

Truth Unspoken: Residential Schools, Genocide and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*

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Introduction

Indian Residential Schooling sits uncomfortably in the Canadian national mythology. This nation that prides itself on a history of peaceful expansion and good governance removed several generations of Indigenous children from their families and subjected them to forceful assimilation, criminal negligence, and multiple abuses under the guise of offering disciplinary “civilization” and moral “uplift”. Today, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada exists as one part of a multi-pronged strategy to repair this history and its contemporary negative effects, which include ongoing challenges of suicide, addiction, abuse, neglect, and a social welfare system still prone to removing Indigenous children from their parents. This paper considers Canadian redress efforts in light of the topic of genocide. Following a brief discussion of the journey from residential schooling to the implementation of the components of the *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA)*, I examine controversies surrounding the labeling of residential schooling as genocide. In so doing, I seek to particularize genocide within an Canadian Indigenous context, while simultaneously situating residential schooling as a destructive node within a broader genocidal network. Indigenous memoir and oral history from the Manitoba region are drawn upon to illustrate the distinct experiences of attempted destruction within the Cree and Anishinaabe communities. Finally, the concluding section of the paper

examines the potential of and challenges faced by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada in light of Indigenous experiences of colonial genocide.

From Residential Schools to the Settlement Agreement

Indigenous peoples were important partners and allies in the early stages of colonial exploration in what is now Canada (Fisher, 1977; Fournier and Grey, 1997; Miller 1989 and 1996). The 17th Century fur trade relied upon Indigenous guiding, trapping, and pelt preparation, and the colonial competition for the so-called new world was accomplished in part through military alliances with powerful Indigenous groups. It was only after a confluence of factors, such as the ravages of disease (e.g., small pox), the decline of the fur trade, and the destruction of crucial means of Indigenous sustenance (e.g., the buffalo), that European colonial hegemony in North America was established. With the desire for increased European settlement in Canada, as well as a capital shift toward resource extraction (e.g., minerals and timber), the need for partnership became less apparent, and what emerged instead was the so-called “Indian problem.” The notion that there was an Indian problem began to arise in the late 19th century, as settler colonial governments came to view Indigenous populations as obstacles to progress, namely land capitalization. The resiliency of Indigenous peoples in their determination to retain their cultural traditions and their connection to the land was taken as a sign of their backwardness, and radical measures were perceived to be necessary to sever their connection to an Indigenous past.

Whereas some argued that Indigenous peoples were members of a “dying race,” thereby suggesting that the “Indian problem” would inevitably resolve itself, the more moderate position held that one could “kill the Indian, but save the man” through assimilation. This moderate position won out, and by the late 19th century it became the central tenet of the federal government’s Indian policy, as the Dominion of Canada stretched from coast to coast under

confederation, and the British North America Act left the federal government with primary responsibility for Indigenous peoples. At this time, an initial push was made to enfranchise Indigenous individuals, offering them some rights of Canadian citizenship in exchange for casting off their Indian status, which had been formalized under the Indian Act of 1876. But this offer of enfranchisement was of little interest to Indigenous people. With their overture rebuffed, the government came to view the adult Indigenous population to be too stubborn and barbaric to accept the offer of (partial) citizenship; therefore, government attention was turned toward Indigenous children, and the residential school appeared the best means to transform Indigenous children into near Europeans (Milloy 1999).

Much earlier, in the 17th century, French missionaries had tried to establish boarding schools, but had found Indigenous parents resistant to enrolling their children. In contrast, by the late 19th century, many Indigenous groups were positively disposed toward European schooling, and even sought for schools to be located on reserves (Miller 1996). Indeed, in the treaty agreements signed with Indigenous groups from 1870 onward, the following language was included upon the insistence of Indigenous leaders: “Her Majesty agrees to maintain a school on each reserve hereby made whenever the Indians of the reserve should desire it” (quoted in Sealey 1980: 26). Up to this point in time, most of the schools that had been previously established for Indigenous communities were day schools.

Both day and missionary boarding schools had largely failed to inculcate European values into Indigenous children. The government therefore continued to study the problem, and recommendations from the 1844 *Bagot Commission* and the 1879 *Davin Report* promoted the idea of creating boarding and industrial schools that would remove children from the influence of the “wigwam” and train them in menial labour and Christian education. In partnership with

various Christian religious dominations, such schools began to appear in most parts of Canada, save for regions in the far north and the Maritimes (MacDonald 2007).

By the early 20th century, the schools had become a fixture of Canadian government policy. Now designed as “residential schools” they operated as total institutions intended to take Indigenous children at a young age, remove them from their families for the better part of a year (in some cases up to 11 months), and forbid them from using their own languages or practicing their cultures. Students’ days were organized around a morning of education and moral instruction and an afternoon of labour. This labour not only served to discipline the children toward embodying a European work ethic, it also helped through sale of the products of school labour to offset the severe funding shortfalls experienced by most schools. In 1910, the government attempted to improve the funding relationship between government and the schools by introducing a per capita system; however, the dollar amount provided per student was drastically less than what was provided for students in boarding schools for European children.

