

THUNDERBIRD EMBRACING INDIGENOUS VOICES OF RESISTANCE

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Abstract

“Indigenous people have not surrendered to the colonial structures embedded within the current government” (Karim).

For over four centuries, Indigenous identities, stories, and lifestyles were silenced due to aggressive actions of settler colonialism. Initially, this was accomplished through maltreatment and exploitation of Indigenous individuals and communities. Results included oppression and attacks on Indigenous sovereignty.

Indigenous artists and writers reveal some of the multifaceted humiliations and challenges experienced by Indigenous Peoples. Their creative work embodies individual statements, collective experiences and oftentimes both. Understanding the often overt and sometimes subliminal messages contained within requires an appreciation of events occurring into present times.

This thesis will discuss some of the significant impacts of settler colonialism. Reclaiming Indigenous heritage and spirituality are important resistance themes in Indigenous art and writing. There is an ambitious attempt to regain their missing cultural disruption and protect their descendants from symbolically sliding further into a cultural erasure.

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Legendary Thunderbird Image



Fig. 1. Tony Hunt Jr, *Thunderbird and Whale*, 2001.

Introduction

Role models influence and strengthen identity. Indigenous elders are important role models keeping traditions alive and relevant. Unfortunately, many former children either did not return from federal government required attendance at residential schools or were traumatized and forever changed from experiences at these institutions. Due to a reduction in elders, Indigenous youth encounter significant challenges identifying with positive traditional role models. This proves a hinderance for their academic and career successes. Some of the relatable factors include systemic barriers, limited representation in educational curriculums and professional identification, and ongoing impacts of historical events and trauma (Head).

Some Indigenous artists, including Alex Janvier, Christi Belcourt and Kent Monkman, and numerous writers of children's stories and a collection of resistance authors, take responsibility to express Indigeneity through purpose created multimedia artwork and stories. Indigenous artists and writers frequently depict the enduring impacts of settler colonialism, using their talents as a form of resistance. Through creative endeavours, they document the historical and ongoing displacement, marginalization, and oppression of Indigenous individuals and communities. Their work challenges dominant settler colonialism narratives and establishes and reinforcing Indigenous resilience. Simultaneously, their talents serve as tools for cultural survival, reclamation of traditions, and aversion to further assimilation. Janvier, Belcourt and Monkman have been the focus of special Indigenous exhibits at the McMichael Gallery, Kleinburg, Ontario. Also noteworthy is a special exhibit by residential school survivor and artist Robert Houle whose twenty-four drawings in medium of oil stick on paper series depicts life within The Sandy Bay Residential School Series, 2009 ("Robert Houle").

Indigenous voices are deconstructing the damage caused by Eurocentric concepts. Some of this is disinformation, purposeful misrepresentation, and some is misinformation, not having all the facts. Disinformation and misinformation have existed for decades and centuries.

Consciously rejecting what has been accepted as a fact or truth is known as resistance. This encompasses the act of disproving established norms with new truths. In this context, resistance is reclaiming what was stolen—stories, languages, lifestyles and cultures. Cree Louise Halfe, *Listen to the Bones*, in *Blue Marrow* discusses her Indigenous heritage. In her free-style poetry, Halfe tells stories of the ancestors.

“I bring to you
These Voices I will not name. Voices
Filled with bird calls, snorting buffalo,
Kicking bears, mountain goats.
I do not know who speaks (Battiste).

When Indigenous history has been erased, banned from speaking native languages, disallowed traditions, simply telling these stories becomes an act of defiance. This is the core of resistance. In an environment that attempted to remove Indigeneity, every word spoken and unspoken rebel previous attempts of ethnic cleansing, genocide and forced assimilation.

For many Indigenous artists and writers, creativity is a means of navigating the deep scars left by settler colonialism. Some create from a place of personal experience, while others engage in collective storytelling that reflects broader political and cultural struggles. This thesis examines Indigenous art and writing as progressive acts of resistance, interrogating how these works address repressed and suppressed memories, generational trauma, and the ongoing struggle for recognition and justice. Personally, this is important because truth needs to reign above mainstream propaganda.

Not all Indigenous artists and writers are professional creatives; many are individuals who felt compelled to share their experiences after years, or even decades, of silence. Others are recognized as resistance artists and writers, using their platforms to directly challenge the erasure of Indigenous histories. These include artists Kent Monkman, Alex Janvier and others and writers such as Mary Brave Bird and Louise Erdrich. Visual art also plays a crucial role in this reclamation, as paintings, carvings, and mixed-media works serve as permanent records of

Indigenous perspectives. Indigenous artists have long struggled for recognition, not only as creators but as truth-tellers whose work confronts settler colonialism's past and its remnants into the present.

Approximately 65 percent of the population are visual learners (Ralph). Indigenous art is time fluid, flowing between past, present and future to preserve culture and identity. The expression, seeing is believing, also applies to education and understanding through art. When non-Indigenous people view the art, there can be belief that the representation is true. This can facilitate breaking down misconceptions and colonial barriers of prejudice. For the Indigenous artist, this interest can foster a deepening sense of self-value and agency, faith in one's ability and permission to be genuine to self. "(T)here is a growing movement towards inclusion, where Indigenous artists, writers...reclaim their real stories and contribute to the path of truth and reconciliation in Canada (Mantiri).

For many Indigenous artists and writers, creativity is a means of navigating the implications experienced due to settler colonialism. Some can create from a place of personal experience, while others engage in collective storytelling that reflects broader political and cultural struggles using allegories and metaphors. Indigenous art and writing represent acts of self-awareness, resistance, and interrogating how these expressive forms address repressed and suppressed memories, generational trauma, and their ongoing struggle for recognition and justice.

This thesis initiates a turning point—a discussion where Indigenous peoples reclaim their voices and assert their truths. Through literature, film, art, and activism, Indigenous storytellers are not just reclaiming history, they are shaping new horizons of their futures. Their work represents powerful assertions of Indigenous rights, a refusal to be written out of history, and a demand for social and political justice. Settler colonialism may seem to be an antiquated structure, but Indigenous resistance is an ensuing force that cannot and will not be silenced and

where the realization of different truths shall prevail. Too long Eurocentric truth has been the mainstay. Through my master's studies in Interdisciplinary Studies at York University, I received training as an activist scholar. The courses taken guided me towards a more critical understanding of how deeply Eurocentrism is embedded within academic frameworks, societal structures, and systems of knowledge. I realized Eurocentrism is not a historical artifact, but a systemic issue establishing power dynamics and simultaneously obscuring the contributions of non-Eurocentrism. I was motivated towards this work to deconstruct the damage inflicted by Eurocentrism and to challenge its dominance, question its assumptions, and contribute to a more inclusive knowledge. This aligns with my broader ambitions engaging in research critiques to knowledges that have been historically disrupted, suppressed and temporarily silenced. Ultimately, I want to be part of meaningful change contributing to a more equitable environment and world.

This thesis explores how Indigenous artists and writers articulate resistance and assert presence through their creative works (Do 938). Drawing on Patrick Wolfe's theory of settler colonialism as an ongoing structure—rather than a concluded historical event—this project frames settler colonialism as a persistent force shaping Indigenous lives, lands, and relations. Wolfe defines settler colonialism through the logic of elimination: a structure designed to remove Indigenous presence to secure settler access to land and territory. This theoretical foundation is expanded through the work of Indigenous scholars such as Tiara Na'puti, la paperson, and other foundational thinkers who emphasize the centrality of land, story, and sovereignty.

This research also engages Indigenous scholar Eve Tuck's framework of desire-based research, which resists narratives that depict Indigenous communities solely through trauma. Instead, desire-based research foregrounds Indigenous presence, agency, and complexity. It affirms that Indigenous peoples and nations are not merely surviving settler colonialism, but

actively envisioning and creating alternative futures. This means addressing how artistic expression embodies resistance.

