victims of violence must be understood in the context of a colonial strategy that sought to dehumanize Aboriginal women" (Native Women's Association of Canada 2). The colonial agenda involved a deliberate and overt strategy to undermine the influence and respect Aboriginal women held within their communities by replacing the existing economic, political, and social systems with ones rooted in patriarchy and European understandings of gender roles and social standing (3). The value of Aboriginal women has been and remains diminished in the esteem of their communities and of judicial officials due to persistent patriarchal values that, deliberately or otherwise, continue to influence and regulate social norms and gender relations in Canada.

[120] Aboriginal women experience violence by both Aboriginal and non-Indigenous offenders (Native Women's Association of Canada 30) but Aboriginal women and girls are more likely to be killed by a stranger than non-Indigenous women (29). There are alarming trends revealing that they are vulnerable within their communities, and vulnerable to law enforcement or judicial discrimination (Buller 38). More than half of women and girls died in a residential dwelling and only 17% of the known culprits were strangers, though most cases occur in urban areas, partly because of limited response to the needs of families in rural and on-reserve communities (Native Women's Association of Canada 26-27). The majority of cases involve young women and girls, under the age of 31, who are mothers (23-24). Nearly half of Indigenous murder cases in Canada remain unsolved (27).

[121] In the evenings after dinner and prayers, girls would spend the hours between 6:00 and 9:00 pm doing homework or needlework in a slightly less structured setting than daily chores (Fortune 28).

and became a popular hobby among women in Indigenous communities. The craft of quilting was passed down from mother to daughter since before the schools' closures, and quilting evolved into a vehicle that carries a counter-narrative to the indoctrination of white middle-class values that were instilled in the pupils at residential schools.[122] For women, the outcome of being separated from their families, communities, and languages at a young age resulted in multigenerational trauma manifesting in loss of family bonding, life tools, parenting skills, self-confidence, and respect for others (Jacobs and Williams 126). Because of these compounded consequences, a barrier developed separating the generations that went to residential schools from communicating with their mothers and grandmothers, thereby interrupting the transmission of homesteading skills and spiritual teachings (127). Whether or not they attended schools, settler society disrupted girls' disposition to parent and become respected elders, to nurture, be caregivers, or to transmit knowledge, all while undermining their role as band decision-makers. The investiture of the *LHQP* with shared narratives of trauma while simultaneously claiming the authority of museum space for the cultural expression of Aboriginal women empowers them to re-claim something from their colonial legacy in an interpellated manner of which they can be proud.

Quilting is a feminine craft redolent of domestic space. The association of home with warmth and comfort, and of the blanket with home, family, and domesticity, makes the quilt, as a predominantly feminine activity for centuries worldwide, an important symbol for Aboriginal women to appropriate as a step towards empowerment in the form of cultural appropriation

[122] By graduation, Aboriginal girls had been indoctrinated for entry into the labour market as domestic workers in middle-class white houses, which coincided with the emergence of the bourgeois woman in the 19th century and ideals for the nuclear family of the 20th century (Emberley 34). Middle-class white women proved models of imperialism and capitalism, incentivized by patriarchal hegemony to devote themselves to reproduction and child-rearing (5-7). By their attire and domestic disposition, white middle-class women modeled and instilled a 'cult of womanhood' interpellated by Aboriginal girls and women (Paxton 175-77).

(Elsley 74).[123] Residential schools fractured domestic life for pupils and ruptured their connections with home necessary for moral support and personal growth. The residence where children lived was reconfigured from a small community to an industrial manufactured setting in which the patronizing heteronormative state model was imposed and violently enforced (Robertson 87-88).[124] The menial tasks children were taught at school reinforced settler gender norms and standards (97). Girls were taught skills useful in a European household setting, like cooking, cleaning, doing laundry, and sewing.[125] Boys learned more physical labour like subsistence farming and animal husbandry. The dual purpose of this 'industrial' type of curriculum was to assimilate the girls and train the boys toward participating in the capitalist labour market, while simultaneously generating income for the federally funded schools in an attempt to offset the cost of their own education (Fortune 28).[126] Although most of the material they produced was impractical for their personal use when they returned to live in their communities, quilting and beading skills were transferable.[127]

[123] Elsley advocates a feminist project of using quilting as a metaphor for emancipatory politics. Elaine Hedges expresses this by alluding to the power of quilting as a feminist alternative to the authority of the pen: "needles became pens and quilts their eminently expressive texts" (11).

[124] Like residential schools, boarding schools were tightly regulated places that limited personal character or marks of individuality. Universally, their educational life limited and restricted their private sphere, in dorm rooms, classrooms, or corridors they were visible to peers and subject to the scrutiny of educators (O' Hagan, 772). They were dressed uniformly and adhered to rigorous scheduling with hours set aside for particular subjects and designated spaces for performing requisite tasks, living under the permanent threat of check-ins subject to punishment for lack of conformity to aspects like hygiene or neatness set by school standards.

