

An Advisory Research Paper for the Mosaic Institute

Dismantling Colonialism, Building Understanding

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Neil Kohlmann
Author



Note from the Author

This paper is the culmination of a yearlong process of personal learning, unlearning, unsettling, and understanding. It is a process, however, that is not complete. Personal unsettling is ongoing; I must work everyday to understand the structures that enable the continued repression of Indigenous resurgence and sovereignty. Furthermore, as part of this, I acknowledge that I do not have all the answers, and although I am doing my best to provide a meaningful and productive roadmap for unsettling engagement, I am open to criticism, open to acknowledging harms I may perpetuate, and open to improvement.

This process started when the Mosaic Institute asked the question of what role, if any, non-government, non-Indigenous organizations such as themselves have in forwarding the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls.

I hope that this is the start of a much larger conversation in my own life, for the Mosaic institute, and between our connections, friends, and colleagues. I suggest herein that the Mosaic Institute ought to pursue a process of unsettling engagement and decolonial action. This process is both internal and external. It must shape the work that Mosaic does, the connections that it fosters, and the systems that it operates within. Importantly, “decolonization is not a metaphor.”[1]

Decolonization is not a label that can be attached to pre-existing social justice strategies in the hope of absolving non-Indigenous organizers of guilt. Indeed, “solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict.”[2] Thus, this paper is an attempt to be a work of solidarity, and is not an attempt to absolve myself of responsibility or shy away from discomfort.[3]

The suggestions of this paper are bundled into a term that I call a “network of understanding.” The structure of this paper is simultaneously an argument in favour of a network of understanding, and a description of what it is. What exactly Mosaic’s network of understanding will look like in practice is not what this paper seeks to show. Rather, this paper is a starting point; it is a guide to begin the work of dedicated self reflection and collaborative unsettlement. It is about taking the initiative to begin this process, without external validation or reassurance. In the words of Jenny Odell, this paper is “less a lecture than an invitation to take a walk.”[4] My goal is to point Mosaic in the right direction and trust them to follow their own path. I hope I can encourage others to do the same, and to do the necessary work of decolonization. We can share this process, and we can make it flourish.

[1] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, ‘Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor’, *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (8 September 2012).

[2] Tuck and Yang, 3.

[3] Tuck and Yang, 10.

[4] Jenny Odell, *How to Do Nothing: Resisting the Attention Economy* (Brooklyn, NY: Melville House, 2019).

Broadly speaking, a network of understanding is a collaborative strategy that involves individuals and organizations in a process of unsettlement and decolonial engagement. It is a way of seeing the reality of Canadian settler-colonialism and it involves building a common understanding of violent colonial structures, as well as steps for such structures' eventual dismantlement. It also includes understanding our complicity with this violence. Just as colonialism is not an event,[5] neither is unsettlement and eventual decolonization. It is continual process of self-reflection, unlearning, learning, and action. It is a way of seeing Canada differently, and building the foundations of a better relationship. By understanding, therefore, in a community, the degree of authority that Canadians have in perpetuating harm against Indigenous peoples, steps can be taken to replace authority with responsibility. Although the majority of the Calls for Justice of the Final Report are intended for Canadian governments and large corporate actors, there are critical steps that all Canadians must take to both understand the implications and ramifications of The Inquiry, as well as hold their governments responsible. The Final Report speaks generally to all Canadians in the scope and severity of its claims. It asks Canadians to, "critically examine the attitudes and behaviours that impact the lives of Indigenous People." [6] For Canadians to help, therefore, they must use introspection and question what they take for granted about colonial realities.

Critically, as a white settler, my voice is neither definitive nor sufficient. What I can do, however, is point out obligations that we must honour, foundations that we have betrayed, and a society built on violence and dispossession. When I use the word "we" I am referring to other white settlers and the Mosaic Institute. Importantly, much of my evidence draws heavily on Indigenous voices and perspectives. None of what this paper says is new, or unique to me, in any way. Rather, it is the compilation of various Indigenous and decolonial scholars and activists in the form of a network of understanding, which in turn serves as succinct guidance for the Mosaic Institute. My prefatory piece of advice, therefore, is to read and listen to these voices, and to take them at face value. Often, the burden of proof is put on the shoulders of Indigenous peoples.[7] They must prove their lived experiences repeatedly and are either met with skepticism or insufficient action. This kind of re-traumatization and gaslighting is both recognizably violent and, as will be shown, a structural symptom of Canadian settler-colonialism. Thus, we must do the work to educate ourselves, learn truths, and recognize where action must be taken. Institutions, including corporations, charities, and non-profits like the Mosaic institute are included in this task.

Put succinctly, this paper is me, a white settler, using my own experiences of collaborative unsettlement to advise the Mosaic Institute on how to institutionally embark on a similar path. I am using the platform that the Mosaic Institute provides, and the privilege inherent to this position, to offer advice on what Mosaic ought to do, and how it ought to think about its positionality in Canada and settler-colonial complicity. By making this internal advice external, I hope to also speak directly to other white settlers like myself. I hope I can encourage action, and encourage ourselves to hold our families, friends, and workplaces accountable to the same. In practice, anyone can take and make use of the advice in this paper, but I also feel that I must make my own positionality clear.

[5] Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (1 December 2006): 387–409, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623520601056240>.

[6] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, 1a:12.

[7] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 1a:450.

Definitions

A Note on Definitions

It is important that I carefully define the terms used in this paper. I want to ensure that the words I use do not distract from the larger ideas that I describe. Thus, what follows are definitions for several key phrases that are implied or used throughout.

1. Unsettling Engagement:

A process that settlers must undergo to reassess previously established truths.

Drawing from many meanings and connotations of the word, *unsettling* involves discomfort and change. It is a process that settlers must undergo to uncouple themselves from complicity through ignorance. Described in detail by Paulette Regan, *unsettling* is a step further from empathy, and involves more than just understanding someone else's situation, but understanding how one's own situation perpetuates harm against others.[8] This is not an easy process, and the burden ought to be on the one going through the unsettling engagement to take on the brunt of discomfort. If done effectively, it will make the person who went through it discontent with the status-quo, and thus will literally unsettle them from past comfort. As George Manuel and Michael Posluns state, "real recognition of our presence and humanity would require a genuine reconsideration of so many people's role in North American society that it would

amount to a genuine leap of imagination." [9] Unsettling, therefore, is the first step to bridge the gap in settler imagination.

2. Settler:

Someone who is not an Indigenous inhabitant of Canada (i.e. does not have ancestors that lived in what is now known as North America prior to 1492).

It is a "non-discrete", [10] meaning not exclusive, identity. Furthermore, there is significant discourse over whether someone is a settler if they or their ancestors chose to come to Canada involuntarily (the descendants of slaves, for example). Therefore, this is a significant grey area, and ought to be considered as a layer of variability within the settler/Indigenous dichotomy. Importantly, *settler* is not a depreciatory or derogative term, but rather a descriptive label to describe the relationship between individuals and the land. *Settler* differs from non-Indigenous and is an important term to use because it puts the onus of identity on the settler themselves and describes a larger process of relationship. Ultimately, while these terms are not insults, they are not compliments either. Rather, as part of unsettling engagement, they "should be discomforting and provide an impetus for decolonial transformation through a renewed community centered approach." [11]

[8] Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

[9] George Manuel and Michael Posluns, *The Fourth World: An Indian Reality* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 2018), 224.

