Colonial Trauma in Canada:
Ethnostress, Public Stress and Political Stress among Indigenous Peoples

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Abstract

In this paper, through the application of the concepts of ethnostress, public stress and political stress to Indigenous communities in Canada, I demonstrate how modern pressures have repercussions where there remains lasting transgenerational colonization-trauma. From the background of the context and social significance of French and British colonization in Canada, this paper examines how the current political circumstances and popular discourse perpetuate an unhealthy environment for Indigenous communities that is harmful to reconciliation prospects and to ending the long shadow of a traumatic past, sometimes despite the best intentions.

Introduction

After briefly considering the context and social significance of French and British colonization, this paper will examine how the political circumstances and popular discourse in Canada perpetuate an unhealthy environment for indigenous communities that is harmful to reconciliation prospects, sometimes despite the best intentions. By drawing from trauma theories, I demonstrate how there remains unresolved transgenerational colonization-trauma among Indigenous[26] communities, which is perpetuated by lack of acknowledgment among the non-Indigenous public and discrimination in Canadian politics. This analysis employs concepts from cultural studies and psychology to examine how trauma is reproduced in various forms among Canadian Indigenous communities. Applying models from these disciplines to Indigenous communities in Canada can explain how modern pressures have repercussions where there remains lasting transgenerational colonization-trauma.

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[26] 'Indigenous' means peoples original to the land, locals of a region but in a global context. For the purpose of this essay, 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 (Dickason and Newbigging xi). Unless otherwise specified, the term encapsulates First Nations, Inuit and Métis peoples living in Canada.

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Medical Definitions of Trauma in Western Medicine

The Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM) is the standard for the definition of a medical disorder from the types of illnesses that were formerly labeled 'shellshock', 'combat stress', 'delayed stress syndrome', and 'traumatic neurosis', under the designation *Post Traumatic Stress Disorder* (PTSD).[27] This functional and practicable definition holds that trauma results from a physical experience that causes psychological and physiological symptoms, commonly recurring invasive memories, often temporarily repressed, of a violent or physically degrading event (Hamburger 66-70).[28] The definition of PTSD-trauma was conceived in response to symptoms found in witnesses and victims of Western combat or catastrophe, and over time it was adapted and applied to cases of rape and incest.

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[27] PTSD is a response to a stimulus, which is a traumatic event. Response to overwhelming events 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 (and avoidance of) trigger-objects that stimulate the intrusive thoughts about the events (Caruth 4).

[28] 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 (Ledoux 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).

The vocabulary of Western medicine does not factor Indigenous philosophies and worldviews into its diagnosis (Linklater 23-25).[29] Before the colonial period, Indigenous healers were elders, members of the community who interpreted their client's social concerns as part of their wholistic[30] concept of personal wellbeing (27). With the advent of modern medicine and science as distinct fields of study, such an approach to the treatment of social anxiety became impractical. Renée Linklater has been a program evaluator, curriculum developer, educator, trainer and researcher among First Nations in northwestern Ontario for over twenty years, and she advocates that professionals in the medical field who are working with Indigenous communities should separate the general symptoms of PTSD-trauma from colonial trauma, which she views as a specific and separate instance of traumatization (18). In her doctoral dissertation, she outlines how Western theories of psychiatry and psychology can further pathologize traumatized individuals by failing to recognize their condition for what it is: colonial trauma (15). The difference is that colonial trauma is cumulative, historical and transmittable[31] (34-36; Struthers and Lowe 259-64).

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[29] An Indigenous worldview maintains a relationship with Aboriginal ancestors, ceremonies, community, culture, food, land, language, lore, medicine, spirit guides, stories, and totem animals (Linklater 23; Chansonneuve 23-24, 53,72; Mussell 26, 96-97).

[30] *Wholistic* wellbeing considers the wellbeing of a person as a *whole* entity composed of four elements, the spirit, mind, body and community (Linklater 27-28). What is absent in dominant Western health paradigms is an understanding of the wholistic concept of wellness within the Aboriginal framework that includes social connectivity.