[125] Although significantly better treated and more pampered, girls in European boarding schools also griped and resented the increasingly menial curriculum set by 19th century gender ideology that sought to promote appropriate feminine accomplishments like getting married and having children, or a career of service as a household servant (O' Hagan, 773).

[126] By the 1960s, as the government took over the management of residential schools from churches, the operating assumption was that Indigenous pupils were incapable of understanding a rigorous academic curriculum, and instead instruction remained structured around religious doctrine and manual labour skills (Fortune 33). Besides not teaching the prevailing curriculum of public schools, residential schools did not provide skills needed to succeed in the Canadian labour force (Morse 236).

[127] For example, if they had been raised with their mothers and grandmothers, the young girls would have learned to make moccasins, instead of the handkerchiefs they manufactured at residential schools to offset the cost of their own education.

Residential schools set out to regulate Aboriginal children's bodies and transform them into agricultural and domestic labourers (Robertson 103). Sewing, knitting, quilting, and beading proved the most appealing of the menial tasks girls learned at school, as being skillful offered certain advantages. For young girls, participating in a craft fair gave them the chance to show off their skills in beadwork and embroidery, but far more importantly for their personal development, it gave them a chance to represent themselves in public. As an attractive bonus, sales of their work could earn them enough money for a bus ticket home for the holidays (Niezen 126). After their departure from school, as adults, sewing, beading and embroidery became important skills that allowed women to generate income, whereas many other aspects of what they were taught were unsustainable when they returned to their communities. Over decades, the development of a new artisanal class of commodity producers evolved into a market for souvenirs (Phillips 198). Despite reification, the commodification of women's craftsmanship in beadwork on moccasins, sewing ceremonial garments, or quilting blankets, proved a means of preserving the visibility of Aboriginal custom which evolved into a cultural subsistence strategy (Robertson 101).

Unlike the first two exhibits examined in this paper, the *LHQP* was not sponsored by the TRC until after its completion. Williams is an artist from Curve Lake First Nation in Ontario who felt inspired by Harper's apology to reach out to her family and friends with an idea and ask for their participation (Robertson 89). Cloth and textile are common allegories for the nation,[128] and Williams appropriated the imagery and applied it to the experience of Indigenous Canadians.

[128] Textile art has a long global history of use as a symbolic representation for a group, particularly by women, often in collaborative efforts (Lewis and Gerus-Darbison). Examples include African Kente cloths, the storyquilts of the agrarian Hmong in southeast Asia, *arpilleras* or *cuadros* in South America, and Antebellum slave quilts in the United States (Gillespie). The use of textile art for expressions of Aboriginal identity and story is increasingly popular, with several recent North American examples, such as the *Native American AIDS Quilts*, and the Canadian *Sisters in Spirit Traveling Quilt* and *Living Healing Quilt Project*. In the modern context, collaborative cloth art has transcended historical Indigenous applicability and is used for more universal appeal, as is the case of *the Names Project AIDS Memorial Quilt* (Carocci).

Prime Minister Pierre-Elliott Trudeau first applied the metaphor of a tapestry to Canada's multiethnic composition in the 1990s (Trudeau 177). The fabric, he explained, consists of knots, and from close-up only threads and colours are visible, but from afar the beauty of the woven harmony becomes apparent (177). However, the pattern of the tapestry can only be appreciated when the knotted underside is unseen. A quilter herself, Williams was inspired to make a collaborative tapestry of the residential school experience interpellating Trudeau's metaphor of a Canadian tapestry in an effort to reach the same broad Canadian audience but with a subversive message empowering Aboriginal survivors. Beyond its testimonial value, the *LHQP* is thus clearly an attempt to rethink Canadian self-perception.

When she initiated her project in 2008, her call for quilted blocks reflecting personal stories of school experiences or transgenerational trauma spread across the internet without promotion or any association with the Commission. Williams began receiving blocks from contributors she never contacted and did not personally know (Robertson 89). The women who quilted individual blocks are survivors from across Canada. Determining to accept and incorporate the unanticipated contributions, Williams created thematic narratives piecing them together and produced a set of three quilts, titled *Child Prisoners*, *Crimes Against Humanity*, and *Schools of Shame*. Each 13" x 13" square represents a memory, a story, and a person with a unique perspective on a horrible experience. Most submissions came with accompanying messages of varying lengths conveying stories of hope, isolation, loss, and recovery. Williams felt that their meaning did not need to be conveyed in words, but that the quilted images sufficed, and it was important to her that the stories should be told with pictures. She opted not to include the textual material in her artwork to let the assemblages narrate the impacts of trauma.

As discussed in the opening section, the illusion of creating a linear narrative helps make sense of the fractured time that trauma elicits. Piecing together elements of one's incomprehensible and overwhelming experience into a coherent image, for example in a quilted tableau, grants agency and a sense of control over the traumatic events. When one's personal story fits into a tapestry of similar experiences, the sense of belonging that comes of having a shared experience offers reassurance, shelter, and healing. Quilting projects are increasingly popular modes of advocacy in Canada, to the extent that universities are beginning to advocate their efficacy for raising awareness of feminist topics.[129] In the manner that P. E. Trudeau sought to evoke nationalist pride by alluding to a societal tapestry of multicultural identities, so does Williams' project foster a sentiment of cohesion among women, girls, and LGBTQ2S Indigenous survivors.