At the heart of this inquiry is the concept of resistance—understood not only as opposition to oppressive systems, but also as everyday acts of creation, renewal, and refusal that sustain Indigenous life. Resistance here includes the reassertion of Indigenous worldviews, the reclamation of narrative authority, and the intentional creation of space for Indigenous presence and futures. Resistance creates new role models.

To explore these themes, this thesis adopts story-work as its methodological framework. Developed by Jo-Ann Archibald, story-work affirms Indigenous stories as sources of knowledge, ethics, and teaching. It emphasizes relational accountability, emotional and spiritual engagement, and the significance of story as both method and content. Story-work aligns with wholistic epistemologies, recognizing the interconnectedness of mind, body, emotion, and spirit. Applying this approach meant engaging with each creative work with respect, humility, and attentiveness to its teachings, context, and relational meaning.

This project examines artworks by contemporary Indigenous artists including Kent Monkman, Christie Belcourt, Alex Janvier, Robert Houle and Norval Morrisseau. These artists and their creative works were selected for their engagement with themes of land, identity, memory, and resistance.

Story-work guided the analytical process. I examined how these artworks tell stories—through form, symbol, silence, repetition, or rupture—and what relational teachings they convey. Core principles such as respect, responsibility, and reciprocity informed this analysis. Some findings confirmed expectations; others were surprising, unsettling, or deeply moving, offering new ways of understanding resistance and Indigenous presence.

Before engaging the artworks in depth, the thesis provides historical and conceptual grounding. This includes context on settler colonialism, Indigenous epistemologies, and the key

terms and theoretical frameworks that shape the analysis. The research methods used in this study juxtapose academic viewpoints with the interpretive art and writing of Indigenous artists and authors. Several of the artists and authors selected for this study represents desire-based approaches. The juxtaposition of the academic and non-academic validate historical and ongoing situations and ethical considerations. This thesis will also reference Indigenous Wholistic Theory, importance of resistance art and writing, significance of storytelling and story-work, build on viewpoints of academics and historians including Patrick Wolfe, Eve Tuck, Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Indigenous professors. Wolfe's analysis is echoed through academic scholars, including David McNab, Bonita Lawrence and Emma LaRocque each sharing opinions on historic events and resulting outcomes for Indigenous Nations.

The role of storytelling, stories, and story-work in resisting settler colonialism and supporting decolonization contributes to reclaiming identity, rebuilding knowledge systems, and reasserting sovereignty over history, land, and future.

Indigenous artist Norval Morrisseau represents the transformative power of the Thunder Bird. The Thunderbird was chosen for this thesis as it represents the most powerful of all Indigenous spirits. This mythical figure embodies the trilogy of power, protection, and strength. This represents the resiliency of Indigenous individuals. The Thunderbird is a significant Indigenous role model (Boas).

For these messages to resonate some explanation of terminology is required. When using the term *Indigenous* and referring to *Indigenous individuals and communities*, it is essential to recognize that this does not imply a homogenous group. Indigenous individuals and Nations are diverse, with distinct cultures, histories, and experiences of resistance to settler colonialism.

The term Indigenous is used throughout this thesis, unless quoted sources use a different term, such as Native or Indians. Indigenous is an inclusive term representing all

peoples considered original to North America prior to European settler colonization. Indigenous is defined by the United Nations (United Nations). These original peoples have faced ongoing displacement, forced assimilation, and resistance efforts in response to aggressive settler colonial expansion.

The lowercase native is used within this thesis to represent where people are from, or prior originated. People are native to the place (town, city, country) they were born. This is often unrelated to ethnicity. By contrast, Indigenous encompasses the broadest and most politically significant categorization, particularly within the context of settler colonialism and Indigenous resistance. The term reflects not only a shared experience of dispossession but also the ongoing struggle for self-determination.

Indigenous art and writing use direct and indirect messaging. Allegories use symbolic characters, representative events, and illustrative settings to convey a larger idea. Ben Sures' *The Boy Who Walked Backwards* is a representative allegory.

"It's the story of a boy who successfully escaped from residential school, and it is a rare story of a residential school survivor that comes with at least a partially happy ending – though I say "partially" because we're not told what happened to the children who didn't walk backwards through the snow" (Kitching).

Louise Elbridge's *The Blue Jays Dance* is a metaphor linking one unrelated thing to another explaining similarities. "Unpredictable, unpretentious, unforgettable, *The Blue Jay's Dance* takes the mundane routines of everyday life and renders them marvelous." (Birchbark Books) Allegories and metaphors are used throughout Indigenous art and writing.

Settler colonialism is used as a broad term to cover the conquest of Indigenous individuals and Nations. Historian Patrick Wolfe describes settler colonialism as a system for settler expropriation of lands and resources, rather than an historical event. This involves the structural removal of Indigenous People from traditional lands. Many techniques were used from

treaties to violence and aggression. Some argue that settler colonialism is not about racism, rather it has roots in appropriating (stealing) Indigenous land. This is characterized as a systematic land grab sponsored by the Eurocentric governments.

Analysis of the Indian Act is outside the scope of this thesis. However, the Indian Act is mentioned within this thesis due to its relevance with settler colonialism. The Indian Act is a Canadian federal law passed in 1876 governing "status Indians," their bands, and the reserve system. The original intention of the Indian Act was to assimilate Indigenous peoples into mainstream Canadian society. As a result, it has been amended multiple times. The Indian Act defines who is considered a "status Indian," passed through the male bloodline, manages reserve lands, ownership rights of the resources under the reserves, and details the relationship between the federal government and First Nations communities (Indian Act). The Indian Act is incredibly complex in its application. There are several exclusions including Metis, Inuit and Indigenous women who are excluded when they marry outside the Indigenous bloodline. The Indian Act is a form of racism (McNab, *"Failure"* 1).

Coinciding with a discussion on the spirituality of select Indigenous artists and writers, there should be an appreciation beyond settler colonization of what transpired with the European invasion of Turtle Island. Although this thesis will attempt to begin a discussion, due to the breadth of this topic, this interpretive research initiative cannot be inclusive of all factors. However, settler colonialism did not consider that Indigenous groups had civilizing laws and influences. This is because Eurocentric thinking did not consider different viewpoints and therefore, regarded them as savages (Berenstain 2).

The volume of information on this topic is expansive. This report focuses on selected and important aspects. A roadmap of the contents of this thesis includes the following. Chapter 1 Thunderbird discusses the significance of this legendary symbol. Indigenous culture exists through interwoven time, the intertwining of past, present and future. Chapter 2 Indigenous

Legacy introduces the impacts of settler colonialism. European expansion was primarily about land dominance in North America. Indigenous People were an obstacle in transforming Turtle Island into a representation of European values. Indigenous People were marginalized through exploitive treaties and forced assimilation, including residential schools. This chapter is intended to briefly explain some of the background lasting into current times. This knowledge is foundational as a fact check. Chapter 3 Impacts of Settler Colonialism and Canada Day focuses on the controversy that Canada Day may not be celebratory for Indigenous Peoples. Select Indigenous artists including Kent Monkman, Alex Janvier and others are discussed because Indigenous art represents powerful interpretations of truth. Chapter 4 Indigenous Role Models and Stories About Residential Schools introduces the void and importance of Indigenous role models for Indigenous youth. Stories are shared from residential school survivors unlocking repressed childhood memories. Sharing these stories is often painful for the victim. These stories provide a capsule of what happened and a freeing of the past painfulness. Chapter 5: Appreciating Indigenous Identity – Resistance Writers focuses on reclaiming identity. Tom Wilson is delighted at leaning his truth and Indigenous roots. Select resistance authors express outrage of their personal and collective plights concerning losses and stolen values. The importance of spiritual guidance and spirit memories are explored where the past and future are melded with the present as ancestral guidance. Chapter 10 Voices Through Videos includes videos created to accompany this thesis from numerous galleries exhibits and visits. These were created to visually share the messages through art. Also included are video interviews with Dr. T. Patrick Carrabré, Métis composer and educator, providing insights into the intersections of settler colonialism, Indigenous resistance, and artistic expression through music.