[31] For more on the transmissibility of trauma, see Marianne Hirsch on *postmemory*, which is the consequence of familial transference of traumatic knowledge and embodied experience (3-6).

Marianne Hirsch is the former Director of Columbia University's Center for the study of Social Difference and in her experience, memory is communicative and transferable (103-08). Trauma initiated outside the community, for example or in the past, can create a cumulative wound to the community that can be transmitted from parent-to-child, from patient-to-elder, or from confidant-to-confidant (Mussell 39).[32] Intergenerational trauma can result from unresolved ancestral, historical, or communal experiences, and can be transmitted to individuals in the present (Linklater 19-20). Problems of interpersonal relationships and violent social deviation are common symptoms of trauma (NNADAP Review Steering Committee 42, 63). These symptoms are general to trauma caused by an injury, threat, or natural catastrophe, however in cases of social traumatization like colonial trauma, more specifically in cases that affect a large population, severe symptoms can be observed in the public sphere (Hamburger 69-70).[33] For example, political censure causes social distress, widespread anxiety, mistrust for the prospects of the community, and a sense of instability that can trigger the reactivation of past fears in those who have suffered from social violence, humiliation or rejection (Restoule).

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[32] Trauma with external origins can cause dysfunction in the community three to five generations removed from the event, resulting in hurtful behaviors like physical and sexual abuse within the community (Lane et al. 9).

[33] 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, and in totalitarian regimes that practice ethnic, political or racial persecution, deprives the survivors and their oppressed descendants of the security and resilience that a community can provide (Hamburger 69).

Psychotherapy largely ignores how psychological symptoms and interpersonal functioning are impacted by public stress and political stress. However, for individuals and groups suffering from social trauma, nonviolent events can generate trauma responses like high anxiety and panic. Betty Teng, a trauma therapist who practices at the *Office of Victims Services* in New York, outlines the phenomenon whereby nonviolent events, like lack of acknowledgment, a barrage of public derision, or daily reports that challenge a policy of denial, can exacerbate traumatic symptoms in traumatized, latent-traumatized or recovering individuals (220-21). Teng discusses how 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 (220-21). This renders individuals susceptible to "feel more anxious or even to fall out of their 'window of tolerance' [cognitive space for calm, linear thinking] into panic attacks, flashbacks, and dissociation" (222). Clinicians working with Indigenous clients advocate a wholistic concept of wellbeing that considers the effects of the political environment on

personal health and the syncretic role of individual wellbeing on public health.[34]

Key terms

Ethnostress is a concept drawn from cultural studies, coined to describe the result of colonial trauma. In their 1992 report on the effects of ethnostress and the conditions created within Aboriginal[35] communities, Bob Antone and Diane Hill coined the term 'ethnostress' as the label for the confusion and disruption, the cause underlying the dysfunctional social behaviour within communities of various social groups, North American Indians among them (1). It is the response within a community that has been injured, oppressed and dehumanized by colonization. Ethnostress is the communal disharmony that comes from the loss of cultural identity and pre-colonial traditions, like

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[34] According to UN guidelines, the health of Canadian Indigenous individuals must consider a wholistic focus on determinants of well-being external to the individual, including political involvement as its underpinning, agency in self-governing, stable fiscal relationships, and residential and infrastructure development feature in the rehabilitation of victims of a dilapidated lifestyle (167). The health of the individual needs to be placed in the context of the community, and lifestyle diagrams should incorporate the Medicine Wheel, with its four directions, signifying both the inward and outward forces acting upon the individual: inwardly the spiritual represents the external social realm, so the physical is the cultural, emotional translates to environmental, and mental represents economic (Assembly of First Nations Canada 6).