[10] Emma Battell Lowman and Adam J. Barker, *Settler: Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada* (Winnipeg, Manitoba; Black Point, Nova Scotia: Fernwood Publishing, 2015), 17.

[11] Corey Snelgrove, Rita Dhamoon, and Jeff Corntassel, 'Unsettling Settler Colonialism: The Discourse and Politics of Settlers, and Solidarity with Indigenous Nations', *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 2 (29 September 2014), 3.

3. Indigenous Peoples in What is Now Known as Canada:

A blanket term to describe the peoples (including cultures, nations, and societies) descended from the pre-colonial inhabitants of what is now known as Canada. Includes First Nations, Inuit, and Metis.

Importantly, there are more than 600 distinct First Nations within Canada, with distinct histories, cultures, traditions, forms of governance, and languages.[12] The term “Indigenous peoples” therefore, does not really describe anything specific. Rather, it is a blanket term for an incredibly diverse collection of peoples and nations. Like settler, it is non-discrete and describes a relationship to others and the land. Like all societies, Indigenous individuals have their own perspectives, opinions, and politics. Considering this, one Indigenous voice can never speak completely for their whole community, let alone all Indigenous peoples across all of what is now known as Canada. As well, both elected and hereditary leaders do not express the opinions of all their constituents. Just as settler Canadians are certainly not expected to agree with our elected politicians’ decisions all the time or at all, Indigenous folks ought to not be expected to always agree with their leadership.

4. Dignity Model:

a model of conflict resolution developed by Donna Hicks,[13] the dignity model believes that only by rebuilding and upholding dignity between groups, opposing sides can conciliate. [14]

As will be shown, Canadian governments have continually violated the dignity of Indigenous peoples. The restitution of dignity, therefore, is essential for any kind of conciliation. Dignity includes acceptance, inclusion, acknowledgement, recognition, fairness, benefit of the doubt, understanding, independence, and accountability.[15] Without these elements, dignity will not be preserved. Importantly, dignity of all parties must be upheld, meaning that any initiative must strive to uphold the dignity of settlers as well as Indigenous peoples. Ensuring the dignity of all parties is a core element of conflict resolution models. Doing so ensures that all parties feel respected and affirmed while also moving to repair considerable harm.

[12] ‘Aboriginal Peoples in Canada: First Nations People, Métis and Inuit’, accessed 2 July 2020, <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/nhs-enm/2011/as-sa/99-011-x/99-011-x2011001-eng.cfm>.

[13] Donna Hicks, *Dignity: The Essential Role It Plays in Resolving Conflict in Our Lives and Relationships* (New Haven, Conn.; London: Yale University Press, 2013).

[14] Donna Hicks, *Dignity* (Yale University Press, 2011).

[15] Hicks, 25-26.

About the Mosaic Institute

My assessment of the question “what role, if any, does the Mosaic Institute have in responding to the *Calls to Justice* required an in-depth understanding of the organization. As such, the Mosaic Institute (“Mosaic”) is a Toronto based non-government organization that seeks to solve conflict through the incorporation of multiculturalism into processes of conflict resolution. Its mission statement, according to Vice President of Operations Rachel Mansell, is to “affect and amplify the voices of communities to enact change.” Thus, Mosaic does not seek to speak on behalf of anyone or in the place of any groups, rather, it wants to ensure that historically oppressed voices are heard and put towards making a difference. In line with the title of the organization, Mosaic sees Canada at its strongest as a multiplicity of voices and perspectives that come together to make a whole, rather than an assimilated and homogenous society. Indeed, Mosaic speaks to the heart of Toronto’s motto “diversity our strength” and conducts itself based on this core principle of strength from diversity. Mosaic is a registered charitable organization, and thus cannot participate in any partisan lobbying or contribute to political campaigns. However, it still puts forward politically relevant statements, such as on its website where it refers to diversity as the “best protection against the social unrest that impairs our potential and our prosperity.”

In practice, Mosaic describes itself as a “think and do tank.” It embraces this through its “models for social change” that encompass

dialogue, research, and action. Specifically, it conducts comprehensive research into pertinent issues, runs events in collaboration with community organizations, and raises money for charity. Furthermore, Mosaic organizes public events. It hosts film screenings, panels, discussions, and the annual “Peace Patron” award ceremony, which honours individuals who have made significant contributions to peace in Canada and abroad. Furthermore, Mosaic goes beyond the role of a traditional think tank by actively engaging with the communities that it works with, seeking to incorporate and amplify their voices wherever possible. Mosaic strives to create a safe space for dialogue and exchange of ideas among groups historically made to feel unheard or unsafe. It does, however, act more like a conventional think tank through its research and policy proposals. This can be seen through projects such as its long-term extensive study on “imported conflict.” [16]

The Mosaic Institute prides itself on extensive community partnerships, whether through events as described above or research with academic institutions. For example, Mosaic conducts programming within high schools and universities, incorporating youth and student voices. It runs a program called “UofMosaic” that takes its mission statement to the university level, inducting undergraduates into a collaborative program that promotes discussion and dialogue on pertinent global issues. Small but ambitious, Mosaic strives to bring out the best in Canadian society, working wherever possible to bring communities together and make sure all are heard.

Mosaic has historically looked at the dynamic between Canada as a whole and voices of diaspora communities.

[16] ‘Perceptions & Realities of Imported Conflict’, <https://mosaicinstitute.ca/research/perceptions-&-realities-of-imported-conflict>.

In recent years, however, it has also turned its focus to Indigenous peoples living in what is now known as Canada. It is important to consider that Mosaic does not have many years of experience working with Indigenous peoples and has mainly focused on the voices of diaspora communities in the past. However, it is increasingly seeking to implement Indigenous voices and perspectives into its organization. Indeed, in working towards the goal of including as many diverse voices as possible in research, dialogue, and policy making, Indigenous communities are critical in this regard, as they have been continuously institutionally oppressed by ongoing settler-colonialism. Stemming from its recent commitments, and a desire to turn its resources towards active change in this area, over the past year the Mosaic Institute has tasked me with understanding what non-government, and non-Indigenous actors like themselves can do to meet the Calls for Justice released by the Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. This paper is the answer to that question, and it involves contending with the big picture of settler-colonial violence, and our role in its perpetuation.

Describing Mosaic's strengths helps to illustrate the reasoning for my advice. Playing to their strengths allows for more succinct, targeted, suggestions. Accordingly, this is why a network of understanding is community based, and focuses on amplifying voices, changing perceptions, establishing connections, and making space for oppressed perspectives. Although the Mosaic Institute wants to know what any non-government, non-Indigenous actor can do, a network of understanding is tailored more specifically to their skills and experience. This is not to say that my recommendations have no applicability

elsewhere, but rather it is by no means exhaustive and should not be perceived as the only path for decolonial action. Importantly, while there is an institutional necessity to act, action must be taken in a way that fundamentally prioritizes Indigenous voices and perspectives. Mosaic, in accordance with its basic values, must value amplification rather than act as a surrogate.

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The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls

The National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (referred here as *The Inquiry*) released its final report (referred to herein as the *Final Report*) on June 3rd, 2019. At more than 1,000 pages, the report is the culmination of years of research; 2,386 participants; and 1,484 family members and survivors who provided testimony. It chronicles the ongoing trauma, violence, and institutional discrimination that Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people face. Furthermore, it contains 231 “Calls for Justice” that task all levels of government with specific actions to remedy the systemic violence that they are complicit in.