Williams explains that the background fabric of each quilt has symbolic significance in her culture (Robertson 90).[130] The mass-produced strawberry print shared by all three quilts symbolizes traditional medicine, because strawberries in the spring represent mother earth's life-giving properties of renewal. The turtles in the background fabric of *Schools of Shame* signify Turtle Island, the ancestral term for North America (Figure 20).[131] The crops in the *Crimes Against Humanity* background represent traditional resources and the wealth of heritage lost to colonization (Figure 21). The star-printed fabric for the borders in the *Child Prisoners* quilt evokes those who passed on to the spirit world, the more than 3,200 children who died attending or attempting to flee residential schools (TRC Canada, *Honouring the Truth* 92), while the background print of teepees represents life in the prairies before the arrival of settlers (Figure

[129] Western University visual arts professor Kirsty Robertson's analysis "Threads of Hope: *The Living Healing Quilt Project*" won the Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English's Priestley Prize (ACCUTE) for the best essay published in English Studies in Canada that year (Winders).
[130] Williams, statement made in interview with Kirsty Robertson, November 2009.
[131] Cindy Pelletier chose to depict Turtle Island for her quilted block. Her brief accompanying message, cited here in full, explains her reason: "My square represents Turtle Island because residential schools not only affected the survivors, but all of Turtle Island, and the healing and reconciliation has to encompass survivors and families and Turtle Island."

22). Employing such designs and motifs is a conscious strategy to make intelligible Indigenous values associated with particular ethnic themes that create a shared sense of community for those who acknowledge their meanings (Carocci 78). These quilts condense a variety of messages which can be interpreted by viewers as individual opportunities for working through trauma. Unlike what Trudeau's analogy of a tapestry portrays, the *LHQP* does not depict a tolerant multicultural nation; the *LHQP* tells the traumatic and turbulent shared heritage of Turtle Islanders.

Scenes and images depicted in the quilted blocks range from commemorations of family members to personal experiences of abuse, chores, isolation, and prayers. Unlike most, Marion McGregor, of Whitefish River First Nation, chose to depict her favorite moment at residential school: a relatively fun chore when "talking and playing tag in a quiet manner were allowed." McGregor's block depicts a little girl moving backwards across a hardwood floor. McGregor recalls washing, waxing, and polishing floors weekly on Saturdays, which was a team effort. Girls in pairs sharing a pail between them would wash the floors on their hands and knees before dust rags were tied to their socked feet to serve as polishers. The choice of subject matter is a remarkable statement of resilience; such is her history, and she chooses to dwell on a positive aspect of the fact that the highlight of her education was a bearable chore. The closing lines of her message add,

> Some of the work ethics that I acquired upon leaving the residential school were responsibility, following directions, working, and playing as a team, punctuality, good work habits and staying on task. I was able to practice these values in my adult years which supported me to become self-sufficient in my endeavours. (McGregor)

Reflecting on her own experience as an asset shows remarkable ability to overcome terrible abuse and mistreatment.

Shirley Ida Pheasant, who attended St. Joseph's Residential School, shares McGregor's belief that people are adaptable and resilient. Her block depicts a scene from her experience with

school life. Instead of focussing on the times she was sick, lonely, or when she or one of her friends were scolded or received a strapping for speaking their language, she remembers a bag of jellybeans. On her departure in September each year her father would give her $2, which she cherished and spent sparingly on "comfort food" (Pheasant). Jellybeans were the cheapest, and she would stretch her money to make it last until April. Pheasant recalls three girls from her school, "Mary Ann, Mary Elizabeth and Louise from Gchi-minising" with whom she shared her treasured treat after especially miserable moments. As an adult, she chose to depict jellybeans on her quilt because, for her, they still represent emotional support, friendship, and kindness.

Accompanying her block depicting a five-petaled flower made of overlapping hearts with a female figure at its center, Claudia Irons, of the Curve Lake First Nation, sent a message of love that nevertheless alluded to the heritage of pain in which she shares.[132] In the 1920s, when residential school attendance became mandatory, parents had faith in the institutions and limited reason to mistrust the teachers or instruction received. By the 1960s, thanks to public support for the residential school program and a veil of silence surrounding the human rights abuses associated with them, the implementation of discriminatory child welfare systems enabled the government to remove Aboriginal children from their families in what became infamously known as the 'Sixties Scoop' (Jacobs and Williams 128-29). 27,000 children were taken from reserves and urban centers where they lived and placed in the custody of agencies, leaving mothers with no recourse to reclaim their children.[133] Christina Buckshot, Anishinabe (Algonquin) from Kitigan Zibi Anishinabeg, only recalls ever having heard members of her

[132] The brief message is worth citing in full: "My quilt piece is dedicated to all the mothers of residential school children. I shudder in horror to think of how these poor women had their children taken from them. How you must have suffered. My wish is to give all of you a big hug. Also, for you to know that people really care about all of you and your children. It does not matter how old we are, we are all still somebody's child. Love, Claudia."