Funding challenges persisted and resulted in dreadful conditions within the schools. The school buildings were poorly insulated and not built to withstand the Canadian winter. The children were overcrowded, inadequately clothed, and the food they were fed failed to meet basic nutritional standards. The teaching staff was often untrained, since it was difficult to attract quality teachers into such a dismal and under-funded environment. Moreover, the conditions at the schools were such that disease spread was often rampant. At some schools, mortality rates were as high as fifty percent, leading Chief Medical Officer of the Indian Department Dr. P.H. Bryce to note in his 1907 *Bryce Report* that residential schools constituted a “national crime” committed by the Canadian government and the churches (Milloy, 1999).

More well known are the stories of physical, sexual and emotional abuse from the schools. Severe beatings often took place when children spoke their Indigenous languages, stole food, ran away, or simply got on the wrong side of a school authority. Children were also humiliated and degraded, such as when their hair was shaved off in retaliation for misbehaviour, or they were required to wear soiled bed sheets over their heads as punishment for bed-wetting. The violence of the schools was exacerbated by the violence of their removal from community and family life – e.g., loneliness from missing their parents, anger felt toward parents who had delivered them to the schools, alienation from opposite sex siblings and cousins with whom they were forbidden to speak, and disconnection from parental and community socialization. Finally, many residential school survivors have reported sexual victimization at the hands of religious authorities, teachers, and their fellow residential school students.

The history of neglect and abuse in the schools went largely unspoken for many years in Canada. It was not until the late 1980s, when class action lawsuits arose to demand compensation from the Federal government for residential school abuses, and the early 1990s, when Indigenous leaders began to speak about their own experiences of violation at the schools, that the Canadian government and churches began to confront the issue.

Certainly the prospect of a large class action settlement was crucial in motivating their response, but it is also noteworthy that initial attempts to deal with the residential schooling past focused almost solely on the physical and sexual abuses that occurred in the schools. For example, the 1996 “statement of regret,” which was made by the federal government alongside a promise of \$350 million in funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, did not consider the destructiveness of the schools beyond their impact on individual children. Similarly, the subsequent Alternative Dispute Resolution Process, which was intended to address the class

action members' complaints outside of the courtroom, was an ineffective and overly legalistic attempt to ignore the more systematic and community-based harms caused by the schools.

Neither of these early attempts at redress satisfied residential school survivors and their representatives. In the face of their failure to end the class action lawsuits, the federal government at last agreed to negotiate a settlement with the Assembly of First Nations and representatives for survivors, the Inuit, and the churches. The end result was the 2006 *Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA)*, which includes a) a compensation package consisting of a Common Experience Payment (CEP) and an Independent Assessment Process (IAP), b) a public apology by the government, and c) a truth and reconciliation commission. The settlement agreement, itself, is circumscribed by the legal circumstances under which it was negotiated. In particular, it is "not to be construed as an admission of liability by any of the defendants named in the Class Actions or the Cloud Class Action." Nonetheless, with the three redress mechanisms created through the IRSSA, there was hope that public education and reconciliation with respect to the residential schools would, at last, be achieved. But would these processes allow for adequate understanding of how residential schools affected Indigenous groups as groups?

The Common Experience Payment, as a blanket, lump-sum compensation program, does not create much opportunity for considering group-based harms. The settlement notice distributed to survivors describes the issue of residential schooling as follows:

Residential schools were boarding schools for Aboriginal children that operated throughout Canada for over a century. Canada and religious organizations operated the schools. Harms and abuses were committed against the children. Various lawsuits were

started against the Government, the Churches, and others, based on the operation and management of residential schools in Canada.

The CEP provides \$10,000 for a survivor's first year in school and \$3000 for every subsequent year. It is framed in a language intended to prevent further liability on the part of the government and churches, and to represent a full and final resolution to all IRS class action suits. The common experience payment, therefore, merely marks the time one spent in a residential school without treading into the murky waters of the cultural harm brought about through this schooling experience.

The Individual Assessment Process does deal with specific instances of harm, but in an actuarial manner that asks claimants to identify instances of physical, sexual or psychological harm suffered individually rather than collectively. In this manner, harm is individualized, itemized and made governable so it can be delineated, counted, measured, estimated, and compensated. Through such practices, the past is managed more than it is mastered, as deeply social and ontological damage perpetrated through forced assimilation is transformed into a discrete set of calculable and reparable acts. The IAP form is a 28-page document that demands a great deal of personal and descriptive information from the applicant. As well, various forms of verification or proof are required, such as a doctor's note to confirm that one is too ill to attend a hearing. The complexity of the application means applicants will in most cases require the assistance of lawyers in filling out its details, adding one further level of translation, as their personal experiences of harm are converted by professionals into the terms demanded by the form and by the process.