Importantly, *The Inquiry* should not be read without historical and cultural context. Rather, as Stó:lō author Lee Maracle said at a talk in November 2019, missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people are a “sidebar to colonialism.” Ongoing systemic violence, therefore, is a part of much larger structures that have been put in place and maintained by settler-colonial governments, and are integral to the creation of what is now known as Canada.[17] As Sami scholar Rauna Kuokkanen argues, “all these systems and structures – colonialism, capitalism and patriarchy –

are predicated on violence, whether direct and interpersonal or structural, economic or epistemic.” [18] And accordingly, while it can be argued that steps have been taken to address historic harms, the structures that enabled this harm have endured.[19] For settlers to fully understand the impact, importance, and scope of the *Final Report*, therefore, is to understand that Canada is built upon violence and dispossession.[20] As such, the Calls for Justice of *The Inquiry* do not just demand remedies for Indigenous peoples, but also necessitate the dismantlement of a violent internal structure that persists at both a national and individual level, and the creation of a better relationship in its place. If effective, long-term change is to be had, the very foundations of Canadian settler colonialism must be contended with. Indeed, if approaches fall short of this, conditions can certainly be improved, but Canada’s settler-colonial past and present would not be confronted, and the actual structures and hierarchies that perpetuate systemic racism and violence would remain intact. Thus, colonial abolition ought to be the goal; a target to work towards and measure ourselves up against, and act as a reminder that we are not absolved until Canada is something else.

As such, the *Final Report* is essential because it exposes the foundations of settler-colonialism while simultaneously amplifying the voices of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA survivors and witnesses.

[17] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, ed., *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls*, vol. 1a (Gatineau: National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019), 64.

[18] Rauna Kuokkanen, ‘Globalization as Racialized, Sexualized Violence’, *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 10, no. 2 (1 June 2008): 221–22.

[19] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, 2019, 1:231a.

[20] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 1:114.

[21] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, 2019, 1a:6.

The very least we can do listen and understand. As the Final Report of the Inquiry states: "Through their sheer determination over generations, they have forced governments to pay attention, and to establish what we consider to be just the beginning of this work: a National Inquiry into the root causes of a crisis that has been generations in the making." [21] Importantly, therefore, the Inquiry is just the beginning. Necessary action and change is the next step. This is where organizations like the Mosaic Institute come in, this is where we get involved, this is where a *network of understanding* directs us on a collaborative path. The information is out there, and the evidence is right in front of us. Now we must act.

The Elements of a Network of Understanding

The terms "collaborative" and "community based" ought to be interpreted broadly, implying a process that is both internal and external. Effectively engaging with others requires constantly engaging with yourself (or within an institution), learning and unlearning, interpreting, and reinterpreting. As many Indigenous voices have shown and continue to show, and as this paper seeks to amplify, settler-colonialism is not an event in the past, nor a defunct relic of racist plotters. Instead, it is a present reality, something deeply embedded into our present relationships, structures, institutions, and daily decisions. Contending with the violence of settler-colonialism involves contending with these aspects.

To see how developing a *network of understanding* works, I have divided the process up into five distinct pillars that build off one another to provide a rough roadmap for understanding Canadian settler-colonialism's manifestations and violence, as well as a potential path to overcome it. They are as follows:

PILLAR ONE

Understand the operation of settler-colonialism through violent structures and their amalgamated superstructure, called *settler-colonial hegemony*.

PILLAR TWO

Understand that genocide against Indigenous peoples not only occurred but never ended and has been subsumed under the blanket of hegemony and colonial structures.

PILLAR THREE

Understand how Canadian settler-colonial hegemony gaslights the struggles of Indigenous peoples through its structures and myths.

PILLAR FOUR

Understand our complicity in holding up these structures, and therefore our complicity in violence, genocide, and enforced denial.

PILLAR FIVE

Understand that we must replace authority with responsibility to dismantle these structures and build a better relationship.

[21] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, 2019, 1a:6.

Settler-Colonial Hegemony

Canada is not a natural or predestined phenomenon. It is, like all countries, a human creation. Thus, alternative ways of being – whether political, social, or cultural – existed well before Canada and can exist capably without it. Primarily, these alternatives are those of Indigenous peoples. Canada, therefore, by the very fact of its existence, occupies the space of Indigenous identities and ways of being. As such, this is still the land of Indigenous peoples and the existence of Canada does not erase that fact.

However, as both history and the present show, the construction and progression of Canada attempts to erase Indigenous peoples and their relationship to the land, with considerable success. Patrick Wolfe, a major scholar on settler-colonialism, outlines how settler-colonialism differs from other kinds of colonialism.[22] Specifically, that it is “rooted in the elimination of Indigenous peoples, polities, and relationships from and with the land.” [23] This is not an event, but rather an ongoing process. [24] Indeed, “Settler colonialism involves a daedal arrangement of justifications and unhistories (sic) to deny genocide and brutality... settler colonialism must cover its tracks, and does so by making its structuring natural, inevitable, invisible, and immutable.” [25]

The existence of Canada as a modern settler-colonial state, therefore, actively eliminates Indigenous sovereignty, self determination, and all that came before it, appearing natural and inevitable. This sort of domination, which includes the monopolization of both land and identity, can be effectively described as settler-colonial hegemony. The word “hegemony” is defined by Merriam Webster as “the social, cultural, ideological, or economic influence exerted by a dominant group”, [26] illustrating a dynamic of inherent oppression and domination. Drawing from Antonio Gramsci’s concept of cultural hegemony, as well as Frantz Fanon’s observations on the manifestations of colonialism, Yellowknives Dene Glen Coulthard in *Red Skin, White Masks* describes colonial hegemony as an all-encompassing phenomenon. [27] It is settler-colonialism’s ability to manifest itself discreetly within the institutions of the contemporary state as natural, inevitable, and total. Canada is fundamentally settler-colonial, and it is trapped within this foundational framework. Thus, while no longer a formal colony, Canada’s composition is dependant on colonialism. If we are to understand modern national identity as an “imagined community,” [28] built upon narrative and mythmaking rather than natural fact, Canada’s hegemony obscures its colonial foundation and subsequent repression of Indigenous sovereignty. Canada is perceived as the only rightful claimant to this territory, while Indigenous nations are either assimilated, co-opted, or destroyed.

[22] Wolfe, ‘Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native’.

[23] Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, ‘Unsettling Settler Colonialism’, 7–8.

[24] Wolfe, ‘Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native’.

[25] Eve Tuck and Marcia McKenzie, *Place in Research: Theory, Methodology, and Methods*, 2016, 154.

[26] ‘Hegemony | Definition of Hegemony by Merriam-Webster’, accessed 13 August 2020, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hegemony>.

[27] Glen Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition, Indigenous Americas* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 111.

[28] Benedict R. O’G Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Revised edition (London New York: Verso, 2016), 32.

While many Canadians understand that their country was founded through colonial violence,[29] it is easy to see settler-colonialism as being a relic of the past, rather than an active and ongoing process of hegemony. Indeed, there is no point where settler-colonialism effectively stopped. Rather, colonialism is still maintained, but out of sight of most settlers and through exclusionary and violent structures.[30] (This concept is explored in depth in the next section). As such, Canada sets the agenda and suppresses alternatives through its monopoly on all of what it deems to be itself. All the territory north of the United States border is internationally recognized as Canada. Its citizens, therefore, are Canadian. However, this country, and its prior incarnation as a British colony, is less than 500 years old. Indigenous nations, which include sophisticated governance structures, [31] predate this by thousands of years. Thus, all other forms of being and knowing that are deemed “non-Canadian” (whether implicitly or explicitly), such as practices of actual Indigenous sovereignty and governance, are viewed as illegitimate alongside Canada. Hegemony, therefore, accurately describes the ability for Canada to hide its ongoing colonialism as *normal, inevitable, and legitimate* under – in Weberian terms – a monopoly on power. [32] Canadian identity, as it stands, includes this hegemonic expulsion of alternatives. The idea of Canada in a vacuum appears benign and quite virtuous in theory, especially when we associate it with notions of peacekeeping and diversity.