[35] 'Aboriginal' is a legal term in Canada defined by the 1982 *Canadian Constitution of Canada* to designate the group that is autochthonous to the land (*i.e.* First Nations and Inuit peoples) but over time it has come to more broadly include Métis as well. This essay favours the term 'aboriginal' over 'native', to which it is analogous.

ceremonies (Antone and Hill).[36] 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).[37]

Public stress and *political stress* are psychological concepts. William Dougherty, professor at the University of Minnesota and practicing therapist at the Citizen Professional Center, proposed these two conceptual categories to address a lacuna within the medical field for identifying collective episodes of trauma. Dougherty employs these terms to refer to challenges to personal and relational well-being as a result of political, economic, cultural, and historical pressures (211-12). Political stress is a type of public stress. Although related, the two are distinct. Public stress describes challenges to personal well-being and social relationships due to cultural inhibitions in the community, in education, and in judicial institutions, as well as being constrained or frustrated by societal structures in the broader political, economic, and historical environment. Political stress refers more specifically to the language of politics and its impact on the societal network. Dougherty's

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[36] The prohibition against Aboriginal celebrations prevented the transmission of ideology, rituals, and a sense of belonging, while banning gift-giving undermined communal reciprocity and healing (Linklater 26). The extreme injustice of imposing colonizer holidays while banning traditional ceremonies ruptured the security that comes of socializing with the local community.

[37] The Canadian federal government commission the National Native Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program (NNADAP) which produced a final report in 1998 that concluded that a) various forms of addiction including alcohol, bingo and gambling, illegal drugs, and prescription drugs, are a serious problem in Indigenous communities, and b) legally-obtained and illegally-produced alcohol in particular is a pervasive issue that affects Aboriginal communities (sec.3.2.1).

terms encapsulate the fact that "the words, actions and policies of government bodies, elected officials, and candidates for public office create challenges for personal and relational wellbeing" (211-12). Events in their community, national forces, and worldly concerns can stress individuals, resulting in anxieties and relationship strains.[38] Symptoms are a result of an inability to unpack how the public sphere affects their personal journey, so that they become ungrounded, out of touch with their feelings, unresponsive, or rashly reactive to difficult circumstances (215).

Cathy Caruth explores the unreliable nature of traumatic memory, which she calls the 'collapse of witnessing', that is the result of events that are unbearable in horror and overwhelming in intensity, a phenomenon that compounds the effects of collective suspicion and reluctance to believe the accounts of survivors (4-7).[39] Elizabeth Ann Kaplan examines trauma in the public realm, elaborating that trauma is not uniform but varies by proximity, it can be witnessed through digital media, and be vicariously transmitted from group to group or translated from one generation to another (1-2). Hirsch uses the term 'transgenerational' to describe memory transmission between an individual and collective remembrance (106, 109, 111), and 'postmemory' to describe received remembrances of experiences that did not happen to the individual but that were nevertheless transmitted to them

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[38] According to Dougherty when faced with political stress, symptoms can take two forms in individuals: numb-reactive or agitated-reactive (214).

[39] Retrieval of traumatic memories are often doubted by the public, which is critical of 'false recovered memories' (Caruth viii, 138, 142). For example, traumatic childhood memories are often doubted by the adult victims themselves (6).

(103-08). Crucially, Linklater demonstrates how as a direct result of colonisation, the majority of Indigenous communities are suffering from ongoing multigenerational colonization-trauma (13). In what follows I examine the current situation in Aboriginal communities in light of these concepts, and interpret the Canadian government's recent efforts to reconcile the circumstance with attention to the response elicited among Indigenous peoples.

Historical Background

During the century preceding transatlantic contact, the region that would become Canada was occupied by a population of 500,000 to 2.5 million Indigenous people with diverse cultures that spoke an estimated 300 to 450 languages (Fraser 3; Historica Canada). Before the arrival of colonizers, Indigenous populations were not entirely trauma-free. There were predictable causes of trauma such as death, tribal warfare, and starvation. Colonial traumatization is different because it involves mass death and unpredictability. Since the colonial era, foreign diseases, conquest, capitalism, and national hegemony have killed and displaced entire communities. Foreign laws, schools, and churches were not part of the cultural context with which Indigenous communities were prepared to cope (Linklater 30). Under English control, Indigenous people were subjected to a social philosophy of assimilation that saw the enforcement of practices intended to assimilate Indigenous peoples to the culture of their colonizers.[40] The imposition of British and French educational principles and the