Prime Minister Stephen Harper's apology to Residential School Survivors was offered in June of 2008 before the House of Commons. In it, Harper goes well beyond the narrow framing

of the 1996 Statement of Regret. For one, the apology acknowledges not simply physical and sexual harms, but also the harm of forced assimilation and its impact on Indigenous communities. He notes, “The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian Residential Schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language.” Although he does not employ the term genocide in describing this history, one can at least see here some of the harms that are arguably part of a wider genocidal process. But, in so doing, Harper did not want to acknowledge Indigenous groups to the point of appearing to admit their nationhood, and he thus concludes by emphasizing the TRC as a chance to build a stronger, unified Canada:

It will be a positive step in forging a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.

Thus, the apology concludes with an emphasis on nation-building (see Wilson 2001), directing our attention away from past harms and toward a future in which we live under a common (still largely European) nation. The culture, language, and heritage acknowledged in the previous quotation from the apology, are only to be valued if they fit into a larger Canadian mosaic.

In the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) mandate, the TRC’s first listed goal is to “Acknowledge Residential School experiences, impacts and consequences.” Among other things, the TRC also aims to “Promote awareness and public education of Canadians about the IRS system and its impacts.” But this acknowledgment of experiences and public education is limited by the requirement that the TRC make no reference in any of its events or reports to the

civil or criminal liability of individuals or organizations that have not been previously charged. Survivors who come before the TRC at one of its national or community events, therefore, can only deliver the truth of their experience in a language that occludes the names of those who committed the harms. Still, the TRC events are intended as opportunities for “analysis of the short and long term legacy of the IRS system on individuals, communities, groups, institutions, and Canadian society including the intergenerational impacts of the IRS system.”

The Politics of Colonial Genocide in Canada

Through the TRC, then, the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement opens space for discussion of the destructiveness of residential schools. In this section, I make a case for carrying out such a discussion through the language of genocide. To begin, I will offer a brief anecdote about the polarizing nature of using the term genocide in Canada, which I will follow with more detailed discussion of the destruction of Indigenous groups in Canada in light of recent work on colonial settler genocides.

In spring 2011, controversy emerged around the Brampton Peel Museum’s refusal to run an exhibit on the genocide of Indigenous peoples in Canada. The design company in charge of the project, supposedly drawing on my work, suggested that the history of Canada is too complex for the use of the term genocide. This has never been my argument, but activists committed to revealing Canadian genocide immediately contacted me to demand that I justify my position. I clarified that my argument has always been that a strong case *can* be made that genocide occurred in Canada, but that a un-nuanced application of the United Nations Genocide Convention has the unfortunate effect of assessing Indigenous destruction through a Eurocentric lens, thereby glossing over what is particular to the Indigenous Canadian experience. Therefore, I propose a localized re-reading of the UNGC that is more sensitive to Indigenous notions of

group identity and its potential for destruction (Woolford 2009). In making this argument, I do, however, qualify, as do many other scholars of colonial genocide (Bischoping and Fingerhut 1996; Moses 2008; McDonnell and Moses 2005), that there are numerous Indigenous groups in Canada, each with distinct experiences of the colonial encounter, which makes it difficult to make a blanket claim about a “Canadian holocaust”.

In my subsequent discussions with the activists, it is this latter argument that seems to have caused most concern, since a patient academic study of these issues was viewed to be too soft and gradual given the magnitude of Indigenous suffering in Canada. In contrast, my main interlocutor upheld as a model for political engagement the more strident approach of Kevin Annett. Annett is a former United Church Minister who sought to expose his church’s participation in covering up the crimes of residential schools. Annett’s written approach to the issue follows somewhat in the footsteps of Ward Churchill (1997, 2000) in that his vocal activism, tendency toward conspiracy theories, and often-expressed feelings of persecution tend to result in his dismissal as a polemicist, despite the fact that his position is not without a degree of validity (see Annett 2001). In general, though, Annett’s writing falls into the category of historical writing that Dirk Moses (2008: 6) describes as “writing as a hanging judge,” whereby the author/activist seeks the righteous satisfaction of supporting (or even leading) the victims in their noble cause. Such an approach, unfortunately, allows critics to quickly leap upon oversimplifications and sweeping generalizations and redirect the discussion away from questions of genocide. Regardless of my scholarly disagreements with Annett, however, I find it most disturbing how conveniently his arguments are marginalized from mainstream Canadian debate.

But are those who argue that the term genocide is not applicable in Canada right? Does the Canadian case, and residential schooling in particular, belong to a different category of events than genocide? Here, I want to draw on the emerging literature on settler colonial genocide to make the case that residential schools are a crucial node in a network of genocidal events that have made the continuation of Indigenous group life in Canada exceedingly difficult. Such a nodal approach to conceptualizing genocide is consistent with Lemkin's research on colonial genocide (see McDonnell and Moses 2005), which drew connections between the myriad destructive actions carried out by settlers, missionaries, and the state, among other actors. Genocide, for Lemkin, involves "a complex synthesis of a diversity of factors" (quoted in Moses, 2008: 13), but how are we to understand the collective action carried out by a diverse group? The theory of nodal governance offers one means to capture the often diffuse and complex strategies through which governance typically operates (Miller and Rose 1992; Rose 1996; Foucault 1991; see also Finzsch 2008a and 2008b). Governance, here, refers to the attempt to manage events within a larger social system defined by a high degree of complexity. Governance occurs through a number of techniques (e.g., force, norm creation and manipulation, moral suasion, economic incentives) by a variety of actors (e.g., states, corporations, institutions, individuals) through periods of often rapid social change (Burriss et. al., 2005). The actors who implement the techniques of governance are part of a larger network or "outcome generating system," (OGS) which refers to how collective actors through both conscious and habituated actions generate collective outcomes that are perceived as "goods" (e.g., peace, happiness, economic well-being) or else defined as problems (e.g., violence, famine, suffering) when things go wrong. According to Burriss et. al. (2005: 37), a node "is a site within an OGS where knowledge, capacity and resources are mobilized to manage a course of events." Each node exhibits a specific way of