[133] Neglect, in the form of domestic violence, inadequate housing, poverty, or substance abuse, is the most frequent cause cited for the removal of Indigenous children from their parents' custody (Vowel 185). Thus, the transgenerational trauma that was inflicted upon the Indigenous communities with colonization was further reinforced with the forcible removal of the children from their families.

family mention two things about that era: her Uncle Marcel once said, "I was sent there to go to get an education, and all I remember doing is working in the kitchen," and her Aunt Evelyn recalled being told when she was six years old "that if she did not go, her mother would be thrown in jail."[134] She included a picture of her father's family that was taken on the day his older brothers and sister (Marcel, Jerry, and Evelyn) were leaving for Residential School in Spanish, Ontario.[135] Hers is a message of commemoration; she signs, "For all the sadness, hardships, and burdens you carried all of your life, Christina" (Buckshot).

Still today, for young First Nations, Inuit and Métis women, the future can look bleak and the current social structure is not only unsympathetic but unforgiving. In her block Kimberly Morrisseau, of Métis heritage, looks back on her choices and the life she made for herself. She was seventeen years old when she became pregnant. To begin with, being an Aboriginal female limited her employment opportunities. Being an Aboriginal teenage single mother condemned her to a life of systemic dependency with narrow options. Members of her community commented that "her life was over now" once they saw her pregnancy (Morrisseau). Few believed an Aboriginal teenage mother could finish her education. Instead it was assumed she would lose incentive to contribute to society and become dependent on the welfare system. The outcome of these circumstances would result in little-to-no income during her adult life. Minimal retirement benefits and no health insurance would mean limited access to medical services or extended care as a senior. Instead, as an aging Métis-Aboriginal single mother, Morrisseau went to study at the University of Manitoba, where she felt further marginalized, and she circulated among itinerant city dwellers rather than classmates. In 2008 Harper's apology did not leave her

[134] Buckshot writes, "I don't really know that much about this time in my Dad's family. I have noticed, though, that nobody in the photo is smiling."
[135] Her own father was spared following their path because the family moved to Syracuse, New York, when he was eight. Buckshot muses, "Perhaps my grandmother felt she had to leave to protect my Dad from going to these schools?"

indifferent, "It was during the formal apology that I was able to realize that I connected with 'these people' [homeless individuals] because I also existed on the edge of society" (Morrisseau). The heart on her quilted block represents this self-awareness that developed as she advanced her education, which she calls her 'inner truth.'[136] Looking back, she views that moment of hearing the apology as the chrysalis for a change that occurred within her. The butterfly on her block represents her changed self once she discovered that the way she viewed herself as an Aboriginal woman was limiting what she could achieve. Going forward, embracing her uniqueness empowered her, enabling her to take charge of her life, complete her degree, and become a contributing member of her community.

Non-Indigenous viewers of these tableaus can be motivated by such scenes to understand why public engagement with the discourse and practice of disclosure and reconciliation is so desperately needed. The professionally-lit display of quilts dramatically staged within the authoritative context of museums legitimizes the veracity that is already evident in the mutually-reinforcing narratives of the quilted assemblages. In their public setting, the quilts are not only cathartic for the creators whose tableau of their experiences can then be pieced together into the larger puzzle of the communal story, they also undermine the traumatic historical usurpation of the protective warmth associated with blankets by illness and suffering, redeeming the textiles by employing them in the process of recovery (Carocci 81). If the settler public can relate to this cultural appropriation and sympathise with its use for the assertion and display of uncomfortable truths, then the quilts become symbols of conciliation and new relationships, in stark contrast to the past use of blankets to kill or of needlework to assimilate Indigenous peoples.

[136] "This inner truth existed up until the moment of my recognizing it while listening to the apology. I felt like for the first time, my existence was acknowledged but I think that this was felt on a grander scheme as I think that I felt that, for the first time we as Aboriginal Peoples of Canada were acknowledged as human beings and vital members of Canada."

The *LHQP* resists and subverts the narrative around colonization and gender roles by seizing a pedagogical opportunity to present a decolonizing discourse that challenges the frequent motifs found in Euro-Canadian public spaces and unsettles the authority of museums over framing the Aboriginal story (K. Johnson 189). Viewing the exhibition works discursively; transformational learning occurs from the cycle of not knowing, working through discomfort, to ethical listening without preconceptions (Regan 205).[137] Cross-cultural communication issues arise from fundamentally differing worldviews, but if there is a power imbalance between the groups to be reconciled and pervasive societal prejudice persists, the impetus for a drastically changed interdependent society stalls (Morse 249). Achieving greater gender equity and equal treatment for First Nations communities and settler Canadians alike will contribute to the well-being of the whole society.