Chapter 1: Thunderbird



Fig. 2. Quinn Hopkins, 2023.

Toronto-based Indigenous artist Quinn Hopkins used art to connect with his Anishinaabe heritage. One of his images is the stylized Thunderbird. "I would come home and feel disconnected, so I would paint and it would make me feel a connection again" (Dart).

Through research for this thesis, inclusion of an image to compliment the impact of Indigenous artists and writers became beneficial, perhaps even necessary to set their experiences apart from Eurocentricity. The Thunderbird's connection to Indigeneity became threatened as a metaphoric blanket where settler colonialism attempted to smother into extinction Indigenous values and culture.

Chief Joseph mentions the time when the traditional story of the Thunderbird occurred was "a long time ago – before this time in which we measure" (First Nations Education Steering Committee and First Nations Schools Association 85). There are archaeological sites with renderings of Thunderbirds from 4,000 years ago. The origin of the Thunderbird remains

unknown. Archaeological researchers estimate myths and legends of the Thunderbird may originate with a real bird that coexisted with humans before becoming extinct. Thunderbirds are thought to be large birds like eagles. The name is based on the thunderous noise of its flapping wings.

Based on its might, the Thunderbird represents one of the most powerful of all Indigenous spirits. This mythical figure embodies the trilogy of power, protection, and strength. According to Indigenous legend, the Thunderbird can transform into a human form by removing its mask-like feathers (Palm's Trading Company).

The Thunderbird watches over Turtle Island. Containing magical powers, it can cause rain and irrigation for crops and natural vegetation. Since lightning originates from the Thunderbird's beak and the sound of thunder from movement of its wings the Thunderbird is associated with weather. The symbolic and legendary Thunderbird is respected throughout many North American Indigenous communities. It is often represented in artforms, storytelling, short stories, and poems.

The Thunderbird is chosen as the image for this thesis due to its transformational qualities and characteristics, its resiliency and endurance, and its universality within Indigenous communities across Canada and parts of the United States including Algonquian, Ojibwe, Menominee, Siouan, Ho-Chunk, Arikara (Lenik). It also represents the vital connection of Indigenous Peoples to the natural world through spirit memories, visions, dreams, and feelings of connection to the spirit world ancestors. Understanding the significance of the Thunderbird's connection to Indigenous ways of knowing is significant to generational connectiveness to ancestors and nature.

The image of the Thunderbird is prevalent in Indigenous art and stories throughout several past centuries. Although historians and anthropologists cannot pinpoint the timeline for the origin of the Thunderbird, there is consistency with its physical description and mythical

imagery throughout Indigenous communities from coast to coast to coast. There are subtle differences within the consistency of this mythology, however, the similarities guide a connection amongst Indigenous Peoples. Thunderbirds are environmentalists punishing humans breaking moral rules disrespecting the physical realm. "Ethnographer George Amos Dorsey transcribed a tale from the Arikaras with the title *The Boy who befriended the Thunderbirds and the Serpent*: a boy named Antelope-Carrier finds a nest with four young thunderbirds; their mother comes and tells the human boy that a two-headed Serpent comes out of the lake to eat the young" (Dorsey).

The Thunderbird factors into the "Indigenous ways of knowing" through representative storytelling relating to ancestral relationships with wholistic approaches to the land and respect for all living things. Indigenous knowledge transcends time existing simultaneously in past, present and future shared through interconnected oral stories, traditions and community practices. Elders play a significant role in sharing mythologies, including the relevance of the Thunderbird.

There are many Indigenous stories about Thunderbirds. These are originally told through oral traditions. To preserve these stories, many are being written down and captured in permanence. Indigenous oral stories are atmospheric involving the teller and the listener. Some of this impact is lost in written format. However, the story is preserved. The stories can be shared more broadly. Indigenous People recognize their knowledge will be lost if it is not captured for future generations. This effort corresponds to Bill C-29 (2024) protecting Indigenous culture.

The representation of the Thunderbird reflects Indigenous essence. This helps to appreciate restoration of Indigenous sovereignty on Turtle Island. What happened due to settler colonization needs to be explained. The recovery process for Indigenous Peoples will take time to course correct. However, interestingly, the thunderbird is a symbol that many Indigenous

people refuse to give up and abandon. In some Indigenous communities, the Thunderbird may be fused with Christian imagery in religious art. This fusion reflects Indigenous expressions of faith and resistance within a Christian context. During a time when missionaries promoted Christianity. "Indigenous Christians often felt compelled to abandon their culture as a survival strategy. However, the Thunderbird was an indigenous symbol that some refused to discard. The Thunderbird is ubiquitous in the material intersections between Christianity and Indigenous faith traditions" (Milliner 2). Indigenous Christianity can best be perceived when understood as a form of creative resistance (Milliner 1-3). The thunderbird is a survival symbol and one that adapts to new paradigms.

Chapter 2: Indigenous Legacy

Settler colonialism displaced the Indigenous population and replaced it with a new Eurocentric diaspora of settler occupants. Settler colonialism did not recognize the uniqueness of Indigenous communities as differing from Eurocentric conventions and therefore believed Indigenous groups were void of civilizing laws. This is based on Eurocentric thinking and not considering the possibilities of other viewpoints and perspectives. Therefore, settler colonialism regarded the Indigenous population as savages (Berenstain 2).

In the 1990s, Gerald Vizenor, Indigenous scholar invented the term survivance, survival and resistance, in relation to ongoing settler colonial dominance. Survivance is an overarching term to describe the importance of active perseverance of Indigenous cultures. This includes resistance, resiliency and adaptations of traditions shaping current destiny and identity (Glancy 271). Survivance is born out of significant and consequential atrocities faced by Indigenous Peoples since Europeans arrived on Turtle Island, a name used by many Indigenous people in North America.

The concept of survivance is addressed throughout Indigenous art and writing. Caroline Monnet, Indigenous artist, discusses preserving Indigenous cultures and traditions while surviving in an urban environment and context. Within city life, there are daily distractions, work, school, multiple cultures, and Indigenous individuals maintain their heritage with a unique mix of survival and resistance (Kovler).

Indigenous sovereignty refers to the inherent right, often granted through negotiated treaties, for Indigenous Peoples to govern themselves. The overarching concept provides Indigenous control of traditional lands, destiny and futures. Indigenous sovereignty recognizes and respects the distinct political, social, economic, and cultural traditions of Indigeneity.

“Indigenous Sovereignty arises from Indigenous Traditional Knowledge, belonging to each Indigenous nation, tribe, and community. Traditional Indigenous knowledge consists of spiritual ways, culture, language, social and legal systems, political

structures, and inherent relationships with lands, waters, and all upon them. Indigenous sovereignty exists regardless of what the governing nation-state does or does not do” (Karim).

Indigenous Wholistic Theory is based on the intersection of a multi-layered, interconnected view of wellness based on Indigenous epistemologies, worldviews, cultures, and traditions. This includes spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical characteristics. It also recognizes the fluidity of past, present, and future. indigenous wholistic theory includes value-based dynamic relationships linking self, others, land, and spirit world. Indigenous writers including David McNab and Louise Erdrich refer to the spirit world involvement through spirit memories, the intervention of the ancestors (Absolon).