thinking about and set of methods for dealing with a matter of governance, as well as a set of resources and an institutional structure that allow the node to carry out its tasks. Understood in these terms, the residential school is such a node in that it represents the institutional localization of the notion that Indigenous people can be forcibly transformed into European subjects through a variety of disciplinary actions. The residential school attempts this task, however, within a broader network of colonial relations directed toward addressing the ‘Indian problem’ and producing the good of an uncontested capitalist land regime within a unified Canada.

By drawing on such a conceptualization, I take issue with McGregor (2004: 290), who makes a clear distinction between governance and genocide, arguing that Aboriginal education and assimilation were projects of governance intended to transfer to Aboriginal children the social norms and “cultural competencies of the national community,” which McGregor contrasts this with a program of elimination. McGregor’s argument suffers, however, from its narrow focus on the policy decisions of white governors, ignoring how Indigenous groups experienced this attempt at governance. In particular, he misses the ways in which the tools of governance – of calculating, categorizing, delimiting and racially defining (see Neu and Therien, 2003) – are potentially destructive to the ways in which Indigenous peoples experience themselves as groups or peoples. Indeed, the very constitution of the “Indian” as a governable subject through legal vehicles like the Indian Act of 1876 provided the Canadian government with a target for forced transformation. With this new category of actor, the “Indian”, codified, “Indian” traditions, such as the Potlatch and Powwow, as well as Indigenous forms of self-governance, could be outlawed. In addition, access to resources and movement could be limited, recourse to legal council to pursue land claims could be forbidden, and children could be removed from their families for purposes of forcible assimilation. Moreover, these acts of governance affected the ability of

Indigenous groups to sustain themselves as groups, as the governmental project targeted the very foundations of their groupness at multiple points. Rather than being mere “governance”, such actions reflect the state’s shift toward the increased use of bio-power in its attempts to govern and control the human life-form (Stone 2008), whereby the body of the Indigenous person becomes the target of either exclusion (e.g., the reserve) or reformation (e.g., through the disciplinary apparatus of the residential school). Diffuse nodes of governance thereby received direct or indirect state support in playing specific roles within an outcome generating system intended to “kill the Indian but save the man,” whether through assimilative education, land appropriation, regulation of the movement of Indigenous peoples, cultural prohibitions, or other such acts.

Likewise, I reject similarly qualified notions of genocide, such as “cultural genocide” (Ponting and Gibbons 1980; Wotherspoon and Satzewich 2000) or “indigenocide” (Evans and Thorpe 2001; Evans 2008). Evans (2008: 134) refers to the “lack of fit” between the UNGC and the “disastrous process of indigenous dispossession occasioned by settler colonialism.” With Bill Thorpe he coins the term “indigenocide” (2001), which “communicates an interdependent, three-way onslaught upon lives, land, and culture.” This is an important acknowledgment of the overlap between the lives of group members and their land and culture. The problem with this variation on the term genocide, though, is that in its attempt to articulate the specificity of Indigenous experiences of destruction, it removes this specificity from a more general category of protection, as is suggested by the UNGC. In other words, I argue that the UNGC has the potential to be adequately capacious so that it can protect a diversity of group types, so long as we move beyond its essentialistic prescriptions of race, ethnicity, religion and nation. The goal should not be to particularize Indigeneity to the point that it remains exotic and otherworldly, and

therefore part of a different universe of obligations. In other words, we need to overcome the conceptualization of Indigenous peoples as “absolute others” (Schaller and Zimmerer 2008: 195) with whom we are unable to form any mutually recognitive relationship.

Scholars working in the area of colonial genocide have complicated against an earlier tendency to view genocide only in physical terms (Barta 1987; Stannard 1992; Moses 2002, 2005, 2008; McDonnell and Moses 2005; Finzsch 2008b; van Krieken 2004; Wolfe 2006; Woolford 2009). I would add to this that such notions of genocide, that focus solely on physical destruction, miss what is elemental to the notion of genocide – the protection of group life. Group life is not simply about the lives of the group members. Group life is about the continuous creation of groups. As Nancy (2000: 17) notes, “Existence is creation, *our* creation; it is the beginning and end that we are” (17). Definitions of genocide that limit themselves strictly to physical genocide force existence and creation apart, as though destruction simply stamps out existence, rather than the creation of existence, which is the real genius of group life, and the greatest loss brought by its destruction.