Conclusion

Reconciliation means recognizing and responding to hurt and need. The TRC has tasked Canadians with coming to terms with five centuries of collective truth; but reconciliation is not about knowing the truth, it is about *doing* truth (MacDonald 343).[138] Acknowledging the hurt means recognizing the need to act, to overcome, and to reverse the generations of discrimination and exploitation. The shock and shame Canadians feel at decades of residential school policies needs to extend well before and beyond the Commission's scope, to enfranchisement and Indian status policies. Since the arrival of Europeans, the relationship between the Indigenous peoples native to the land and the descendants of colonial settlers has been marred by abuse of human

[137] As a relationship develops between the parties represented, they become increasingly equal in worth from the perspective of the participant, regardless of knowledge level, spiritual beliefs, or political authority (Mussell 335). Opportunities for truth-telling and exchanging stories about personal experiences help us to relate to others and perceive the value of their humanity. Demonstrating willingness to discover their cultural uniqueness contributes to the restoration of broken bonds of trust (336).
[138] Ignorance and inactivity are antithesis to reconciliation; partnership and mutuality are required.

rights, attempted genocide, broken promises, broken treaties, civilian massacres, colonialism, displacement and relocations, introduction of new diseases, residential schools, theft of land and resources, and war. Given that a good relationship has never flourished, Canada needs conciliation before implementing reconciliation (Amagoalik). Exploring the challenges to reconciliation and the impediments to recovery from colonization-trauma reveals how the current circumstance is ill-prepared to foster reconciliation (Mussell 323). So long as violations against Indigenous peoples' territory, land, and natural resource rights are belittled and dismissed by the public or ignored by the government, many Indigenous individuals will remain disinclined to believe or trust the non-Indigenous Canadian commitment to reconciliation.

This study proposes that to bridge the cultural divide which separates Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians, the audience should be educated on how to receive and interpret in an empathetic manner portrayals of the Indigenous experience that do not conform to Western literary or therapeutic models, and that the exhibits created by the TRC provide a starting point for grooming the Canadian audience towards reconciliation. The aim of this work is to contribute to Canadian preparedness and willingness to participate in the reconciliation process by bearing witness to the traumatic narratives of our shared heritage, in an effort to prevent the continued transmission of trauma.

We have examined the issues caused for Aboriginal constituents when truth commissions rely on oral testimony transcribed into written statements or reports, which is not well suited to their truth-telling customs (ICTJ, "Guidelines"). The performance of testifying orally before witnesses, whether for celebration or in commemoration, conveys breadth of meaning and depth of sincerity that are lost in transcription. This essay has stressed the need for Canadian administrative bodies to devise alternative standards of evidence in collaboration with

Indigenous educators who employ innovative forms to transmit truth-telling. In sum, considering the key perspectives that scholars have advanced regarding truth commissions and museum spaces shows that Indigenous principles of witnessing are crucial to the implementation of reconciliation measures. The creators of the TRC exhibits and the survivors who contributed their testimonies shared the objective of forming a sympathetic space where Indigenous narratives can be expressed in non-linear and non-colonial frameworks. The three primary sources I selected are examples of the Canadian Commission's attempts to involve Indigenous peoples at all stages of the truth process, in a way that respects Indigenous peoples' representative customs and gives attention to the specific needs of Indigenous survivors and their descendants.

By studying colonization-trauma theory, the role of an empathetic audience in recovery from trauma, and the testimonial of Indigenous survivors and their descendants who express the need for recourse to non-literary forms of storytelling to portray their subjective experiences, I have argued that the Gestures of Reconciliation placed into the *Bentwood Box*, the Pieces of History donated to the *Witness Blanket*, and the personal tableaus sewn into the *LHQP*, are significative tokens, not mere collectibles.[139] They have particular pedagogical value for settler Canadians. These objects can curate and narrate incontrovertible truths about Canadian history to a public with little knowledge of the crimes, much less of the newly-initiated transition period towards reconciliation (Milton and Reynaud 527-29). Canadians who view state funding of reserves as sponsorship or legal settlements like the IRSSA as charity are denying how Indigenous peoples are a substantive and critical part of the substance of who we became as a nation. The project of implementing UNDRIP, addressing the 94 Calls to Action, and abolishing

[139] It was important to contributors that these should have a post-TRC life not closeted in archives. Indigenous archivists and curators understand the significance of the objects beyond their materiality (Milton and Reynaud 526).

of the *Indian Act*,[140] is not a philanthropic enterprise but the overdue fulfillment of human rights. By stimulating discomfort, disconnection, and disruption to the viewers' operant ideology, these narrative tokens initiate ideological shift, instigate dialogue, and possibly heal relationships.