Indigenous social worker, Kathy Absolon discusses Indigenous Wholistic Theory as a foundational knowledge set. Absolon proposes a framework based on the sacred circle, incorporating four directions as central to many Indigenous worldviews. Clockwise, East represents Spirit and Vision, focusing on the spiritual aspect of being and purpose, South reflects Relationships, Community, and the Heart, emphasizing emotional understanding and interconnectedness, West brings in Ancestors and Indigenous Knowledge, recognizing the wisdom passed down through generations, and North Symbolizes Mind and Action, dealing with intellect, reflection, and the implementation of knowledge. This wholistic framework integrates mind, body, emotion, and spirit while being deeply rooted in Indigenous values and cultural practices. The Indigenous artists and writers chosen for this thesis embody these principles sharing these viewpoints. Indigenous identities are complex and subtle (Absolon).

Dr. Shawn Wilson is Opaskwayak Cree from northern Manitoba. Like Indigenous Wholistic Theory, his specialization focuses on inter-related concepts of identity, health, healing, well-being and culture. Wilson confirms that “Indigenous researchers are knowledge seekers who work to progress Indigenous ways of being, knowing and doing in a modern and constantly evolving context” (Wilson), He describes a research paradigm involving how relationships shape

Indigenous reality. Indigenous research needs to carefully select the topics and ways to present information. This concept is echoed by Christy Jordan-Fenton, co-author of *Fatty Legs, A True Story*. Jordan-Fenton states Indigenous storytellers need to carefully choose the topic and how much detail to share.

Eve Tuck, Indigenous scholar, in a letter published in the *Harvard Educational Review* titled *Suspending Damage, A Letter to Communities* states, “I write to you about home, about our communities. I write to identify a persistent trend in research on Native communities, city communities, and other disenfranchised communities—what I call damage-centered research”. Tuck expresses the significance of “the long-term repercussions of thinking of ourselves as broken” (Tuck 409). Tuck recognizes the historical exploitation and mistreatment of people ironically made invisible.

Vine Deloria Jr., prominent Indigenous American author, activist, and scholar remembered for “his influential works advocating for the rights and sovereignty of indigenous communities.” Deloria acknowledges mistreatment of Indigenous peoples and advocates for the recognition of their sovereignty. Indigeneity is not defined by the images of feathers and other familiar items, but by the values, culture and knowledge of peoples predating settler colonialism (S. Harjo).

Although difficult to undo the past, Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups can work together going forward to implement new approaches to decolonization. Developing the land area known as Ontario’s Ring of Fire is an example. The area is rich in abundant rare earth minerals including chromite, cobalt, nickel, copper, zinc, gold, diamond, platinum group elements (palladium, rhodium, ruthenium, osmium, and iridium). The Ring of Fire is on Indigenous lands. Accessing these riches requires a high level of cooperation. The economic value can be significant for Indigenous renewal and prosperity. However, economic value needs to be balanced with Indigenous values. The non-monetary contribution may include the

development of a new way to work together for common goals. Decolonization means not repeating Eurocentric and White mercenary practices (Ontario).

The discussion of mistreatment is complex. There are many viewpoints. The commonality is the effect on Indigenous Peoples. This situation has been endured for centuries and continues into the present. Several academics and resistance writers have expressed views.

Impacts of settler colonialism continue into the present time. Throughout her book, *Fractured Homeland: Federal Recognition and Algonquin Identity in Ontario*, Bonita Lawrence, Indigenous writer, scholar, and professor describes current economic underdevelopment, land appropriation and continued colonial cultural subjugation. In Canada, Lawrence describes the continued suppression of Indigenous communities by the dominant Eurocentric majority. She explains this leads to negatively reinforcing the erosion of Indigenous culture and identity (Lawrence 150).

It is an understatement to express that settler colonialism treatment was unjust towards Indigenous Peoples in Canada. They were exploited by the early explorers for their knowledge of the land and resourcefulness for survival in harsh winter climates. When no longer needed, Indigenous communities were marginalized through treaties and pushed off their traditional lands through targeted aggressions including genocide and erasure. Later, their sense of self was stolen through mandated attendance at residential schools. For many years, even centuries, their public voices were silenced.

Scholar Julia V. Emberley describes, “settlers made sense of Aboriginal societies by viewing them through a European, patriarchal lens, assuming that Victorian principles represented the natural order of things” and “As settlers arrived in what is now North America, they brought with them a foreign patriarchal European value system. European settlers imposed

their own frameworks of understanding onto Aboriginal social systems, which had particular ramifications for Aboriginal women” (Marginalization of Aboriginal Women).

Marginalization and a lack of necessities of life, such as safe drinking water have disadvantaged some Indigenous communities. The issue of violence against Indigenous women and girls in Canada has been acknowledged for decades, yet there has been a lack of meaningful investigative and legal actions. In many cases murdered Indigenous women go uninvestigated and unprosecuted. Statistically, Indigenous females face an alarming six times more likelihood to be murdered in Canada than other demographic groups. For years, Indigenous women have spoken out about the disproportionate violence they face (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women).



A red hand over the mouth represents the symbol of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women (MMIW).

“It stands for all the missing sisters whose voices are not heard...for the silence of the media and law enforcement in the midst of this crisis...for the oppression and subjugation of Native women who are now rising up to say #NoMoreStolenSisters.”

Fig. 3. *Red Hand Symbol.*

And,

“...symbolizes the connection between the physical world and the spiritual world. Native Americans believe that the dead can see red, so by wearing red we invoke the help of our ancestors and spiritual guides” (Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women).

Despite decades of advocacy and mounting evidence, systemic inaction persists. The ongoing violence against Indigenous females reflects deeper societal neglect and a justice system that has repeatedly failed to respond effectively to this crisis. Indigenous women have faced marginalization since the enactment of the Indian Act. Status Indian lineage is passed through the male bloodline. The Indian Act defines eligibility and establishes the rights and benefits associated with Indian status. Indigenous females have not been allowed the same status as a form of reduction of Status Indians.

Although the responsibility for MMIW remains unresolved, some areas where injustices and indignities against Indigenous People are being more closely examined. Restitutions for wrongdoings is a process the government of Canada is championing. This correction will require time and dedication by Canada's federal, provincial and territorial governments.

The Truth and Reconciliation Report 2015 is a formal recognition of the atrocities of the residential school system. However, this is only an aspect of the changes needed. In Canada, there are more Indigenous children living in Child Protective Services (CPS) than the total number throughout history's forced attendance at residential schools. Arguments, as stated below, are made that CPS simply replaced residential schools. Recognition is part of the identifier; however, sustainment of Indigenous culture is another critical and crucial component. "Indigenous children are vastly overrepresented among foster children in Canada. In 2021, Indigenous children accounted for 7.7% of all children under age 15 in the general population, but 53.8% of children in foster care" (Statistics Canada, 2022).

Helping to promote venues to encourage a better and more comprehensive understanding, are government assurances that Canada will remain true to its constitutional objectives promoting equitable civil liberties. In 2023, the Canadian government implemented an action plan consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous

Peoples (UNDRIP), a framework for reconciliation (Government of Canada). Canada recognizes the philosophy of Indigenous sovereignty, however, nationally falling short of comprehensive implementation. Sovereign entities will require two separate governance co-existing. "The laws and regulations that enforce the systems currently in place are not accepted by all First Nations communities. This is recognized by the Canadian government as well, meaning that both Canada and Indigenous Peoples maintain their own sovereign states." (Karim).