Therefore, a concern for colonial genocide carries with it a responsibility to try to understand targeted groups on their own terms, so that we can understand the ways in which they create and reproduce themselves and adapt to circumstances across time and space. This entails more than just a desire to protect the lives of those whom we perceive to be group members; it involves an understanding of the ways in which such a groups constructs itself as a group. In the case of Indigenous peoples, the dynamic process of group formation often involves more than just group membership defined by a specific set of identity characteristics. For example, animist beliefs often blur the lines between nature and culture that are so prominent in many European notions of identity. Where Europeans may live on a land that sustains them, Indigenous

cosmology may view specific flora and fauna as part of the group itself. Therefore, for example, the destruction of “grandfather” buffalo means more to the Cree than just the loss of a source of food, clothing and shelter – it is a loss of a part of their set of group relations (Hubbard 2011). And the removal of children may be experienced as not just an interruption of reproductive and socialization patterns; as well, child removal disrupts patterns of intergenerational relations that are particular to oral cultures. The crucial point here is that we must know something about the group, and how they constitute themselves as a group, before we make any proclamations about whether or not they have experienced attempted genocidal destruction, since the group is *sui generis* in its groupness. Therefore, the destructiveness of a specific outcome generating system must be assessed in relation to the specific characteristics of the group that is targeted.

A stickier issue arises in the case of colonial genocides, however. Even if colonizers did disrupt the particular forms of group relations that define Indigenous groups, could this not have happened by accident? Was there clear intent, as is necessitated by the UNGC, exhibited by Canadian colonizers? Legal questions surrounding the issue of intent are handled elsewhere (see Barta 2008; Finszch 2008a; Stannard 2008; Moses 2008). I will limit myself here to those aspects most relevant to the Canadian residential school case study.

An often-mentioned rationale for implementing residential schools was that of moral uplift. In opposition to those among the settler population who viewed Indigenous Canadians as a “dying race” that should be allowed to fade away, the pro-residential school settlers saw Indigenous persons as redeemable subjects who could be transformed into (almost) European citizens. If this is so, how can “uplift” be viewed as a strategy of destruction? To begin, one must acknowledge that it is only possible to claim to be providing civilizing uplift to Indigenous peoples if one misrecognizes them and treats them first as barbarous peoples. Such

misrecognition allows one to bury or bracket one's intent – to act without actively admitting to the ends one seeks to achieve. In general, I do not like to draw analogies from criminal law when discussing collective harms, but here the claim of unintended consequences could be seen as a “mistake of fact” plea of the sort not typically allowed in Canadian courts, since it claims an unacceptable level of ignorance to advance the argument that the accused was unable to form the mens rea required to commit the crime. More honestly, it is akin to recklessness, a closing of one's mind to the potential outcomes of one's actions by closing oneself from attempting to get to know the Other, which is more commonly associated with basic (or general) rather than the specific intent that is often held as the standard for genocide.

But such analogies confuse and individualize the ways that collectivities think and act. While the law requires an individual or “corporate person” to serve as its primary actor, sociological understandings of genocide can afford to explore the more complicated patterns of collective action. Here, the theory of nodal governance is also instructive in its discussion of the collectivity:

The things these people do create outcomes over space and time. These outcomes are not necessarily the result of their intentional activities or of their activities alone. Outcomes are produced by the complex interaction of what people do, how they relate to one another, the institutions, technologies and mentalities they deploy, their biological equipment and the conditions and stimuli from the larger physical and social environment in which they operate. Any given collectivity can be understood to be an ‘outcome generating system’. By this we mean that the products of the operation of the collectivity across space and time are not exogenous but organic to the collectivity, reflect the conditions of the OGS, and in turn influence the further development of the system over time (Burris et. al. 2005: 34).

That a collectivity produces an outcome generating system is not the problem. Indeed, the complex production of the OGS is part of what makes a collectivity a collectivity. However, an OGS provides the epistemic tools through which our ways of knowing, seeing, and acting in the

world are shaped. In so doing, the OGS can be directed toward destructive outcomes, such as when it is infused with a “logic of elimination” (Wolfe 2006) whereby the Indigenous Other is known in a manner that sets the course for creating a world in which Indigenous ways of being are more difficult to sustain.

Within the settler Canadian worldview there was little room for the continuance of Indigenous societies. For example, former Superintendent Duncan Campbell Scott (quoted in Tovias 2008: 281) stated that “The happiest future for the Indian race is absorption into the general population, and this is the object of the policy of our government. The great forces of intermarriage and education will finally overcome the lingering traces of native custom and tradition.” Such a statement is illustrative of how settlers misunderstood both the Indigenous person, and themselves. Indigenous custom and tradition are factors to be overcome only if misunderstood as backward fetishes (Latour 2010). The Indigenous person is seen as investing in unproductive and superstitious activity, whereas the European investment in a monetary economy and the forces of science are assumed modern and factual. Through such ways of (mis)recognizing the Indigenous other, momentum is created toward devaluing Indigenous lifeworlds to the point that they are destructible. This is not a case of accident or specific intent – it is an intentionality embedded in an outcome generating system that is built with complete disregard for Indigenous ways of collective existence.