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[40] The policy of assimilation aimed at absorbing all the Indigenous people and customs in Canada until they are subsumed by hegemony (United Nations 138).

implementation of colonial settlement patterns had a particularly negative impact.[41] Treaties were issued to restrict traditional Indigenous territory, promote white settlement, designate land for the construction of a national railway, and open a new front in the North-West Territories for agricultural settlement (Historica Canada). After Confederation in 1867, the government created a system of treaty-lands called 'reserves' to which Indigenous communities are relegated to this day.

Indian Act

Since its passing in 1876, the lives of Indigenous peoples have been defined by Canadian law, based on patrilineal descent which excludes maternal lines.[42] The Indian Act[43] was conceived to regulate Indigenous affairs, including land, education, and political rights, under the state after Canadian independence. As a result of willful government oversight and neglect, issues of addiction, criminality, homelessness, homicide, physical abuse, sexual abuse, suicide, and violence are higher in Indigenous communities than among the majority-population of Canadian nationals (United Nations 24, 170, 206). Members

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[41] The advent of colonialism disrupted the intergenerational transmission of ancestral knowledge in political forums, in residential schools and in the workplaces. The damage done interrupted the process of knowledge creation, *i.e.* the use of cultural experience to transmit knowledge, which has hindered intergenerational relations (Castellano 24-25).

[42] J. P. Restoule discusses how the *Indian Act* harms the identity of the Aboriginal people it represents, it has imposed regulations on personal mobility, has restricted language use to English and French, and has actively suppressed cultural activities and celebrations (Restoule 106).

[43] 'Indian' remains a legal term in the Federal Statutes of Canada, although it has widely fallen out of favour.

of Indigenous communities still subject to the Indian Act continue to feel exposed, helpless and vulnerable to the Canadian state apparatus.

Residential schools

Residential schools in Canada were instituted by the 1867 Indian Act, which was an effort to assimilate Indigenous people to British or French customs and values (United Nations 138). Over 150,000 First Nations,[44] Inuit, and Métis children were taken away from their parents and communities and forced to attend (UN High Commissioner for Human Rights 9).[45] Maggie Hodgson bluntly reminds us that the purpose of residential schools was forcibly removing Aboriginal children from their families, keeping them separated from their parents, preventing their access to ceremonies, limiting their exposure to cultural beliefs, inculcating them with the colonial language, and indoctrinating them to believe their parents' traditions are wicked (363). The children were physically and verbally abused by zealot church representatives whose initiative was to convert and reform the Indigenous youth (Chansonneuve 41, AI16). Notably, they were beaten for speaking their mother tongue, the only language they knew. The sexual abuse of children by priests in the Catholic Church was a stark and long-standing episode of institutional denial and fabrication of popular truth that distorted reality (Kelly 24; Teng 231; Chansonneuve 5, 17, 37, 40). Only in recent

[44] 'First Nations' is a Canadian term 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.

[45] Then Prime Minister of Canada Stephen Harper acknowledged this figure in his public apology on June 11 2008 (para.2).

decades has the rampant sexual abuse that took place in these boarding schools come to light (Mussell 74, 109, 121; Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs 30-31).[46]

Current Situation

Cycle of Abuse

The pervasiveness of substance abuse and suicide among Aboriginal communities is notorious in Canada (Chanteloup). These issues are largely due to the cycle of trauma that imposes unresolved trauma on subsequent generations by traumatized individuals who perpetrate acts of violence (Lane et al. 9-10). The connection between childhood sexual abuse and pathological behaviours is significant.[47] Traumatic acting out includes addiction, gambling, hoarding, overconsumption, and violence (Linklater 48). Hostile behaviours among members within the community include verbal abuse, humiliating, and shaming, which are aspects of lateral violence that are common among victims of long-term oppression (Middelton-Moz 116). Being a victim of lateral violence has many indirect effects besides addiction, like depression, poor parenting, and difficulty having a healthy sex life

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

[47] Ronald Niezen notes that there is a marked increase in pathological behaviours in displaced or marginal communities (sec.Historical Etiology).