The way in which Canada has told the story of its inception, its presumptive generous role and relative nonviolence, redacts the atrocities committed against Indigenous populations and omits insidious racist ideologies, like eliminating the Indian heritage in children at a young age or imposing assimilation via adult enfranchisement, that underly still-existing legislative policies. Moving forward, the way in which we collectively conceive of our story should not depict settler Canadians as extending their customs and privileges onto Indigenous peoples in a way that benefits them; it must demonstrate the reciprocity in the heritage we collectively share. Educational curriculums and museums are key mediums for retelling the Canadian story to show how Indigenous communities and settlers are inextricably intertwined in the patchwork fabric that became the quilt of Canada.

21st century museums are going through a process of contestation, negotiation, and reinvention as Canada attempts to decolonize public pedagogy (K. Johnson 190). The message from Indigenous exhibits is clear: resist assimilation, colonization, and the destruction of Turtle Island (Fortune 39).[141] All Canadians could benefit from interpellating this message and sharing it for resistance carries the promise of change. Canadians would benefit from learning and internalizing the principles of *Gete-Anishinaabeg*, a social movement which invites us to participate in transforming Canadian settler society into *Oshkimaadiziig* ('the New People'),

[140] J. P. Restoule discusses how the *Indian Act* harms the identity of the Aboriginal people it represents. It has imposed regulations on personal mobility, restricted language use to English and French, and has actively suppressed cultural activities and celebrations (106). 'Indian' remains a legal term in the Federal Statutes of Canada, although it has widely fallen out of favour.

[141] Indigenous people resist and rebuff industries and policies that discriminate against them or threaten their livelihood, or the environment. Examples include the 1990 Oka crisis in Quebec, the 1995 Ipperwash Crisis of in Ontario, the Idle No More movement founded in 2012 in Saskatchewan, and the ongoing Keystone Pipeline protests in Alberta.

forward thinking Indigenous and settler Canadians imbued with values of peace and righteousness, and indignation at injustice (Benton-Banai 90).[142]

While there is a psychological benefit to truth-telling, there is a risk of devastating demoralization. For many survivors, testifying to the Commission was a soothing balm to long-suppressed emotions and left them "feeling good" afterwards (Reynaud 373-74). Post-TRC interviews conducted three months after the Commission's conclusion revealed that the moral uplift participants felt had not lasted (373-74). By 2016, after the Commissions' completion, 33% of Canadians still had not heard of residential schools (Environics Institute 29), and 58% were not aware that there had been a Canadian TRC from 2009 to 2015 (32). The sentiments survivors most commonly expressed as resurging were lifelong feelings of anger and frustration. Many expressed disillusionment and disappointment at the Commission and described it with terms like "expensive band aid," even "bullshit" (Reynaud 376). In such cases, the result of the TRC's work was to reinforce the long-standing underlying mistrust of government-led initiatives.[143] If the TRC failed to overturn common stereotypes and public discrimination relating to Canada's Indigenous constituent, it could weaken the will of survivors to participate in the social reform necessary for Canadians to recover individually and collectively from colonizer trauma.[144]

Without formal recognition from the national and international political spheres and concomitant reversal of the *Indian Acts* and a full accommodation of Indigenous rights and cultural privileges in Canada, the Aboriginal population continues to lack the empathetic

[142] Canadians must "overcome distrust and hostility, make things compatible, and become agreeable" (Amagoalik 93).
[143] Bradford Morse concludes, "The scars from gross injustices likely run far too deep to hope that achieving complete reconciliation between all the First Peoples and all the rest of Canadian society is possible within our lifetime" (253).
[144] The widespread disrespect and intolerance evidenced by stereotypical presumptions need to transform into familiarity and friendship (MacDonald 346).

audience it needs to retell its story. So long as they are marginal to the dominant social discourse, their voice is muted and they cannot reclaim the much-needed agency over their communal narrative, which is needed to resolve the disruptive effects of trauma. Indigenous communities continue to suffer pervasive trauma twice: because of lateral violence and because of the lack of acknowledgement or redress by their oppressors, among whom (or rather at whose margins) they cohabit. In this sense, unlike the descendants of the survivors from the Holocaust or the Armenian Genocide, Canadian Aboriginal communities have not transitioned into post-generational trauma, and despite the cessation of the colonial agenda, new generations are being re-traumatized by ethnostress, lateral violence and by the transgenerational trauma of their family members and neighbors (Linklater 53).

My effort has been to acknowledge our past history of shameful treatment towards Indigenous peoples and the racist legacy Canadians share, to disavow a culture of denial, and reflect Indigenous realities in the academic record. Much remains unaddressed, such as how to improve the socio-economic status of Indigenous people, their access to health and education, or the inadequate housing and water crises in Aboriginal communities.[145] Survivors hold faith in reconciliation in balance with their anger and frustration, and like many of them, I believe that Canada can be better, that it could in actuality become *Oshkimaadiziig*. The NCTR will continue to share the messages encapsulated in the exhibits created by TRC contributors in an effort to create trust between Canadian individuals and groups who harbour stereotypes for each other, promote collaboration between communities with varied interests, and redress institutional and professional practices that are discriminatory.