Experiencing Residential Schooling in Manitoba

To illustrate the operation of this OGS through the residential school node, I will now turn to the case of residential schooling in Manitoba. The province of Manitoba sits at the geographic centre of Canada. It was formed out of a rebellion that pitted Métis and other Indigenous groups against

the Canadian government. The Indigenous peoples who populate this region are the Cree, Assiniboine, Anishinaabe, Sioux, and Métis.

Manitoba was one of the first regions of the country to sign treaties with the Canadian government. As noted earlier, in treaty making, Indigenous groups often sought access to European education, but it was agreed such education would take place on reserve, and it was never imagined that it would take the form of intensive proselytization. Based on the 1879 Davin Report, industrial schools were built in MB and NWT in 1883, and they eventually morphed into residential schools that offered a “half day” system of instruction followed by industrial and agricultural labour (Miller 1996). In total, there were 12 residential schools that were in operation in Manitoba from 1889 to about 1975, by which point most schools had closed. Four churches ran these schools: the Guy Hill, Pine Creek, Fort Alexander, Assiniboia, Sandy Bay, and Cross Lake schools were under the Roman Catholic Church; the Brandon, Portage La Prairie and Norway House schools under the United Church; the Mackay and Elkhorn schools under the Anglican Church; and the Birtle school under the Presbyterian Church. All of these churches competed for students (Manitoba Joint Committee on Residential School 1994).

Initially, Indian parents were loath to send children to religion-run schools. As the principal of St. Joseph’s School at Cross Lake noted: “Among the four tribes ... not one Indian is willing to part with his young children or to allow them to remain here for any length of time. Therefore, it is advisable and necessary to bring pressure in some way to bear upon those Indians who refuse their children, as by threatening to deprive them of their rations, etc.” (quoted in Sealey 1980: 28). The schooling offered at the early missionary schools differed greatly from Indigenous educational patterns. For the Ojibwa, education began at a young age through play that mimicked adult tasks. For high status Ojibwa, education could continue through

involvement in the Midewiwin, an institution intended to foster “cultural unity, preserving traditions, healing sickness and educating its members” (Sealey 1980: 7). It was not until the Canadian government began to enforce residential schooling through law that such forms of Indigenous education were disrupted and the schools began to see greater enrollment of Indigenous children. In 1894-95, amendments were made to the Indian Act to require attendance at residential schools (Miller 1996), and these amendments were reiterated and reinforced in 1906. In 1920, a further amendment to the Indian Act made residential school attendance compulsory for children ages seven to fifteen.

The mass enrollment of several generations of Indigenous children over a period of approximately 50 years had a detrimental impact on Indigenous communities. The rest of this section focuses not on the experiences of physical and sexual abuse that were rife in the schools, but rather on how children were severed from their group identities in manner that sought to destroy group ontology. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP 1996: 316) is quite clear on this point:

...[I]t required a concerted attack on the ontology, on the basic cultural patterning of the children and on their world view. They had to be taught to see and understand the world as a European place within which only European values and beliefs had meaning; thus the wisdom of their cultures would seem to them only savage superstition. A wedge had to be driven not only physically between parent and child but also culturally and spiritually. Such children would then be separated forever from their communities.

Without drawing on the language of genocide, or even cultural genocide, the RCAP report makes clear the destructiveness of child removal for Indigenous communities.

What this attack on ontology amounted to was an attack on habitus – a full assault upon the learned dispositions of Indigenous life that were the storehouse of the embodied practices of Indigeneity. For example, Hayter Reed, a senior member of the department in control of Indian Affairs in the 1890s, instructed teachers and staff of the residential schools to employ "every effort...against anything calculated to keep fresh in the memories of the children habits and associations which it is one of the main objects of industrial education to obliterate" (quoted in RCAP 1996: 312). For Indigenous students in Manitoba, such coordinated efforts had significant negative effects on their ability to bond with their families and communities, to form relationships with others, and to maintain a sense of Indigenous identity.

The trauma caused through separation from parents had broader implications for the students. In the following quotations, survivors tell about their disconnection from parents:

[They told us]...that you can't live like your parents no more. You're dirty and they don't have anything, they're poor. I remember that maybe that's why I kept going because I didn't want to be that. ...when our parents came and visited us on Christmas and Easter, they were made to live down the hill from school. That's an old house, an old grey house, it looks like a concentration barracks. That was how it was made up. There was bunks like the concentration [camps]...and that's where they were put when they visited us. (Gary, who attended 3 schools between 1944-1958, quoted in Dalseg 2003: 50-1)