(Mussell 26). Individuals in such environments adapt to the violence and internalize the injustice of their oppressors towards them as self-negation (Linklater 51-52). Behaviours include child neglect, domestic violence, juvenile crime, substance abuse, and suicide. The traumatized acting out evidenced by lateral violence on reserves reveals that the Indigenous state of mind suffers from culture shock.

Indigenous communities have higher-than-average suicide rates among youths and adults.[48] Deaths resulting from suicide or overdose are common and often come in clusters, evidence that lack of closure from unresolved grief creates a vicious cycle.[49] New generations of Canadian Aboriginal communities are being traumatized by lateral violence and by exposure to the intergenerational trauma of their family members and neighbours (Linklater 53). In this cycle of unaddressed transgenerational trauma and lateral violence, youths are susceptible to the anger, fear, hurt, and

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[48] Youth suicide rates are five to seven times the Canadian rate: per 100,000 capita, there are on average 126 suicides among First Nations male aged 15-24, compared to 24 for Canadian males in this group; for women the respective figures are 35 for First Nations compared to 5 for Canadian nationals (United Nations 170). Mussell found that more males than females commit suicide, boys will commit suicide four times more often than girls, and adult men commit suicide at least three and up to eight times as often as women (36, 39). The relationship of youth-suicides and cluster-suicides to the historical injustice and the lack of national redress for the violent colonization has been proposed (Niezen).

[49] 90% of the men coming for treatment at a First Nations treatment centre disclosed they had been sexually abused early in their lives (Mussell 74). Most adults seeking treatment for addiction receive counsel from addiction counselors in the form of self-help, a philosophy based in the Western 12-step model that is not equipped to address the root issues for the addiction which are childhood violence, sexual abuse, and ongoing transgenerational trauma (NNADAP Review Steering Committee 5, 12).

shame of parents who neglect or abuse them, typically under the influence of alcohol (Mussell 35). These youths have limited access to counselors, and those who do might not know how to access the help or struggle to recognize that they need help (52). Federal and provincial funding lacks counselling services, programs for drug-addicted expectant mothers, drug and alcohol rehabilitation facilities, harm reduction services, a reliable methadone supply, treatment for affected family members, or youth prevention programming (50).

Inadequate Housing

The deliberate poor management of security, health and welfare policies continue to threaten and intimidate Indigenous social environments in Canada.[50] The slum housing conditions on many reserves are an exploitive form of imposed poverty.[51] Lack of access to secure housing is directly caused by government policies, not only on reserves but also in urban neighborhoods (Statistics Canada, *The*

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[50] The inferior conditions and healthcare available to Indigenous communities is evidenced by a) as recently as in 2006 tuberculosis rates were approximately 35 times higher in indigenous communities than among the non-aboriginal Canadians b) diabetes prevalence among aboriginal peoples reaches three to five times higher than among Canadian nationals in the same age group c) Indigenous peoples are particularly susceptible to contracting HIV (United Nations 158, 164, 174).

[51] Andreas Hamburger holds that poor management of social issues is a modern democratic form of political persecution that sustains and perpetuates the social traumatization of communities that suffer from colonial trauma (80).

Housing Conditions of Aboriginal People 1-2).[52]
Discriminate municipal land-grabs and the prejudices of
racist landlords that result in forced evictions are among the
systemic challenges Indigenous residents face (UN Special
Rapporteur 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). The result is that native
communities have disproportionately high rates of
homelessness and natives are overrepresented among the
urban homeless (UN Special Rapporteur 10). The
concentration of homelessness is higher among Indigenous
communities both on reserves and in cities.[53] According to
the UN, a key part of reconciliation for Canadians and First
Nations peoples will be for Canada to demonstrate
unambiguous respect for the humanity of Indigenous
peoples, of which financial compensation is at best a small
token, so long as reserves remain critically underfunded and

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[52] Nearly 20% of Aboriginal people live in homes that require major
repairs and 18% live in overcrowded conditions (UN Special
Rapporteur 8).