[145] Multiple UN declarations in 2018 and 2019 denouncing Canada's inadequate housing (UN Special Rapporteur 4), lack of access to clean water on reserves (8), and human rights violation against Indigenous women and girls (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights, para. 68; Human Rights Committee, secs.7-8), reveal that the 2009-2015 TRC did not mark a transition to a more just, equitable, and human-rights compliant nation.

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Appendix

Figure 1 - Bentwood box at first TRC National Event in Winnipeg on June 21, 2010 (credit Serge Gouin, Rideau Hall)

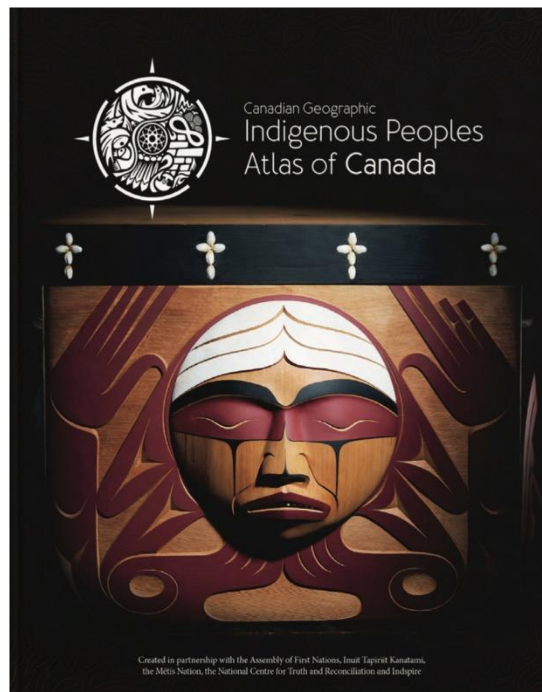

Figure 2 - Bentwood box - cover of Indigenous Peoples Atlas of Canada (credit National Geographic)

Figure 3 - Bentwood Box by Luke Marston, front panel (credit Fred Cattroll, courtesy of the University of Manitoba)

Figure 4 - Bentwood Box by Luke Marston, left panel (credit Adrian Wyld, The Canadian Press)

Figure 5 - Bentwood Box by Luke Marston, right panel (credit Eagle Feather News)

Figure 6 - Marcel Petiquay donated his child-sized suitcase (credit CBC News)

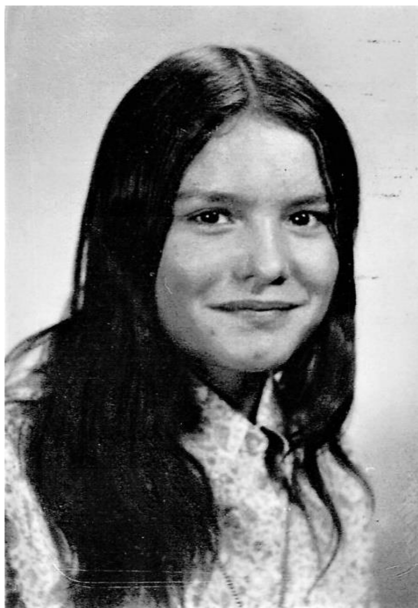

Figure 7 - Bev Sellars at age 13, a year after she left St. Joseph's Mission School (credit Bev Sellars)

Figure 8 - Moccasins that were donated by Leanne Crowchief Sleigh (credit Bev Sellars)

Figure 9 - Saskatoon police offered a police hat to the Bentwood Box (credit CBC News)

Figure 10 - Walk for Reconciliation, Sept. 23, 2013 (credit reconciliationcanada.ca)

Figure 11 - The Witness Blanket (credit witnessblanket.ca)

Figure 12 - Braids of hair from Marion and Ellen Newman around Pieces of Apple Tree from the St. Mary's Mission old Site

Figure 13 - Marion and Ellen Newman ceremonial braid cutting by Elder Shirley Alphonse and their mother Edith (Newman and Hudson 135-36)

Figure 14 - Piano keys from an old chapel organ, left of a yellow mush hole bowl surrounded by a silver platter used by school staff, marble flooring, a foundation chunk, the 'Soiled Linen' sign from St. Mary's, a brass doorknob, and a brick from the boys residence (credit witnessblanket.ca)

Figure 15 - Merit badges for cooking, knitting, sewing and cleaning, between an original and a revised United Church crest that was present on the signs of every United Church-run school (credit witnessblanket.ca)

Figure 16 - Girls at a residential school on the Blood Reserve carol singing (Newman and Hudson 74)