I thought that our parents turned against us because we had to be totally different from our people. Living with these white people- with the nuns and the priests - we thought that, I thought that we had to change our and accept that way of life, and that is why our parents didn't love us anymore, because we had to stay away from them. I thought that

they, they took us away from the school because we could not be with them anymore. I couldn't understand why they still couldn't hold me. My mother never hugged me all my life. Two years before she passed away, she put an arm around my shoulder and I shivered. I couldn't stand her... (Mary, who attended 1 school between 1931-1943, quoted in Dalseg 2003: 51)

The residential school student experiences as a shock this initial break with the safe lifeworld of the family home. The parent, who is perceived to be a protector and source of knowledge, is disempowered before their eyes, and this diminishment results in the parent being blamed for the separation. Moreover, the residential school also works to degrade the parent, devaluing the parent as a symbol of Indigenous identity, which therefore must be left behind. The parent, then, is the link to the community world, from which the child is also being divorced:

The priest, the nuns, the teachers, all put down any kind of native, aboriginal teachings. We were called pagans, no good for nothing Indians, wouldn't go far in life. As I recollect, I don't remember any of the other students ever speaking about the native culture, the pipe ceremonies, teaching lodges, nothing. I don't ever remember, it wasn't until years later that I started hearing about these native teachings. But never was it ever allowed to talk about teachings or native spirituality or even your language, you couldn't speak your language (Darryl, who attended 1 school between 1958-1960, quoted in Dalseg 2003: 57).

But predictably, I became used to school life as time went on and related more with the priests and nuns who had become so familiar. I got so used to being in school that my

closeness to and contact with my family became less and less important; the separation meant that our lives and interests had become disconnected (Fontaine 2010: 131).

Lost with the parents is the world of teachings, in particular language, which allows the student to maintain a sense of connection to community. All things associated with Indigenous life are presented as profane, dirty, backward, and an obstacle to survival.

This disconnect to community manifests as a more general inability to form and maintain human relationships. The residential school Survivor often reports feeling isolated, alienated, and cold toward others.

I called those people who ran the boarding school, "stone people." What did I learn from those stone people? I learned how to suppress my natural feelings, my feelings of love, compassion, natural sharing and gentleness. I learned to replace my feelings with a heart of stone. I became a non-human, non-person, with no language, no love, no home, no people, and a person without an identity. In this heart of stone grew anger, hate, black rages against the cruel and unfeeling world. I was lost in a veil reaching up to the black robes and priests and nuns trying to make sense of all of this anger and cruelty around me. Why were these people so cold? Did they not have parents somewhere who loved them? Why did they despise us so much? In the beginning, I was constantly confused and always, always lost to their ways. I even went so far as to find a woman to marry that had no family connections, literally an orphan, my wife was an orphan, she has no family so that way I didn't have these people touch me. I didn't love this woman and I told her I didn't love her because I didn't know how. It was a cold calculated act, like buying a car. She had to meet certain requirements and function properly, but I didn't love her. (John, who attended 3 schools between 1955-1959, quoted in Dalseg, 2003: 76-7)

John's sense of himself as a "non-person" captures succinctly the dehumanization experienced by the Survivor, who subsequently cannot muster or manufacture the feelings that make human relationships possible. And with such relations absent, how can the group continue to function as a co-created unit? Deeply felt relationships are central to the construction and reproduction of group identity.

I think mostly maybe it was cultural abuse, putting us down as Native people, that we were no good, our parents were no good, you have to leave that life because there's nothing in it anymore. I think it succeeded in a sense, it succeeded on the wildest expectations to making me like them. Again, I had to suffer because I ended up saying "Who the hell am I?" People say that I'm an Indian, what the hell is an Indian [...] Maybe that's why I cried because I don't think they made me a person really, they made me something else and I think that's the legacy that I always carried about boarding school. I am not a person that they took when I was six, and when I came out I was a totally different person. Maybe that's what hurts me the most is that a lot of times when I question myself on who I am, it's very hard to explain [...] I would like to wear a braid and feathers but I don't understand those things because they took that from me, but the only thing that they never took was my language. That's one thing I always kept is to talk my language, which is lot better than a lot of people that have forgotten their culture or rejected their language. (Gary, who attended 3 schools between 1944-1958, quoted in Dalseg, 2003: 79-80).

Sometimes I hated being Indian and I wanted to be white and I turned with the white and they refused me. They said I was an Indian. You can't - you are an Indian. So, I was stuck

in between. I knew I was Indian, but how to be an Indian, I don't know. I know there was a history. I know I wasn't a loser all my life. (Raymond, who attended 1 school between 1958-1964, quoted in Dalseg, 2003: 80)

The survivor is thereby divorced from an identity, but also a network of relational connections, an indigenous outcome generating system, that makes identity possible. The residential school, as a nodal moment in a genocidal network, denies the Survivor all forms of identification, Indian and white, leaving the Survivor feeling lost. And it is this experience, this loss and loneliness, this absolute disconnection, that the Survivor understands to be genocidal. In this sense, when referencing the term genocide, the Survivors statements I have witnessed and read, speak less to a specific definition of genocide and more to an experience. For example, Theodore Fontaine (2010: 170-1) writes:

I visited Munich, Germany, and the Dachau concentration camp in 1983. As I toured the exhibits, I couldn't help but remember Fort Alexander Indian Residential School and see the similarities between it and where I was, particularly the seven-foot-high fence topped by barbed wire turned 45 degrees inward. Self-pity and anger soon evaporated, however, as I slowly viewed the photos and descriptions of each bunkhouse, dormitory, mess hall, washroom and shower stall. I can still see the people in these photos, the sunken eyes, the pot bellies, the protruding ribs, the spindly, skinny arms and legs, the matted hair and the pleading, despairing look of people confined by war and an evil dictatorship. I could not imagine the devastation and anguish caused by this atrocity of human history, and my own experience at Indian residential school seemed very minute. Nevertheless, as different as the scenarios are, there was something in the eyes of the people in the photos that was familiar; I'd seen it in the eyes of residential school survivors.

Fontaine is forthright in acknowledging that his experience was much different than the industrialized killing of the Nazi camp system. However, where he connects with this quintessential case of genocide is captured in the eyes of the victims, and their feelings of absolute degradation and disconnection.

Conclusion: Facing Residential Schools Through the TRC

When you remove several generations of children from their homes, disconnect them from family and community, and impose on them the cold, unfeeling world of the residential schools, a serious assault on the ability to form group-constituting relationships is committed. Unable to care about and fully be with like others, the group is deprived of its creative, lifeworld-forming capacity. Adding to this assault on the group as a self-reproducing entity, are the deaths and abuse suffered by the children at residential schools, all while their communities simultaneously faced further encroachments on their lands, the denial of Aboriginal Rights, an assault on Aboriginal governance, and the prohibition of cultural events like the Sun Dance and potlatch.

Genocide, understood as the destruction of group life rather than lives within a group, is, under these terms, the broader background of the residential school experience and therefore a crucial point of discussion for the TRC. Left un-acknowledged and undiscussed, the danger is that our attempts to repair this past will fail to transform the destructive outcome generating system of colonialism. In this paper, I have argued that our understanding of genocide must be particularized to the Indigenous group context if we are to better comprehend how such groups create themselves. At root in such an argument is an ethical imperative to seek to put oneself in the place of the other, and strive toward a fuller (yet never full) understanding of the other's mode of collective existence. Genocide, in the case of Indigenous peoples in Canada, stems from a profound and catastrophic misrecognition of Indigenous modalities of group identification.

Historical redress through a the TRC, I would then argue, must seek to further recognition, so that the equally valid forms of human existence and identification can flourish alongside those held dear by Europeans. Unfortunately, so many of our redress processes are directed toward inserting the Indigenous person into a reaffirmed colonial universe, where practices of economic, symbolic, and linguistic domination remain unscathed. In this sense, the outcome generating system directed toward solving the Indian problem is often simply revamped and reformed. Indeed, the echoes of the colonial era ring loud in the mechanisms established under the ISSRA. For example, Fontaine (2010: 183) expresses the discomfort of his hearing:

I turn the handle, open the door and slowly step into the room. I am almost overcome with panic. My eyes can't stop darting around various parts of the room and I feel a deep stab of fear. I almost turn around and walk back out. This is eerily similar to what I experienced when I was a seven- or eight-year-old boy and heard Father P. directing me in a commanding, low whisper, "come in, *tciga* (little boy)." But this is not the day of my *ménage*. ...This is the day of my hearing, the long-awaited opportunity to tell representatives of the Government of Canada about my experience in residential schools.

Unlike the more individual-oriented CEP and IAP processes, The TRC has the potential to open discussion about and educate upon the collective destruction of which residential schools were merely one node. But much depends on how the memories of residential schools are shaped and managed by the design of the TRC. Indeed, residential schools, in their attempt to assimilate Indigenous children, demanded that they forget their indigenous histories (Logan 2001). In contrast, the TRC asks them to remember these histories in particular ways.

At the first national event of the TRC, participants in the public healing circles were asked to encapsulate their memories within a 5-minute time frame. They were required to speak only of

residential schools that had been officially approved (and not day schools where many abuses also occurred), and not to name the names of the perpetrators. Memories were upheld and organized as individual memories, as individual experiences of the loss of community, protection, parenting, self-esteem, among other harms. But these were disconnected from broader patterns, and it remains to be seen how the TRC will string them together within its final report. Based on the arguments presented in this paper, I would hope that the TRC report reflect that the memory of genocide is not solely the memory of individual suffering – it is the memory of collective suffering. The collective is the target of the genocidal process, and one must be concerned when our attempts at redress continue to fracture and re-group the collective for purposes of governmental administration. At the same time that the TRC reaches toward representing the collective memory of residential school suffering, the other components of the IRSSA work to itemize and individualize this suffering, producing a catalogue of individual sufferings without adequate recognition of the collective damage done to Indigenous communities. If this trend continues at the TRC, non-Indigenous Canadians may gain a better awareness of the harms suffered by individuals who attended residential schools, but they will be no closer to understanding how residential schooling operated as a node in a networked assault on specific forms of Indigenous group life.

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