[53] In Canadian cities, Indigenous vagrants can constitute as much as two-
thirds of the homeless population, as is the case for Winnipeg (UN
Special Rapporteur 11). Indigenous homelessness is exacerbated by
other contributors like a lack of housing support services, unaffordable
housing, home foreclosures, displacement precipitated by family
breakdown, and eviction due to violence (6-7).

mismanaged (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 339).[54]

Systemic Racism

The legacy of systemic racism in Canada remains (Union of B.C. Indian Chiefs 22, 47-48, 57-58; Kelly 16; Jacobs and Williams 129-30). Even if the overt transgressions of genocide, the forced assimilation, religious dogmatism, and violent discrimination are over, fiscal dependency, limited democratic engagement, lackluster law-enforcement, and discriminatory incarceration are tools of oppression that remain operant.[55] When purposeful violence is accepted by the perpetrator's own social group, it causes damage beyond the individual victim; it damages the

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[54] In 2019, the UN General Assembly published a report on adequate housing as a component of the human right to an adequate standard of living and on the form of discrimination that constitutes inadequate housing. One of most outrageous findings in the report was that Indigenous communities in Canada have drastically limited access to clean running water (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 (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 cubic kilometres, Canada has one of the largest renewable water supplies in the world, with the most renewable freshwater per person each year at 104,000 cubic metres (*Freshwater in Canada* 10). The report outlines a correlation between the "abhorrent" housing conditions and adverse health effects (UN Special Rapporteur 4).

[55] In 2008, Indigenous offenders represented 16.6% of the federal prison population, despite the Indigenous population being only 3.38% of the Canadian population, meaning that Indigenous Canadians are five times more likely to be incarcerated than non-indigenous Canadian nationals (United Nations 206).

individual's family, community, and society, and the perpetrator's too (Hamburger 68). The annihilation of a reparative social network makes it difficult for Indigenous communities to address and rework their experiences into social narratives[56] necessary for a successful coping process (70).[57] Working through traumatization involves coming to terms with history, including recognizing the details of the haunting memories and critically engaging with them.[58]

Veil of Silence

There permeates a thinning veil of silence as regards to the genocide of Indigenous peoples. There have been minimal repercussions among church members and government officials who perpetuated or contributed to the

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[56] Sharing and repeating everyday narratives grants coherence within a social group; the story of the hero and his enemy conveys meaning to experiences that are relatable for individuals of the community. Narratives of trauma provide relatable frameworks and structure to unsupportable, horrifying or overwhelming experiences such as war, persecution and oppression (Hamburger 134).

[57] Modeled after the "talking cure," a Freudian concept, the premise in psychology is that expressing one's thoughts and emotions, to a therapist or to a non-skilled confidant, provides an act of healing, cleansing, or redemption. In this model an empathetic listener is required for recuperation (Laub 70-71).

[58] After having worked through the traumatic experience the individual gains critical distance to the episode, which allows for a reintegration of the events and enables the individual to distinguish the past from the present and future (LaCapra 66, 142-44). It is a process that is never completed, one does not achieve permanent healing from trauma. A good measure for recovery from trauma is the individual's ability to reintegrate into their community, find a new partner, sustain healthy familial relationships, and to overcome the past's invasive recursions into the present so that a positive future outlook becomes possible once again (151).

continuation of the sexual, physical and emotional abuse that took place in residential schools.[59] A conspiracy of silence and a generalized unwillingness to be informed on the topic has kept the genocide of Aboriginal Canadians out of mainstream media and education curriculums until the last decade (McCullough). For many Canadians, myself included, the public apology by then Prime Minister Harper in 2008 was the first instance when we were confronted with the ongoing repercussions of the violence of colonization.