However, Canada is not in a vacuum, but rather has its boots firmly on Indigenous land.

In 2009, Steven Harper received significant backlash by declaring that Canada does not have a history of colonialism.[33] What he declared directly before went largely unmentioned in mainstream media but provides significant insight. “We are one of the most stable regimes in history,” Harper said, “There are very few countries that can say for nearly 150 years they’ve had the same political system without any social breakdown, political upheaval or invasion. We are unique in that regard.” Viewed within a hegemonic framework, Harper appears correct. However, the preservation of such a “political system” has required Canadian governments from John A. Macdonald to Justin Trudeau to break down, upheave, and invade Indigenous sovereign territory. Although Canada prides itself on being multicultural and accepting, this is limited within settler-colonial hegemony to only the alternatives that are accepted by, and contribute to, Canada’s legitimacy.

This helps to explain why the implementation of recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as well as international agreements such as United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, are consistently delayed or fall incredibly short in Canada because notions like “consent”, “free”, and “self-determination” are subordinated under the legitimacy of Canadian control. [34]

[29] There are notable exceptions to this, including Stephen Harper. See: Aaron Wherry, ‘What He Was Talking about When He Talked about Colonialism’, Macleans, 1 October 2009, <https://www.macleans.ca/uncategorized/what-he-was-talking-about-when-he-talked-about-colonialism/>.

[30] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 113.

[31] Tom Porter, Lesley Forrester, and Ka-Hon-Hes, *And Grandma Said--Iroquois Teachings: As Passed down through the Oral Tradition* (Philadelphia, Pa.: Xlibris Corp, 2008).

[32] Max Weber, Guenther Roth, and Claus Wittich, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 29.

[33] Wherry, *What He Was Talking about When He Talked about Colonialism*.

[34] Eva Jewell and Ian Mosby, ‘Calls To Action Accountability: A Status Update On Reconciliation’ (Yellowhead Institute, 17 December 2019); James Munson Published on Jul 12 and 2016 1:01pm, ‘Ottawa Won’t Adopt UNDRIP Directly into Canadian Law: Wilson-Raybould’, IPolitics (blog), 12 July 2016, <https://ipolitics.ca/2016/07/12/ottawa-wont-adopt-undrip-directly-into-canadian-law-wilson-raybould/>.

By understanding this, it becomes clear how Canada's presence (as it currently stands) inherently infringes on the identity and self-determination of others.

From its very description, therefore, Canada's settler-colonial hegemony is antithetical to the Mosaic Institute's mandate. While Canada often prides itself as a tolerant alternative to its southern neighbours' melting pot, divergent identities in practice are often a superficial outer layer to an internal hegemony; alternatives are allowed, but only up to the point where they do not threaten the legitimacy of Canada and its claim on the land. Actual Indigenous sovereignty, therefore, is forbidden. Thus, for Mosaic to effectively create a tapestry of vibrant perspectives and voices, it is essential for it to contend with this hegemony. What is important for Mosaic to consider, therefore, is that settler-colonial hegemony is not all that Canada can be. In fact, it *must* be something different, and *must* not suppress alternatives in the way that it currently does.

Colonial Structures

Settler-colonial hegemony is violent and embeds that violence within its subordinate structures. Because hegemony is total – and must remain as such to maintain a monopoly – other ways of living that are not compatible (such as Indigenous sovereignty) are obstacles rather than viable alternatives. Indigenous peoples, therefore, have historically been perceived by Canadian governments as a problem that needs solving.[35]

They are either subsumed into the settler-colonial umbrella, in a process called *assimilation*, [36] or otherwise eliminated. Residential schools, the White Paper, the 60s scoop, were all created as a solution to the problem of Indigenous people.[37] As Paulette Regan discusses in *Unsettling the Settler Within*, Canada has seen Indigenous peoples as being an “Indian problem” that needs addressing, rather than confronting their own settler-colonialism problem.[38] This pervasive view of a problem that needs solving, alongside the need to legitimize settler-colonial Canada to preserve hegemony, has consequentially led to the majority of Canadian institutions, governments, and corporations structured in such a way so that they perpetuate and obscure violence.[39] The police, the carceral system, the banking system, housing, infrastructure, education, and mainstream media are all subordinate structures of settler-colonial hegemony, just to name a few. It is not that there are specific rules of violence, rather, it is this specific way of viewing Canada as inevitable and total, and Indigenous peoples as an obstacle that is systemic. Indeed, the Final Report states that, “the common thread weaving these statistics together is the fact that violence against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people is not an individual problem, or an issue only for certain communities. This violence is rooted in systemic factors, like economic, social and political marginalization, as well as racism, discrimination, and misogyny, woven into the fabric of Canadian society.”[40]

[35] Thomas King, *The Inconvenient Indian: A Curious Account of Native People in North America*, Anchor Canada edition, n.d.

[36] The process by which one entity absorbs another into it. In the Canadian context, this has been the status-quo against Indigenous lands and bodies since before confederation. Assimilation in the settler-colonial framework destroys, represses, or appropriates alternative forms of living and relating to each other and the land.

[37] Alicia Elliott, *A Mind Spread out on the Ground* (Toronto: Doubleday Canada, 2019).

[38] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 4.

[39] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, 2019, 1:456.

[40] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, ed., *Reclaiming Power and Place: The Final Report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls* (Gatineau: National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019), 56.

Examples

This can be further illustrated with a number of examples.

1

First, the incarceration rate of Indigenous peoples in Canada is hugely disproportionate; In January of 2020, the Correctional Investigator of Canada, Dr. Ivan Zinger, reported that Indigenous peoples make up 30% of the Canadian prison population,[41] while composing less than 5% of the federal population.

2

Second, also in January, Maxwell Johnson, a Heiltsuk man, was handcuffed along with his 12-year-old granddaughter because his attempt to open a bank account was deemed suspicious.[42]

3

Third, many survivors interviewed in *the National Inquiry* cited the lack or inadequacy of housing as a major cause of exposure to violence, like sexual assault.[43]

4

Fourth, Asabiinyashkosiwagong Nitam-Anishinaabeg (Grassy Narrows First Nation) still does not have clean drinking water after their land was poisoned with mercury from a Canadian paper mill more than 50 years ago.[44]

5

Fifth, the education system of this country downplays harms against Indigenous peoples and focuses on construction rather than destruction. Indeed, Anishinaabe journalist and author Tanya Talaga states that, “the state education system has purposefully kept the general population ignorant of the physical, cultural, and spiritual genocide Indigenous peoples have endured for centuries.”[45] And Senator Murray Sinclair has said that, “[n]ation building has been the main theme of Canada’s history curricula for a long time, and Aboriginal people, except a few notable exceptions trotted out as if to prove the rule, have been portrayed as bystanders, if not obstacles, to the enterprise of nation building.” [46]

These are just a few examples of recent harms perpetuated by settler-colonial structures.