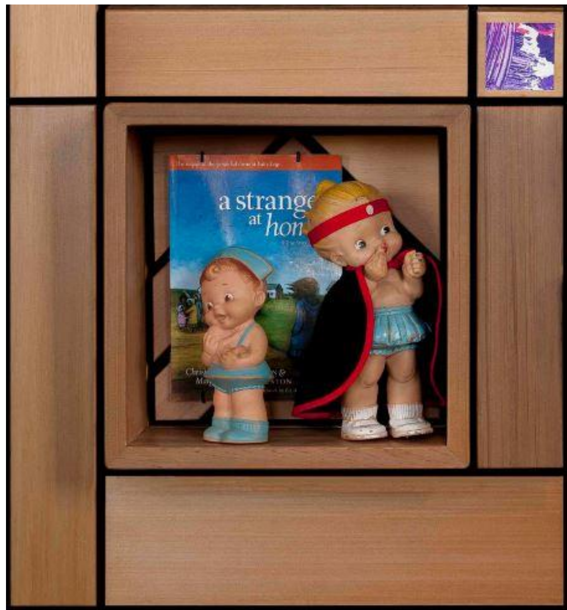

Figure 17 - Two plastic dolls circa 1950's contributed by Phyllis Olney, in front of book *A Stranger at Home* by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton (credit witnessblanket.ca)

Figure 18 - Hockey skates from the 1970s

Figure 19 - Inuvik Community Greenhouse, formerly Grollier Hall arena (credit Inuvik Community Greenhouse Society)

Figure 20 - *The Priest and his Prey* charcoal drawing by George Littlechild on infirmary door recovered from demolition site of St. Michael's residential school, with child-height handprints in black, below, at toddler height, as if pushing it open (credit Aspengrove School)

Figure 21 - Brantford Mohawk Institute, Calgary Sarcee Indian Residential School, Edmonton Industrial School, Sault Ste. Marie Shingwauk Indian Residential School, Alert Bay St. Michael's Indian Residential School

Figure 22 - Entrance to St. Michael's Industrial school (credit seawolfadventures.ca)

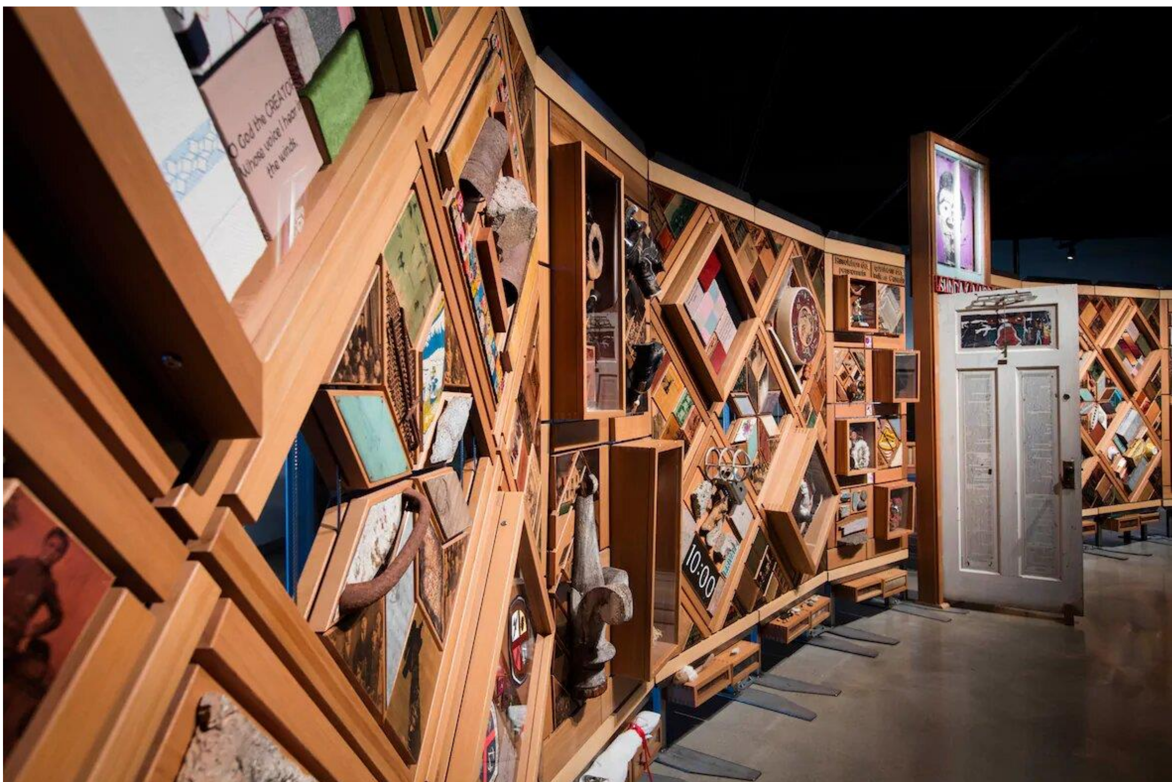

Figure 23 - *Witness Blanket*, hug-shaped curvature like arms extending from the central open door (credit CMHR-Jessica Sigurdson)

Figure 24 - *Schools of Shame* by Alice Olsen Williams

Figure 25 - *Crimes Against Humanity* by Alice Olsen Williams

Figure 26 - *Child Prisoners* by Alice Olsen Williams