The sustained long-term denial of colonial genocide and its consequences re-traumatizes its victims (Hamburger 82). The generations of Indigenous children who were raised under a veil of silence internalized injustice, causing them to develop an inferiority complex that devalues their self-esteem (Linklater 51-52).[60] Aboriginal communities are expressing distress over the lack of redress for egregious historical grievances (Morse 248). Indigenous members are living with current anxiety, apprehensions for the future, and the reactivation of past fears due to current events. Without recognition and reparation for unredressed crimes, and in cases where perpetrators evade responsibility, reconciliation is nearly impossible (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 210).

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[59] It is difficult to prosecute individual actors of the crimes involved in the genocide against Indigenous peoples in Canada, which is why truth-seeking forums, reparations, and institutional reforms are especially critical (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 209).

[60] For many, the stigma around being Aboriginal remains, and in some cases, it has been internalized by those stigmatized (Restoule 102). Generations were raised by parents who hid or tried to conceal their Aboriginal identity. For them, identifying as 'Indian' was not a choice but an imposed designation and there was nothing desirable or even acceptable about the Aboriginal identity (102).

Public Discourse and Apology

Over the past decade the Canadian state began to claim responsibility for its role in the genocide of Indigenous peoples and for the residential school system, which, for better or worse, has triggered shifts in the healing opportunities for Aboriginal individuals (Linklater 55; Joffe 152). Leading up to Harper's 2008 apology, churches that were involved in administering residential schools periodically punctuated Canadian discourse with their apologies.[61] The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the largest class-action settlement in Canadian history, began in 2007, stirring public attention and political discourse regarding the token of reparation (Indian Residential Schools Resolution Canada [IRSRC] et al.). Harper's 2008 statement's blunt recognition that the policies of assimilation of residential schools aimed "to kill the Indian in the child" (para.2) was an overt reversal of a long veil of silence surrounding the topic.[62] Although lauded as historical, Harper's apology omitted the term 'human rights' while addressing what is clearly a gross case of human rights violations (*United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* 156). Aboriginal members of communities that suffer from generalized lateral violence

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[61] Several church apologies preceded the Canadian government's apology: (1986) United Church of Canada (1991) Roman Catholic Missionary Oblates of Mary Immaculate (1993) Anglican Church (1994) Presbyterian Church (1997) Canadian Conference of Catholic Bishops (2000) (Chansonneuve 41).

[62] For example, a public apology was not issued in 1998 when the Canadian government established a 350 million dollar Healing Fund to address the healing needs of all those impacted by residential abuse, including its intergenerational impacts (Chansonneuve 4).

and transgenerational trauma may be hyper-reactive to political discourse of this nature.

Harper's apology to Canada's First Nations peoples for the residential school system, and Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's repetition of the gesture in 2017 to acknowledge the Innu, Inuit and NunatuKavut people, have had little impact beyond symbolism.[63] Despite political rhetoric, federal actions towards reconciliation fell short of First Nations expectations (Chansonneuve 41). In 2019, after the publication of the MMIWG report, when Trudeau omitted the term "genocide" from his public address[64] and failed to propose satisfactory compensation for the 150,000 Indigenous children who had endured residential schools for over a century, political discourse was momentarily drowned

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[63] These apologies are being received as symbols of regret but fall short of being a step toward reconciliation (Morse 247). The UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples warns against issuing governmental apologies that prove insincere, and notes that Prime Minister Harper's policies after the statement were inconsistent with the apology (153-54).