Settler colonialism actively works to silence Indigenous voices and sovereignty, ensuring the broader public remain indifferent to Indigenous realities. Very few outside the Indigenous community listened. More concerning, no one in the mainstream media, political parties, provincial, territorial, and federal governments demonstrated much interest in Indigenous issues. Travesties of residential schools, marginalization and remoteness of treaty lands for reserves are difficult to fathom and address. Politically there appears to be no easy remedy. This translated into a general lack of attention traceable to settler colonialism and its efforts to silence and erase Indigenous voices. This disinterest led to Indigenous communities existing as developing-world-like, geographically isolated areas hidden within a Group of Seven G7 country (Department of Justice Government of Canada).

Many Indigenous nations and communities lack necessities of life including safe drinking water, epidemic levels of childhood diabetes, substance and alcohol abuse, high levels of incarceration, to name a few of the social societal problems. Many of these documented issues are traceable to settler colonialism and to the effects of marginalization resulting from and affected by residential schools including poorer health, lower life expectancy, higher rates of incarceration, lower income and higher unemployment (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc).

Corruptions and injustices are expressed within artistic and resistance print voices from a diversity of Indigenous authors, poets, and novelists. There exists a divide between what Indigenous individuals are willing to share outside their communities and what non-Indigenous

peoples are receptive to absorb. Understanding, appreciating, and resonating with Indigenous sharing requires considerable levels of emotional maturity and intelligence. (Jordan-Fenton, 2020, xiii).

The Indigenous artists and storytellers carefully gauge how much information non-Indigenous individuals are ready to absorb. Emotional intelligence premises the balance of managing personal feelings and counteracting an understanding for the emotions of others. This requires reliance on self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and outstanding social and societal skills. The authors of *Fatty Legs* recognize that those willing to and those not yet comfortable sharing their stories should all be celebrated. For some, painfulness is unresolved. (Jordan-Fenton, 2020, xiii).

Four centuries of colonial distrust is difficult for Indigenous Peoples to overcome. Canadian politicians may require a different process to demonstrate sincerity and promote conviction. Apologies alone are insufficient. Indigenous leaders may insist their voices need to be listened to and included in the solution for moving forward. Without Indigenous leadership, continued harm will be imposed on their peoples.

Recently, much attention has been given to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the recommendations in its 2015 report. The TRC focus is on Indigenous individuals directly (attendees) and indirectly (relations of attendees) affected by the one-hundred-and-fifty-year legacy of the Canadian Residential School System, also known as Indian Residential Schools. The 2007 Canadian federal Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement is Canada's largest class-action settlement. This agreement was the catalyst for establishing the TRC. Additional initiatives include the Indigenous Language Act (2019) for reclaiming and revitalizing Indigenous languages native to Canada, and Bill C-29 (2024) establishing an Indigenous-led apolitical national council for reconciliation (Government of Canada).

It is ambitious and difficult to quickly resolve longstanding issues of settler colonialism. Indigenous presence in North America predates European arrival and settler colonization by thousands of years. Archaeological estimates vary, placing the initial migration between 12,000 and 20,000 years ago. Indigenous Peoples for centuries asserted their sovereignty and connection to the land, thereby challenging disinformation-type narratives seeking to diminish and erase their essences and histories. Settler colonialism destroys existing culture to supplant something new. For more than four centuries, Indigenous stories, identities, and ways of life experienced systematic erasure under Eurocentric settler colonization (Indigenous Services Canada). Eleven treaties were intended to provide some Indigenous with some autonomy. Ideally, they were to allow self-governance. "It would seem that these treaties and agreements allowed Indigenous people to live without government intervention; however, this is not the case" (Karim). Educator Ania Loomba argued that the concept of colonialism, while not identical with nuances and differences across regions, universally forced the original inhabitants and newcomers into deeply traumatic relationships (Loomba 20).

Colonialism typically involves economic, material, and political control by an external power over an original subordinate population. Historian Patrick Wolfe describes a specific form, known as settler colonialism, to be structural rather than a singular event, "The colonizers come to stay—invasion is a structure not an event" (Wolfe 2). He explains, "As practised by Europeans, both genocide and settler colonialism have typically employed the organizing grammar of race" (Wolfe 387). This racial logic shaped the dispossession and destruction of Indigenous nations operating through physical violence and by legal, economic, and social mechanisms designed to remove Indigenous presence.

Settler colonialism was foundational to modernity and Eurocentric concepts of capitalism, shaping expansion of European empires and governance, land ownership, and social organization. However, as Wolfe explains, "Of itself, however, modernity cannot explain

the insatiable dynamic whereby settler colonialism always needs more land." (Wolfe 395) This expansionist drive meant that Indigenous land was never simply a resource, but the very foundation of the settler-colonial state. The logic of elimination was not confined to a single moment of conquest. Rather, it was an ongoing, endless process, sustained through political and legal frameworks, economic pressures, and cultural suppression.

Unlike traditional colonialism exploiting native labor, settler colonialism seeks to eliminate Indigenous peoples. This dynamic secures control of desired land by expanding Eurocentric settlements and pushing Indigenous communities further towards the fringes. Wolfe describes this process as, "settler colonialism destroys to replace." (Wolfe 388) This transformation was not just about displacement but ensuring Indigenous presence was permanently removed from the landscape and making possible a new settler society built on falsely claimed and stolen land.

The process of elimination was insidious as well as violent, evolving through legal mechanisms, government assimilation policies, and cultural suppression. European settlers justified their actions and claimed territories of non-Christian peoples through a fifteenth century papal legal function known as the Doctrine of Discovery. Wolfe notes,

"To start at the top, with the European sovereigns who laid claim to the territories of non-Christian (or, in later secularized versions, uncivilized) inhabitants of the rest of the world: justifications for this claim were derived from a disputatious arena of scholarly controversy that had been prompted by European conquests in the Americas and is misleadingly referred to, in the singular, as the doctrine of discovery" (Wolfe 390).

This doctrine framed Indigenous lands as empty and their inhabitants as obstacles to be removed, providing legal and moral justification for centuries of settler colonial expansion.

Wolfe explains the logic of elimination manifested differently across colonial contexts. "Aborigines were accorded no rights to their territory, informal variants on the theme of terra nullius being taken for granted in settler culture" (Wolfe 391). Terra nullius means 'territory without a master'. It is a space that can be inhabited but not owned by anyone. Wolfe

comments, "In North America, by contrast, treaties between Indian and European nations were premised on a sovereignty that reflected Indians' capacity to permute local alliance networks from among the rival Spanish, British, French, Dutch, Swedish and Russian presences" (Wolfe 391).

While treaties in North America suggested a recognition of Indigenous sovereignty, they were ultimately tools of control, used to legitimize land dispossession while ensuring settlers-maintained dominance.

When legal agreements acknowledged Indigenous land rights, settler colonialism found ways to circumvent. "The American right to buy always superseded the Indian right not to sell. The mechanisms of this priority are crucial. Why should ostensibly sovereign nations, residing in territory solemnly guaranteed to them by treaties, decide that they are willing, after all, to surrender their ancestral homelands?" (Wolfe 391).

The economic pressure, legal manipulation, and outright coercion behind these land transfers reveal the underlying reality that Indigenous sovereignty was never truly recognized. Instead, this was perceived as a temporary inconvenience that settler colonialism sought to overcome. "In US Chief Justice John Marshall declared, Indigenous land rights remained to be 'consummated by possession', (Wolfe 392-393) This means that land was not truly secured for settler colonization until it was actively occupied and controlled by settlers.

A global dimension to this frenzy for Indigenous land can be seen in the fact that many European settlers—particularly economic immigrants—were drawn from the ranks of Europe's landless poor. "The cattle and other stock were not only being driven off Cherokee land; they were being driven into private ownership" (Wolfe 392). This mass privatization of Indigenous lands fueled settler economies and reinforced the notion that Indigenous peoples had no legitimate claim to their own territories. "The dispossession of Indigenous lands was not an isolated event. It was part of a systemic and ongoing process that was central to the expansion

of settler colonialism (Wolfe 392). The theft of Indigenous land was not an anomaly—it was the foundation upon which settler societies were built.