[41] Office of the Correctional Investigator Government of Canada, ‘Indigenous People in Federal Custody Surpasses 30% - Correctional Investigator Issues Statement and Challenge - Office of the Correctional Investigator’, 16 April 2020, <https://www.oci-bec.gc.ca/cnt/comm/press/press20200121-eng.aspx>

[42] ‘Arrest of Indigenous Man, Granddaughter at BMO Branch Shows Vancouver Police Have a Long Way to Go on Reconciliation’, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/canada/british-columbia/article-arrest-of-indigenous-man-granddaughter-at-bmo-branch-shows-vancouver/>.

[43] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, 2019, 1:114.

[44] Jody Porter, ‘Children of the Poisoned River’, CBC News, accessed 12 August 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/news2/interactives/children-of-the-poisoned-river-mercury-poisoning-grassy-narrows-first-nation>.

[45] Tanya Talaga, *All Our Relations: Finding the Path Forward*, The CBC Massey Lectures Series (Toronto: Anansi, 2018), 212.

[46] Murray Sinclair, ‘Speech to the Judges of the Ontario Court of Justice’ (Ontario Court of Justice, 22 May 2014).

There are many more violent acts that go unnoticed or unreported constantly. In fact, violence is not often visible, and this makes larger connections harder to identify.[47] Mainstream media representation of Indigenous peoples, however, is a clearly identifiable settler-colonial structure. It both hides violence and further entrenches settler-colonial hegemony. Such representation presents Indigenous peoples as *outside* Canadian identity, interests, past, present, and future.[48] It enforces settler-colonial inevitability and sidelines – and helps in the elimination of – Indigenous alternatives.

In practice, rather than report ongoing violence, poverty, trauma, and other effects of settler-colonialism as part of the larger whole discussed above, the media treats them as individual events. *The Final Report's* witnesses have included many Indigenous individuals who have had to deal with this deeply flawed perspective and expressed their frustration at the inability of the media to represent the bigger picture. Delores S. relates this feeling with the following after her daughter went missing:

I've had to continually go to the media and replay the events that happened in her story over and over and over for the last two years to get somebody to listen, to get somebody to hear that this is a bigger problem, that these issues are bigger.

That this is not just another Indigenous woman, but this is a problem that is arising in Canada with our Indigenous women being – going missing and being murdered. And, it's been very traumatizing. It's been very traumatizing to have to take my family through this over, and over, and over, and over. [49]

Mainstream media representation, therefore, individualizes the struggles of Indigenous peoples. In effect, larger structures of violence are completely removed from the equation. Furthermore, as Anderson and Robertson argue, this puts the blame of suffering on Indigenous peoples themselves, rather than government violence.[50] Again, it becomes an “Indian problem,” rather than a settler-colonialism problem. Media representation, therefore, is complicit in strengthening the rigid hierarchies and moralities of Canadian settler-colonial authority.[51] Rather than see Indigenous peoples as distinct nations, the media has contributed to the attitude that they are a problem that needs solving. Indeed, this attitude has hardly differed throughout the 153 years of Canada's existence.[52]

Thus, mainstream media implicitly obscures the systemic harm towards Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. This in turn plays into larger societal complacency. The destruction of Indigenous bodies becomes a

[47] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, 2019, 1:456.

[48] Lowman and Barker, *Settler*, 39.

[49] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, 2019, 1a:385.

[50] Mark Cronlund Anderson and Carmen Robertson, *Seeing Red: A History of Natives in Canadian Newspapers* (Winnipeg, Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2011), 271.

[51] Anderson and Robertson, 6.

[52] Anderson and Robertson, 266.

problem with Indigenous peoples themselves rather than a process that settlers are complicit in. Hence, settlers feel that either there is not a problem, or they do not have a role to play in making a difference. Furthermore, this reflects onto government, which feels no pressure from most Canadians to make any change. This feeds into what *The Inquiry* calls an “institutional lack of will.”[53] Media representation, therefore, allows violence to proceed unobstructed.

Thus, mainstream media implicitly obscures the systemic harm towards Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. This in turn plays into larger societal complacency.

Confronting Genocide

Colonial Hegemony and its subordinate structures, as has been shown, perpetuate an ongoing, sustained, systemic violence against Indigenous peoples with the goal of eliminating alternatives to settler-colonial reality. This is genocide. When a people are viewed as a problem that need to be eliminated, either through more explicit methods like outright murder, or implicit ones like cultural erasure or forced assimilation, it is genocide.[54] Indeed, The National Inquiry’s final report contains a deep indictment of the Canadian status quo.

It charges Canada with ongoing genocide of Indigenous peoples, and sees treatment of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people as a clear example of this. In the words of The Final Report:

The violence the National Inquiry heard about amounts to a race-based genocide of Indigenous Peoples, including First Nations, Inuit and Métis, which especially targets women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. This genocide has been empowered by **colonial structures**, evidenced notably by the Indian Act, the Sixties Scoop, residential schools and breaches of human and Indigenous rights, leading directly to the current increased rates of violence, death, and suicide in Indigenous populations (emphasis added).[55]

This is not a light claim, and it should be taken incredibly seriously as a condemnation of ongoing settler-colonialism as described above. Genocide is used here to focus on the severity of structural violence, as well as its persistence. As such, the *Final Report* contends that genocide does not lie in the past with specific events like land grabbing and the residential school system, but rather each is a “colonial structure” that adds to a genocidal whole. As former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Phil Fontaine and Bernie Farber, the former executive director of the Mosaic Institute, commented in a 2013 opinion piece, “Genocides rarely emerge fully formed from the womb of evil. They typically evolve in a stepwise fashion over time, as one crime leads to another.... Our conviction is that Canadian policy over more than 100 years can be defined as a genocide of First Nations.”[56]

[53] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, 1a:111.

[54] David Bruce MacDonald, *The Sleeping Giant Awakens: Genocide, Indian Residential Schools, and the Challenge of Conciliation*, UTP Insights (Toronto; Buffalo: University of Toronto Press, 2019).

[55] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, ed., *Reclaiming Power and Place*, 2019, 1a:50.

[56] Phil Fontaine and Bernie Farber, ‘What Canada Committed against First Nations Was Genocide. The UN Should Recognize It’, *The Globe and Mail*, 14 October 2013, sec. Opinion, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/what-canada-committed-against-first-nations-was-genocide-the-un-should-recognize-it/article14853747/>.

Genocide, therefore, is still in the present, it never ended. This is critical because it puts responsibility on the contemporary state and demands current action rather than apologies for what has passed. While there have been discussions over whether the use of genocide was helpful, productive, or necessary, such conversations are misleading. Instead, the *Final Report* must be handled at face value. To help, especially as a non-Indigenous organization, means listening and then acting, rather than listening and critiquing before action is taken. White settlers ought to take note. Therefore, since the Mosaic Institute accepts the assertion of genocide (and it is my hope that any reader of this paper does as well), our discussion moves to the implications and ramifications of the term. What does this mean for citizens living in a state that perpetuates genocide? How is genocidal *authority* transformed into decolonial *responsibility*?[57] Furthermore, when the reaction to a claim of genocide is met with stiff resistance or shock, how can a national consciousness – which considers “Canada’s colonial policies as racist and misconceived, rather than acknowledge them as explicitly genocidal” [58] – be fundamentally altered?