[64] When the MMIWG report was published on June 3rd, 2019, Trudeau's public acceptance of the report's twofold controversial conclusions, a) that the residential schools were actively genocidal institutions intended to kill Indigenous children, and b) that Canada's treatment of Indigenous women and girls amounts to genocide, avoided the term explicitly used repeatedly in the report (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *MMIWG 1a* 5, 6, 10, 25, 47, 50-54, 87, 94, 162, 191; *MMIWG 1b* 101, 167-69, 174, 189, 191, 193, 195). While Trudeau acknowledged "the terrible violence that continues in Canada" he avoided using the term 'genocide' to describe the ongoing and systemic violence facing Indigenous women and girls (Tunney).

in outrage at the lack of recognition amid claims of reconciliation.[65]

Recently, on December 5th, 2019, the 43rd Throne Speech delivered by Governor General Julie Payette included a section discussing the road to reconciliation (9-10). In it, she credits Canada with "real progress" over the past four years, since 2015 when the Trudeau government promised a new relationship with Indigenous peoples (9).[66] Closure comes not when the culprit has acknowledged his wrong and made reparations (Hodgson 368-69), but when the survivor has had a chance to revalidate their sense of self and been satisfied that those who perpetrated or benefited from the colonial episode accept the humanity of those whom they oppressed (Rice and Snyder 45-47). Canada cannot arbitrarily set the terms for reconciliation, limiting its own role to Western parameters such as financial settlements and public apologies (Llewellyn 199). Canada's role is to educate its citizens and create an environment where reconciliation is possible, where the humanity of Indigenous peoples is respected, and Aboriginal communities have the public space and the empathetic audience they need to recount their narratives.

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[65] Stewart Phillip, the Grand Chief of the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs, denounced the government's denial of the Indigenous genocide, "In order to reconcile for the future, let us truly honour the truth: the State of Canada and the Church committed acts of genocide as defined by the United Nations' Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide" (25).

[66] Payette cites four concrete forms of "real progress" that the Canadian government has achieved: a) the elimination of 87 long-term drinking water advisories, b) funding for First Nations kindergarten through grade-12 education, c) legislation to protect Indigenous languages, and d) the report published by the National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

Where do we go from here?

With rhetoric of truth-telling and magnanimity, most Canadians seek reconciliation and forgiveness, occasionally including offering reparation, as means towards achieving a democratic process in keeping with our vision of a Canadian space. If the government recognizes the Indigenous need to be heard, for strong public representation, for recognition of the genocide, and for an education campaign that transmits non-national memory to Canadian youth, then it will do more than offer an apology. As a post-conflict society, we must address the conflicting narratives of two groups on opposite sides of a traumatic experience. Recovery requires recognizing the traumatic events and the legacy of damage done to the social spaces we share.[67]

Survivors struggle to organize their recollection in the form of a narrative, yet their recovery from colonial-trauma depends on overcoming this inability to voice their experiences.[68] The solution is not only to acknowledge the period of genocide, to redress the ongoing discrimination, racism and segregation, or to offer compensations; it is to recognize the deep societal need within those who experience colonial trauma to be heard and respected, and to respond by becoming empathetic listeners. Dougherty labels

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[67] Healing from trauma does not include forgetting, minimizing or ignoring the searing events of the past, which could feel like a betrayal to the memory of lost ones who suffered (LaCapra 22, 70). In a sense, victims, survivors, and the next generation can valorize trauma as remembering and mourning the persecuted and oppressed (21-23). Moving away from the past and working through the trauma may be experienced as a betrayal of those who suffered or died (145).

[68] Trauma therapy, what was formerly called the 'talking cure', only works if the victims retrieve their voice and there are listeners who can enable their story to be shared (Laub 70-72).

this empathetic audience "citizen-therapists" who provide traumatized individuals with a sense of reassurance, comfort and shelter from judgment (215-16). The storyteller must trust that his interlocutors have the patience and compassion to witness their account of fear, guilt, humiliation, pain, and shame.

Conclusion

Without a reversal of the Indian Act or a full accommodation of their rights and cultural privileges in Canada, Indigenous communities do not have the empathetic audience they need to share their story. So long as systemic racism permeates and the Indigenous perspective is marginal to the dominant discourse, Aboriginal voices are muted and cannot reclaim the agency over their communal narrative needed to resolve the disruptive effects of trauma. Indigenous voices require an empathetic Canadian audience so they can bring forth their identity and shape their future among us. The task of those who seek reconciliation is to fulfil a role as societal healers. Participation will involve educating the Canadian public and elevating political discourse.

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