Despite centuries of systemic erasure, Indigenous peoples resisted. "Whatever settlers may say—and they generally have a lot to say—the primary motive for elimination is not race...but access to territory," (Wolfe 388) Wolfe reports. Settler colonialism depends on land theft, but Indigenous resistance has always challenged this theft—through armed struggle, legal battles, cultural resurgence, and the refusal to disappear. Academic Tiara Na'puti reinforces asserting settler colonialism to be, "an enduring phenomenon of colonial violence and a power structure" (Na'puti 497).

Building on these concepts, academic la paperson conceptualizes settler colonialism as a machine of violence and elimination, consisting of interlocking and treated "as a set of technologies" (la paperson 5). Viewing settler colonialism through a mechanistic lens reveals how it is upheld by various political, legal, cultural, and epistemological mechanisms. Supporting these concepts, Wolfe described it as "an inclusive, land-centered project that coordinates a comprehensive range of agencies" (Wolfe 393). These agencies continually shift and evolve, reinforcing settler colonial dominance.

One of the most powerful forms of resistance includes storytelling and art. Indigenous artists and writers reclaimed their voices, using their creative work to challenge colonial narratives, process intergenerational trauma, and assert Indigenous sovereignty. This thesis will describe Indigenous art and writing serving as both personal expressions and collective statements of survival.

True decolonization requires the permanent dismantling of harmful practices and ensuring that funding and resources are designed to rightfully empower Indigenous people. Resistance is not just about survival; it is resurgence of truths. Resistance leads to intransigence, a refusal to compromise. Decolonization is much more than dismantling

colonialism. This reconceptualization involves political independence, cultural renewal and revitalization, reclaiming and returning traditional lands and resources, and recognition of regaining what was lost. Indigenous Nations and individuals prefer terms interruption or disruption when referring to a loss of identity, connection to ancestral lands and traditions, and a disconnection from traditional values and heritage. Some writers, including Jodie Callaghan describe what was lost due to residential school in her picture book, *The Train*. Callaghan uses lost due to the finality of what happened (Callaghan 11).

With respect to Canada, decolonization for Indigenous People is a complex process. This involves the respect and full cooperation of all levels of non-Indigenous government authorities to create a new diversity. This entails eliminating marginalization, restoring self-determination, and establishing laws respecting Indigenous cultures and knowledges. In addition, decolonization requires acknowledging impacts of settler colonialism, land grabs through unenforced treaties, eliminating the racism and discrimination of residential schools, replaced by child protective services, and the Indian Act. It involves inclusion of Indigenous knowledge in educational curriculums, assessing the reasons for high levels of Indigenous in penal systems, addressing the high level of suicide and substance abuse. There are several components of decolonization, the items stated are representative and not exhaustive. Reality is decolonization will likely require redrafting the Canadian Constitution. There needs to be compromises. Canadian urban centres exist on traditional Indigenous lands. Although these cannot be returned due to legal frameworks, appropriate Indigenous lands and land resources can be established (Queen's University Centre for Teaching and Learning).

Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Report (2015) uncovered truths concerning human rights violations due to attendance at residential schools from March 1960 to May 1994. This investigation conducted more than 2500 hearings. Approximately 21,000 victims were interviewed. A smaller number of victims, about 2,000 agreed to share their stories in public

sessions for recording. All these findings were documented. The findings represent long-lasting impacts of settler colonialism in Canada.

Critical issues are highlighted including, systemic failures in Canada's child welfare system, an overrepresentation based on demographics of Indigenous incarcerated individuals held in the penal prison system, and the unfortunate exclusion of many Métis survivors from the 2006 Residential School Settlement Agreement. Additionally, the report addresses the existence of forgotten Indigenous children dying while attending residential schools and placed in hidden, unmarked and neglected burial sites (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada).

After five years of intensive investigation, the TRC announced the significance to uncover the names of all Indigenous children who perished while attending residential schools. This was genocide. Murray Sinclair, chair of the commission, emphasized the importance of transparency for families seeking closure. "As a parent, as a family, when you've lost somebody, you need to know everything about that loss that you can get your hands on," he explained in an interview. "You need to know why they died, where they died, what they died of, and where they are buried" (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada).

Official records indicate that at least 3,200 children perished in residential schools, primarily due to infectious diseases such as tuberculosis and influenza, which spread rapidly in overcrowded dormitories. Other recorded causes of death include drowning, fires, accidents, suicide, and exposure while attempting to escape. However, Justice Sinclair believes the true number to be far higher (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada).

Nevertheless, efforts to piece together this history remain possible. Existing provincial death records from 1885 to 1950 contain information such as age, race, location, and cause of death. By cross-referencing these records with school attendance lists, a more comprehensive account of the children who perished could be reconstructed. However, this task exceeds the

commission's five-year timeframe. Consequently, the TRC has urged the federal government to allocate funding to continue this crucial research, with oversight from the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation in Winnipeg (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada).

The TRC report also reveals that many of the deceased were buried on school grounds or in nearby plots because the government refused to cover the cost of returning their remains to their families. Most of these grave sites were never formally recognized, and over time, many have been lost as schools were relocated or abandoned.

The TRC's work has shed light on one of Canada's darkest chapters, but the task of uncovering the full truth is far from over. Only through continued commitment to truth, reconciliation, and justice can the country begin to heal the wounds of its colonial past (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada).

The TRC provides a direction forward, or roadmap, towards elimination of the racist undertones of the Indian Act. The Act defines Status Indian along paternal lines and places conditions on Indigenous status. It establishes a specific legal identity different from Indigenous identity and ancestry. The Indian Act divides rather than unites Indigenous People (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada).

Dr. T. Patrick Carrabre is a Métis composer who was also part of the 60s scoop, large-scale removal of Indigenous children from their families and homes. Carrabré's experience highlights the lasting impact of colonial dislocation and the ongoing process of reclaiming Indigenous identity. He offers insight into the intersections of settler colonialism, Indigenous resistance, and artistic expression through music. By advocating for a decolonized creative process, Carrabré underscores broader struggles against settler colonialism—ones that necessitate the acknowledgment of historical injustices, the reestablishment of Indigenous community ties, and the elevation of Indigenous voices within artistic and cultural spaces. His diverse work serves as a testament to the power of Indigenous art from perspectives as forms of resistance and

pathways toward decolonial futures. His work *Histoires des Métis: The Freedom Songs* was inspired by conversations with Métis lawyer Jean Teillet (a descendant of Louis Riel) reflecting upon the struggles and resilience of the Métis people, highlighting their historical displacement, forced assimilation, and enduring cultural pride (Classic 107).

Teillet's legal and historical works, including her book *The North-West Is Our Mother*, helped shape the composition's themes—particularly the attempted erasure and rediscovery of Métis identity. The project includes traditional Métis songs and original poetry exploring historical injustices, such as the violent suppression of Métis sovereignty and the trauma of colonial violence. One song, *Lorette*, confronts the sexual violence suffered by Métis women at the hands of colonial forces, a difficult but necessary truth to address through music.

Resistance writers, Métis professor, scholar and author, David McNab, and legal counselor and specialist for Indigenous rights laws, Jean Teillet share historical information on the long-term impacts of the Indian Act in Canada. Both McNab and Teillet discuss the inequitable treatments of Indigeneity and reduced civil liberties. Racist implications due to national policies by the Canadian government are complex. Through the enactment and administration of legal provisions, the Canadian government set Indigenous Peoples apart from other Canadians denying certain rights and privileges, not including but limited solely to their sovereignty. This political direction influenced the ways Indigenous Peoples were mistreated and how Canadians racialized this demography. Indigenous People are not included as visible minorities even though representing only five percent of the Canadian population (*Visible Minority of Person*).