While genocide can mean many things to a variety of people, David MacDonald, in *The Sleeping Giant Awakens*, does an excellent job of settling this conversation in the Canadian context. He closely examines Canada’s history of Residential Schools and how they factor into the larger discussion about claims of genocide against the government. MacDonald draws upon both Indigenous and European schools of thought to argue that Canada did indeed commit genocide against Indigenous peoples. [59]

While this fact is incredibly difficult for many settlers to come to terms with, MacDonald contends that handling it at face value is necessary for any kind of meaningful conciliation to occur.[60] MacDonald provides an important settler perspective for critical truth telling and paths moving forward. As such, we must deal directly with the term of genocide, and therefore must address the underlying structures that have created the ongoing conditions for genocide’s survival and covert manifestation in the Canadian consciousness.

Mythmaking and Gaslighting

Settler-colonial hegemony is enabled and supported by individual identity as well as collective structures. The stories, ideals, and values that form the core of Canadian identity (often reinforcing its legitimacy) obscure the ways in which Canada acts contradictorily. Paulette Regan describes these stories as “myths” because they are not based in significant truth.[61] Thus, much of Canadian identity is based in narratives of fiction. For example, the peacemaker myth, which states that Canada upholds peace and justice on the international stage – while based in partial truths of overseas organizing (such as Pearson and UNEF) – masks the violence inherent in Canada’s settler-colonial foundations, as well as significant Indigenous contributions to peacekeeping discourse.[62]

Taking these myths for granted and using them without reflection, therefore, continues to legitimize falsehoods and the ongoing repression of Indigenous alternatives. By understanding the manifestations of colonial hegemony through the structures and myths that Canada bases its identity on can help settlers reevaluate what they are complicit in

[57] Lowman and Barker, *Settler*, 112.

[58] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, ‘A Legal Analysis of Genocide’, n.d., 11.

[59] MacDonald, *The Sleeping Giant Awakens*, 5-6.

[60] MacDonald, 182-183.

[61] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*.

[62] Julian Brave NoiseCat, ‘We Need Indigenous Wisdom to Survive the Apocalypse’, *The Walrus* (blog), 17 October 2019, <https://thewalrus.ca/we-need-indigenous-wisdom-to-survive-the-apocalypse/>.

and what their identity inadvertently perpetuates. The next step is to *unlearn* these myths.

A process advocated by Ariella Azoulay, unlearning involves critically reassessing assumed truths to build a new understanding of society. [63]

In order to undo certain processes or heal deep wounds, it is often necessary to first reframe the *truths* that contribute or obscure those harms. In practice, *unlearning* involves a “transformation of violence into shared care for our common world.”[64] Thus, the Canadian identities that hide hypocritical violence must be unlearned. The uncritical valorization of these myths, as well certain historical figures (who are often literally put on a pedestal) must end. In reference to the myth described above, Corntassel and Bird argue that, “the veneer of the benevolent peacemaker narrative has only begun to be challenged.”[65] We must further challenge it and block its ability to reproduce through us.

Furthermore, settler-colonial hegemony’s perceived inevitability and totality, combined with pervasive myths, actively deny the harms against Indigenous peoples. This turns into a form of gaslighting where Indigenous peoples

are told that their lived experiences are not valid nor truthful. “If Canada is supposed to be ‘multicultural’, ‘accepting’, and ‘peaceful,’” the gaslighting goes, “how could it possibly commit institutional violence against Indigenous peoples?” These myths are so unquestioned and societally ingrained that they are more believable than actual people’s lives. The debate around genocide in Canadian media is ample evidence of this dynamic. Instead of acknowledge that an independent group of experts spent countless hours of effort and re-traumatization to develop a substantial, well articulated claim of genocide,[66] 7 mainstream media questioned its validity through debate by its own experts who did not have the same lived experiences.[67] In practice, therefore, mainstream media took ownership of the term and compared it to western notions and experience of genocide rather than trust Indigenous judgement, further asserting a settler-colonial superstructure. This “debate” is particularly disappointing as it demonstrated the Canadian public’s reluctance to listen or understand the lived experiences of Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people. It further reinforced the Inquiry’s claims of a fundamental misunderstanding of the severity of the issues at hand. Additionally, it is indicative of a larger unwillingness to act. Indeed, the promotion of debate rather than action on what should already be a settled non-partisan issue is indicative of larger systemic political apathy that also contributes to an overall “institutional lack of will.”[68] Thus, in effect, the collective struggles of Indigenous peoples in Canada are consistently denied.

[63] Ariella Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (Verso Books, 2019).

[64] Azoulay, 57.

[65] Jeff Corntassel and Christine Bird, ‘Canada: Portrait of a Serial Killer’, in *Surviving Canada: Indigenous Peoples Celebrate 150 Years of Betrayal*, ed. Kiera Ladner and Myra Tait (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2017), 205.

[66] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, ‘A Legal Analysis of Genocide’.

[67] Jorge Barrera, ‘Former Harper-Era Minister Doubles down on Calling MMIWG Inquiry Report “Propagandist”’, CBC, 2 June 2019; Erna Paris, ‘The Report on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women Was Searing and Important, Marred Only by Its Inaccurate Genocide Charge’, *The Globe and Mail*, 4 June 2019.

[68] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, 1a:167.

Because the myths have more power than actual experiences, many Canadians are led to believe the problem is far less than it is, and there is no will for change.

Settler Complicity

We are deeply tied into the processes of settler-colonialism. Paying taxes that support the police and carceral system, voting for politicians that represent us by invading sovereign territory,[69] participating in the housing market, consuming problematic media representation of Indigenous peoples and their struggles, saving money in a bank, these are all tied to the perpetuation of violence. It is insufficient, however, to just not do these things. Because settler-colonial hegemony is total, there is no simple way to “opt-out” or “not participate.” As it stands, to be Canadian is to be a part of a system that is actively committing genocide against Indigenous peoples. This is difficult to accept, and while there are certainly good and bad aspects to Canadian life, we cannot pick and choose the good over the bad and focus on that, because it obscures the larger structures at play. We must accept Canada for all it is, and our role within it. Attempts by settlers to be “one of the good ones,” or to feel virtuous because they are not overtly racist, or to avoid contributing by not paying taxes, or having made the “right vote” does nothing to grapple with the larger

structures of oppression that in turn enable violence. Tuck and Yang refer to this type of settler denial as “moves to innocence.”[70] These moves are inadvertently selfish as they are “those strategies or positionings that attempt to relieve the settler of feelings of guilt or responsibility without giving up land or power or privilege, without having to change much at all. In fact, settler scholars may gain professional kudos or a boost in their reputations for being so sensitive or self-aware. Yet settler moves to innocence are hollow, they only serve the settler.”[71] Thus, it is essential for us to see our complicity with settler-colonial violence, especially ongoing genocide. This is not to pass conviction, but rather show our collective responsibility. We must understand our role in settler-colonialism and decide how we can build a better world together. Indeed, as Ariella Azoulay contends, “part of being a citizen in a colonial power is to understand your role as a perpetrator.”[72] Even though the vast majority of Canadians do not directly participate in colonial violence and would likely never willingly do so, by being a citizen of a nation that was born from – and continues to thrive on – colonial violence, we are complicit in that violence by permitting these processes to remain unhindered.