The conflict for Indigenous lands was a comparatively insignificant issue in the sixteenth century when there were only a few European settlements in North America. However, from the beginning of the seventeenth century, as more settlers arrived and laid claims to property

ownership, Indigenous Peoples were forced off their traditional lands to accommodate the newcomers (Humphreys 9-23).

Understanding the differences of how settlers and Indigenous Peoples viewed land usage distinguishes a fundamental barrier prohibiting their ability for living harmoniously within the same communities (Humphreys 31-43). Settlers arrived with the goal of outright property ownership and establishing permanent settlements, villages and larger urban areas replicating European designs (McNab, Lectures 2017).

Bonita Lawrence is a Mi'kmaw descendant and an academic resistance author focusing significantly on Non-status and Métis identities as well as related gender-based stipulations. She advises that settlers erected fences to indicate and safeguard their land holdings, whereas Indigenous Peoples believed the land to belong to the tribe and not for individual subdivision (Lawrence Lectures 2017). European colonization of Canada concerns how to reconcile lands occupied by Indigenous Peoples that settlers were promised through Government Issue prior to boarding ships bound for trans-Atlantic voyages. Consequently, the conundrum as settlers filed claims to lands that were already occupied by Indigenous Peoples.

Lawrence's purpose in *Fractured Homeland* tackles complex issues of Indigenous recognition related to experiences of the Algonquins. By focusing on the specific challenges facing the Algonquin people, Lawrence discusses identity issues. In an historical context, Lawrence reveals that "many Algonquin families and communities came to be regarded as squatters on their own land, and how individuals and families developed strategies to survive" (Lawrence 152).

Mid-nineteenth century Confederation and post-Confederation Canadian governments attempted to solve what they termed as the "Indian problem" through legislation. McNab explains it was really the "white problem" because settlers did not understand how to coexist

with Indigenous Peoples (McNab, Lectures 2017). McNab and Teillet observe continuance of this situation into the twenty-first century.

Prior to the Confederation of Canada in 1867, the British North American territorial governments attempted unsuccessfully to assimilate Indigenous Peoples. McNab comments on this plan in *The Failure of Canada's Indigenous Policies in the Context of Truth and Reconciliation*, 2017. "The idea was to remove and to centralize Indigenous people into two geographical areas, primarily Manitoulin Island and Walpole Island. (McNab, "Failure" 5). McNab states, "Once centralized on islands, they could better be, according to the government view, "civilized", and then assimilated. This was strenuously resisted by the First Nations." (McNab, "Failure" 5). How to deal with Indigenous Peoples was a significant factor in the Confederation of Canada (McNab, "Failure" 5). McNab stresses Confederation of Canada in 1867 that "...Indigenous Nations effectively appear to have lost recognition and respect for their rights of citizenship and sovereignty over their governance and over their lands and waters" (McNab, "Failure" 6).

In *Why Dismantling the Indian Act will be nearly Impossible* Teillet clarifies some essential facts concerning the scope of the Indian Act of 1876 and its long-term implications of systemic racism. Teillet explains jurisdictional criteria, "'Indian' is the legal designation given to the people who are controlled by the Indian Act" (Teillet 1). Explaining further, "...Indian in this context is not a cultural term of identification. It's a basket that includes hundreds of thousands of Indigenous individuals and collectives the federal government has chosen to designate as Indians. The Act was created to enable the government to control these people, to stop mobility and eventually to eliminate them as "Indians" (Teillet 1).

Teillet summarizes the real purpose of the Indian Act, "Extinguishment was the policy; extinguishment of the people, their rights and policies are still complicit in erasing Indigenous rights and title" (Teillet 2).

The Indian Act provided the Canadian government control over all aspects of Indigeneity including education which was administered through the establishment of residential schools lasting into the late twentieth century with the last closure in 1996. Teillet explains the design of the residential schools was to erase Indigenous cultures (Teillet 2).

The Final Truth and Reconciliation Report refers to this process as “cultural genocide” (Glavin, Truth and Reconciliation Report 2015). Additional stipulations within the Indian Act were designed for reducing the numbers of Indigenous peoples; “Over the decades, controls tightened, restricting the people governed by the Indian Act in every way. If you wanted to go to university, join the army, become a priest, marry a non-Indian or vote, your Indian status was removed” (Teillet 2).

Through the legal administration of the Indian Act the Canadian government gained national jurisdiction over Indigenous Peoples. However, the individual provinces retained authority over lands and resources. This situation hinders Indigenous Peoples from their access to economic advantages, “If valuable resources were found on reserve lands, the reserve would be moved, always to poorer lands. If Canada could not move the reserve, it took the money from the resources on the reserve” (Teillet 2). This legal framework contributes to considerable socioeconomic disadvantage for some Indigenous Peoples living on reserves, especially those located in remote areas which tend to fare unfavourably in comparison to ones located nearby to urban Canadian centres. Lawrence explains reserves located near cities cope better due to off reserve access to education, healthcare and employment opportunities (Lawrence. Lectures 2017). Conversely, accesses to off reserve amenities, services and urban benefits are non-existent in remote areas.

McNab comments on how the Indian Act promotes racism; “...the Indian Act (since 1876) ...is also both racist and colonial...” (McNab, *“Failure”* 1), and adding further discussion. “The Indian Act remains on the books today as a corner stone of Canada’s Indigenous policies”

(McNab. *“Failure”* 8). McNab explains why the Indian Act is racist. “It is not consultative or community-based. It is the federal government which decides who is an indigenous person or not under the registration process of that Act (which is still based on a racist approach using blood quantum) non-status and Métis persons are not and cannot be registered under it...”

(McNab. *“Failure”* 8).

The Indian Act determined classifications for North American Indians residing in Canada. Métis and some Mixed Heritage Natives were excluded, for the most part based on parental gender, as Status Indians. Mixed Heritage children living on reserves with an Indigenous father were included under the Indian Act. However, in most cases, when the father was non-Indigenous, the children faced exclusion. Lawrence describes a complication resulting when the father was non-Indigenous and his name was excluded from the child’s birth certificate, especially if the parents were not legally married. In some of these cases, based on individual and unique circumstances, when unchallenged, these children could be included under the Indian Act (Lawrence 2). In addition to the legal definition of Status Indian, there is the racial classification based on physical appearance. Lawrence describes this as either looking or not looking like an Indian (Lawrence 2). There are also different classification options for Métis. “...in many southern Ontario reserve communities, where, unlike in northern Ontario and Western Canada, the term “Métis” is not seen as referring to culturally distinct hybrid people” (Lawrence 126). In contrast, in Southern Ontario, Métis simply means a lesser category of Indigenous who are “not Indian enough” by both status and blood. Lawrence explains “Métis” are not to be confused with “non-status Indians”, who look Native and who therefore are presumed to be Indian” (Lawrence 126).

Best known for the development of Indigenous literature in Canada, Métis Duke Redbird, poet, journalist, activist, businessman, actor and administrator explains that children born of a Native man married to a White woman qualify as Status Indian, although technically they too

may qualify as Métis. (Redbird 2) The Indian Act included some and excluded others not always or exclusively based on blood quantum. Redbird explains "...group-labelling involved the non-status and enfranchised Indians. Non-status Indians were those who had lost their registered status by marriage, i.e., where an Indian woman would marry a non-registered Indian, a Métis or a white man, or the off spring of a marriage between two non-registered Indians" (Redbird 2). The Indian Act is restrictive. Conversely, a white woman who married a registered Indian man would become a full-fledged Indian woman with all the rights and privileges under the Indian Act. An enfranchised Indian was a registered Indian who, under the Indian Act, had voluntarily decided to become a white man by relinquishing his registered status..." (Redbird 2).