Furthermore, understanding complicity goes beyond empathy and even solidarity. While empathy can be a major part of understanding, there are variable types of empathetic engagement. Importantly, “the sympathetic humanitarian eye is no less a product of deeply held colonialist values, and

[69] ‘What’s Really Illegal? The Defence of Unceded Wet’suwet’en Territory or Provincial Permits for Coastal GasLink Pipeline? | Georgia Straight Vancouver’s News & Entertainment Weekly’, <https://www.straight.com/news/1361256/whats-really-illegal-defence-unceded-wetsuweten-territory-or-provincial-permits-coastal>; ‘War of Words: Experts Say the Wet’suwet’en Actions Are Being Mangled with Loaded Vocabulary | The Star’, <https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2020/02/15/war-of-words-experts-say-the-wetsuweten-actions-are-being-mangled-with-loaded-vocabulary.html>.

[70] Tuck and Yang, ‘Decolonization Is Not a Metaphor’, 10.

[71] Tuck and Yang, 10.

[72] Azoulay, *Potential History*, 50.

no less authoritative in the mastery of its object than the surveying and policing eye.”[73]. Unless sympathy towards the suffering of Indigenous peoples is accompanied by an actual understanding of the structures that enable violence and a strategy to begin to contend with them, hegemony will continue its reproduction. Paulette Regan describes this kind of sympathy as *colonial empathy*. She argues that it buttresses a problematic portrayal of victimhood by hearing problems but not acting or responding in any effective way.[74]

Empathy alone, therefore, is not enough. Rather, complicity helps us understand how we are bound in relationship with Indigenous peoples.

Feeling bad or remorseful will not change anything. Indeed, a network of understanding is a method of evaluating relationships without pity, fear, or shame. Feeling guilty can be illustrative, but it is not the goal; use understanding as a reason for action, not immobilization.

Understanding starts with the self. As Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer and artist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson states: “we do not need the help of Canadians. We need Canadians to help themselves, to learn to struggle and to understand that their great country of Canada has been and is a death dance for Indigenous peoples. They must learn to stop themselves from plundering the land and the climate and using Indigenous

peoples’ bodies to fuel their economy, and to find a way of living in the world that is not based on violence and exploitation.”[75]The onus, therefore, is on settler-Canadians to change themselves, their identity, and their relationship to the land rather than the situations of Indigenous peoples directly. There is not an “Indian problem” but a settler-colonialism problem.[76] As discussed above, historical attempts by Canadian governments to *help* Indigenous peoples were really assimilation or annihilation wrapped up in the guise of aid. They helped hegemony instead. Thus, helping Indigenous peoples is the wrong approach, as they do not need help being subsumed under the settler-colonial fold. Rather, those who live as citizens of a country that perpetuates settler-colonialism need to help their nation rethink itself. Rather than changing or aiding Indigenous peoples, it is much more productive and helpful to effectively understand complicity in colonial violence and what can be done to oppose or dismantle it.

[73] David Spurr, *The Rhetoric of Empire: Colonial Discourse in Journalism, Travel Writing, and Imperial Administration*, Post-Contemporary Interventions (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 20.

[74] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 45–56.

[75] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 101.

[76] Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*.

A Better Relationship

What must happen next? What does dismantling look like? What do we have to build? These are important questions to consider in a network of understanding, and Indigenous peoples have been asking, and acting upon, these questions since before confederation. This is not a new conversation, but it is one that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples must have together. Importantly, we are always in relationship and must work to positively strengthen this bond. Lowman and Barker, as settlers themselves, draw heavily from Indigenous knowledges to describe to concept of *relationship* in their book *Settler*. As they describe, by being present on what is now known as Canada, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are always in relationship with each other and the land.[77] By better understanding this inherent relationship and turning it into an expressly positive one, the grip of hegemony can start to release.[78] By understanding our interactions as relationships, we can further understand how we can have effects on one another simply by being a part of larger processes. Importantly, the fact that we are “always in relationship” must take centre stage. [79] These relationships can be both good and bad, and by identifying them, and where and how they go wrong, it becomes possible to start to replace bad relationships with good ones. This is critical because there is no “opting-out” of

relationship or cutting ties. [80] We must be aware of the ways in which we relate to each other and the earth if any kind of mutually supportive community is to persist. For Tsalagis (Cherokees), there is the word *digadatsele’i*, which means “we belong to each other.”[81] Although structures of oppression like colonialism and imperialism seek to compartmentalize the world for easy consumption and domination,[82] this is a harmful way to see the world.

Thus, dismantling settler-colonial hegemony requires recognizing our relationships and ensuring that they are positive for everyone.

Oppression must be undone. This is what it means to uphold dignity. This is what it means to properly understand. This is what it means to both dismantle and rebuild. Indeed, there is a specific call for justice from the Final Report based on this. Section 15.7 states:

Create time and space for relationships based on respect as human beings, supporting and embracing differences with kindness, love, and respect. Learn about Indigenous principles of relationship specific to those Nations or communities in your local area and work and put them into practice in all of your relationships with Indigenous Peoples.[83]

[77] Lowman and Barker, *Settler*, 115.

[78] Lowman and Barker, 117.

[79] Lowman and Barker, 116.

[80] Lowman and Barker, 118.

[81] Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Corntassel, ‘Unsettling Settler Colonialism’, 3.

[82] Edward W. Said, *Orientalism*, 1st Vintage Books ed (New York: Vintage Books, 1979).

[83] National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, *Reclaiming Power and Place*, 2019, 1b:199.

The path forward must be based in positive relationships, and not just between individuals, but between people and the land, the state, and the structures within it. This is not a simple task, but it is a necessary one.

There are ways, however, in which this kind of pursuit can backfire. Understanding relationships also requires understanding the power of settler-colonial hegemony in co-opting them. This is referred to as the *politics of recognition*. Drawing from Glen Coulthard and Leanne Simpson, the Politics of Recognition is a deeply problematic method of attempted reconciliation that often transforms into assimilation.[84] It requires that for any conciliatory stance to be reached, Indigenous peoples must receive *permission* from Canadian governments to have their own rights, jurisdiction, or culture. While an agreement can be found, it only serves to “entrench settler colonial power,”[85] and therefore the legitimacy of Canadian settler-colonialism. A cycle is thereby established where Indigenous “nationhood” is dependant on the same institutions that originally suppressed it. In the words of Audre Lourde, “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.”[86] Thus, the politics of recognition is unable to bring sufficient *liberation* in the form of alternatives to what is colonial. Instead, it appeals to settler-colonial hegemony’s control of Canadian identity. This in turn inevitably leads to assimilation. When even those who are still facing genocide at the hands of Canadian institutions are “limited to choosing lives within the settler colonial system of Canada,”[87]

the state functions through absorption. The Indian Act, Residential Schools, the 60s Scoop, the White Paper, and even some acts of “reconciliation” were attempts to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the colonial fold, without sacrificing any part of the colonizer. Thus, while they were separate events, they all stemmed from – and consequently reinforced – an exclusively settler-colonial Canadian identity. As Anishinaabe legal scholar and jurist John Borrows argues, “reconciliation, practiced in context, requires that Indigenous peoples reconcile themselves to colonialism.”[88] This cannot be the basis for a healthy relationship because it prioritizes the survival of settler-colonialism over Indigenous peoples, which, as discussed, attempts to destroy all alternatives.

Importantly, however, this is not to say that there is no room for cooperation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples or even between Indigenous peoples and Canadian governments. Rather, it is to highlight the ways in which systems of oppression can reproduce themselves within potential solutions. It is vital, however, to understand where rejecting the Politics of Recognition can become limiting. Sheryl Lightfoot, an Anishinaabe citizen of the Lake Superior Band of Ojibwe, argues that this strategy can lead to “pessimism traps” that, “unnecessarily limit [Indigenous] capacity to contribute to improved Indigenous-state relationships.”[89] This imposed limitation can hinder the possibilities for collaboration and radical imagination of future possibilities of a world beyond settler-colonialism.

[84] Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*; Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*.

[85] Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 176.

[86] Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches*, The Crossing Press Feminist Series (Trumansburg, NY: Crossing Press, 1984), 110.

[87] Lowman and Barker, *Settler*, 39.

[88] Michael Coyle and John Borrows, eds., *The Right Relationship: Reimagining the Implementation of Historical Treaties* (Toronto; Buffalo; London: University of Toronto Press, 2017), 20.

[89] Sheryl Lightfoot, ‘The Pessimism Traps of Indigenous Resurgence’, 2020, 157, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-21780-8_10.

[90] Lightfoot, 160–63.

Such pessimism, Lightfoot contends, fails to recognize the incredibly important work that many Indigenous nations have done in collaboration with the state, or international agreements such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP).[90] This kind of thinking can lead to its own kind of exclusionary dichotomy.

Thus, it is important to reject the politics of recognition from settler-colonialism, but not necessarily Canada as a whole. Indeed, while “any compromise with colonialism causes [Indigenous peoples] to be compromised by colonialism,”[91] settler-colonialism is not all that Canada can be. It is critical to understand that there is the possibility of a positive nation-to-nation relationship outside the confines of settler-colonial hegemony. Thus, although it is true now that “stark power differentials... subordinate Indigenous peoples in Canada,”[92] a relationship must be created where this statement becomes false. Canada ought to not have the power to subordinate Indigenous peoples.

The foundations for the right relationship can be found at the birthplace of Canadian settler-colonial hegemony. Indeed, while genocide comes from the very roots of Canadian identity, there is more there. As John Borrows states,

“[t]he truth is that Canada’s formation does not just rest on racism, force, and discrimination. Canada is also rooted in doctrines of persuasion, reason, peace, friendship, and respect.” [93]

Specifically, the original treaty relationship contains the seeds for a relationship that is not based on exploitation. There is a wide and diverse history of treaties, but broadly speaking, they are “compacts between nations” that set out rules for the sharing of land and common rights for all.[94] Importantly, treaties were only made with certain Indigenous nations and thus this relationship is not universal, but it can provide the framework to build something new, based on something old. Furthermore, the treaties are legally enshrined in the Canadian constitution. Section 35 of the *Constitution Act of 1982* states that, “the existing aboriginal and treaty rights of the aboriginal peoples of Canada are hereby recognized and affirmed.” Not only is this a major element of Canadian history, but it is at its legal core.

There are some histories which contend that the treaties were a way for Europeans to deceive and steal land from unwitting Indigenous nations. While it is true that the treaty relationships have been later justified as a capitulation of land and Canada has consistently violated any agreements made, [95] it is in bad faith to view Indigenous signatories as unwitting or tricked. Rather, the treaties were made with a clear understanding, based on generations of political practices, of what the relationship between settlers and Indigenous peoples ought to be. Gina Starblanket, a Cree/Saulteaux member of the Star Blanket Cree Nation in Treaty 4 territory, and Dallas Hunt, a Cree member of the Wapesevisipi (Swan River First Nation) in Treaty 8 territory, posit a renewed understanding of the numbered treaties. Specifically, that they were

[91] Coyle and Borrows, *The Right Relationship*, 20.

[92] Coyle and Borrows, 32–33.

[93] Coyle and Borrows, 19.

[94] Coyle and Borrows, 21.

[95] Coyle and Borrows, 20–21.

intended to be an agreement in which, “Indigenous people would agree to share the lands with settler populations, entering into what Indigenous Elders describe as a ‘mutual life-giving relationship.’”[96] The treaties contain the necessity of building un-exploitative relationships not just between peoples, but between the land and all living things. They are “living, breathing agreements”[97] that persist now and perpetually into the future. Indeed, for Starblanket and Hunt, this is reflected, “[i]n the Cree term *miyo-wicêhtowin*, described by Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan as reflecting the imperative to maintain good or positive relations with all our relatives, now and into the future.”[98] Although the original relationship has been betrayed, treaties can help us imagine what the future can be. If we understand how settler-colonial hegemony persists and harms and learn to identify the ways in which structures prop it up and conceal it, we can also understand the possibilities that can come after. As Nick Estes, citizen of the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, states, we can “imagine a future free from settler colonialism.”[99] Treaties, alongside Indigenous jurisprudence, can provide the roadmap. “Treaty can help us re-imagine new and healthy forms of relationships, new possibilities.”[100] Treaties ought to not be exclusively “Canadian” to provide a framework either. The Two Row Wampum treaty, made between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Dutch in the 17th century, was an agreement to live in perpetual, and equal, peace and friendship. [101]

The late Indigenous leader Arthur Manuel used Haudenosaunee imagery from this treaty when he stated that, “Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples should be travelling in two canoes on the river together, but each moving under their own power and in control of their own direction.”[102] Thus, the path for a better relationship is visible and open, we just have to travel it together.

[96] Gina Starblanket and Dallas Hunt, ‘COVID-19, The Numbered Treaties & The Politics of Life’ (Yellowhead Institute, June 2020), 12.

[97] Starblanket and Hunt, 15.

[98] Starblanket and Hunt, 15.

[99] Nick Estes, *Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the Long Tradition of Indigenous Resistance* (London; New York: Verso, 2019), 216.

[100] Starblanket and Hunt, ‘COVID-19, The Numbered Treaties & The Politics of Life’, 17.

[101] ‘Two Row Wampum - Guswentá’, Onondaga Nation, 22 February 2014, <https://www.onondaganation.org/culture/wampum/two-row-wampum-belt-guswentá/>.

[102] Arthur Manuel and Ronald M. Derrickson, *Unsettling Canada: A National Wake-up Call* (Toronto: Between the Lines, 2015), 226.

Conclusion

A *network of understanding* is important to implement if institutions like Mosaic want to try and address the Calls for Justice of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. Although the Canadian government must take significant strides towards fulfilling the Calls, it is everyday Canadians that must learn to – at the basest level – be unsettled and angered by the fact that their country perpetuates genocide. Canada is settler-colonial, and it is perpetuating genocide. Canada is still on the path to destroy thousands of Indigenous lives from now into the future.

This, however, is not the only path. This is not all Canada can be.

The original treaty relationship of nation-to-nation collaboration based on mutual respect and *dignity* for each other and the rest of the living world provides a possible alternative. Although successive Canadian governments have opted to turn their backs on this path and betray this relationship, it still exists in our foundation. We have a blueprint for what we must dismantle, and what we must build. This can only be done if settlers and settler organizations (like the Mosaic Institute) do the work to learn, to identify structures and institutions, and to educate and motivate others. They must build a network of understanding. It is an intertwined process of learning, understanding, dismantling, and building. Indeed, “the substantive recognition of Indigenous governance and legal orders also requires a dismantling of other, related forms of domination.” [103]

We must seek out relationships of oppression and replace them with relationships of genuine care.

Prioritize Indigenous voices, understand the history of this country, see the other nations it overwhelms and destroys, read the Final Report, and imagine a better future.

The Canada that we can all create together may look nothing like Canada now, and it may not be Canada at all, but it will be a place for the better. We can – and must – make it happen.

[103] Snelgrove, Dhamoon, and Cornassel, ‘Unsettling Settler Colonialism’, 22.

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