Donald Purich, a former director of the Native Law Centre at the University of Saskatchewan describes, "The involvement of the Métis in defining themselves is crucial – the less than happy experience of the federal government in trying to define "Indians" by way of the Indian Act should be an example" (Purich 15).

Some Canadians question the exclusion of Métis from the Indian Act as unfair from the perspective of political equity since both Natives and Métis are Indigenous Peoples. This argument is not without its merits especially since separate Métis Act nor Inuit Act were never established to cover all of Canada's Indigenous Peoples. (McNab. "Failure" 6) Consequently, many Métis assimilated into White cultures to earn livelihoods improving their income levels through varied employment options. (Statistics Canada) Economic freedom is important to Indigenous Peoples, King comments, "...the [Hawthorn] report revealed the logical fallacy that has haunted Indian history and policy in North America since contact - to wit, that all people yearn for the individual freedom to pursue economic goals. Indians are people, ergo, they want to make money and create wealth for themselves and their families" (King, "Inconvenient Indian" 118).

The Indian Act was brought into existence because peoples of Indigenous origin, sometimes historically referred to as Natives, other times as Indians, related differently to Canada due to political and legal provisions contained within the Royal Proclamation of 1763. After this date, various amendments and additional treaties made it difficult for the government to manage its interest in national settlement expansion including linking the territories north of the forty-ninth parallel by railway to secure this land tract from being consumed by growing pioneer settlements in the United States. In securing lands for railways, Indigenous People were subjected to inhuman treatments including government sponsored starvation. James Daschuk, university professor and author, explains results of racialization in *Clearing the Plains: Disease, Politics of Starvation, and the Loss of Aboriginal Life*. “Racism among policy makers and members of mainstream society was the key factor in creating the gap in health outcomes as well as maintaining a double standard for acceptable living conditions for the majority of the population and the indigenous minority” (Daschuk 3). Two important studies investigated the role of racist attitudes of the dominant society in Canada. For Indigenous Nations this resulted in declining health conditions of indigenous people. (Daschuk 3).

The provisions and intentions of the treaties were not always followed by government officials. British Lieutenant John Graves Simcoe outlined a plan for Upper Canada in 1791. “Simcoe’s land policy was instead premised on a number of land surrenders in Upper Canada, which occurred from the 1790s to the Confederation of Canada (1867), and the numbered treaties thereafter in the Canadian West and North” (McNab. *“Failure”* 4).

Some historians, including Thomas King, put this bluntly, to the government; “Natives were a “nuisance””. (King. “Inconvenient Indian” 33) The Indian Act included detrimental effects for Indigenous peoples by removing their sovereignty. Federal White civil servants were given the responsibility to manage over Indigenous lands leading to the creation of reserves. A reserve is a section of land set aside for the use of Status Indians.

Renate Eigenbrod, German born professor at the University of Manitoba, describes that People of Cree descent refer to reserves as 'leftovers'. "In the Cree language, reserves are called "shkoonigan", "leftovers", and yet Native people are restricted to the reserve if they want legal protection (Eigenbrod 135). Indigenous individuals are arbitrarily defined by the Indian Act as "Indians" first and citizens second. "(T)hey are not protected by the Charter of Rights...and are therefore compelled to think they should stay on the reserve where they are 'sheltered'" (Eigenbrod 135). Many of the reserves are not located on the best land types, for example, some lands being too rocky, especially on parts of the Canadian Shield.

Substantial current documentation exists on the negative effects of the Indian Act. Assessing this situation more than a hundred years later, one of the most significant topics pertains to the Canadian government's responsibility of setting up a political system that creates an economic disadvantage based on race. Over time, many Status Indians living on reserves fell prey to the Canadian welfare system, lower levels of education and numerous issues associated with substance abuse. (Statistics Canada 2022) Some Indigenous resistance writers explain that the Indian Act of 1876 contributed significantly to the propagation of racism. Several historians concur with the argument that if mid-nineteenth century assimilation of Indigenous peoples into white society was not successful, then the Indian Act was a new strategy (McNab. *"Failure"* 4). This has led to systemic racism reflected in lower economic and life expectancy demographics. (Statistics Canada)

Systemic racism is also related to the types of services, including medical, considered to be their constitutional rights, which have been denied to some Indigenous people. This is validated through a situation occurring when Ted Trindell was denied medical assistance and almost died from appendicitis. As a non-status Indian Trindell had to sell everything he owned to pay for his medical expenses (Morissett & Pellitier 74).

As mentioned, Status Indians are set apart from other Indigenous groups because they are governed by federal regulations under the Indian Act instead of provincial legislation contributing to a two-tier approach equating to inequalities and rationalization within Indigeneity. Whites may presume Non-status and some Métis as Indian based on physical characteristics resembling Indians. However, non-status and Métis are denied the provisions under the Indian Act proving that the government complicated matters by creating levels of rationalization. Within Indigenous communities there exists racism because Status Indians see themselves differently from non-status who do not fit into any protected group (Lawrence Lectures 2017). Inuit are also excluded from the Indian Act because they are not classified as Indian.

In Lawrence's 2004, *"Real' Indians and Others: Mixed-Blood Urban Native Peoples and Indigenous Nationhood*, she discusses the importance of mixed-blood peoples' voices. These stories contain real experiences of peoples who may or may not identify within legal classifications, but all share Indigenous heritages. Canada needs to include these experiences and stories as important aspects of its national treasures and histories. Fundamentally, this is about recognition and inclusion. This is about Indigenous role models and sovereignty. Unfortunately, for many the Indian Act contributed to status confusion and a dilution Indigenous identity.

Undoing, or correcting missteps and wrongdoings of government legislations and mistreatments of Indigenous Peoples is complex. It is impossible to undo atrocities. However, recognition on a national level of what occurred is an important step. The Truth and Reconciliation Report focuses on corrections for residential school survivors and their descendants. This is part of decolonization. Much additional work is required to fully address this and other centuries old issues.

Chapter 3: Impacts of Settler Colonialism and Canada Day



Fig. 4. Norval Morrisseau, *Man Changing into Thunderbird*, 1977.

Indigenous artist, Norval Morrisseau, also known as Copper Thunderbird, is considered as the founder of contemporary Canadian Indigenous art. “Norval Morrisseau believed art is necessary to heal. Although Morrisseau’s philosophy is present throughout his body of work, perhaps it is most starkly engaged in *Man Changing into Thunderbird*, in which six large panels of deepening colour intensity illustrate the Anishinaabe artist’s own transformation from human to thunderbird” (Hewitt).

This chapter will juxtapose Indigenous impacts through resistance art within the dichotomy of celebrating Canadian heritage. Many Indigenous individuals experienced significant losses before and after Confederation. Select Indigenous artists are first discussed followed by evidence as to why Canada Day celebrations may be reminders of settler colonial oppression.

Resistance writing is counter to conventionally held concepts. While both storytelling and story-work involve narratives there is a significant difference in approach. Storytelling is the process of telling and retelling a story. This often follows Indigenous oral tradition passing along stories through generations. Story-work is the process of analyzing stories to reveal meaning and understanding of experiences, especially within a cultural context. This process is often used in educational and intellectual contexts (Archibald).

Jo-Ann Archibald is an Indigenous studies scholar from the Sto:lo First Nation in British Columbia. She assisted many educational faculties with the development and implementation of First Nation initiatives including the Arts" ("Jo-Ann Archibald"). She states, "Through Elders' guidance and mentorship, I developed a way to appreciate and understand the beauty and power of Indigenous stories, which is called, Indigenous storywork" ("Indigenous Storywork"). Archibald is an advocate for the value of Indigenous stories within educational curriculums. "By implication, the term story work signals that Indigenous stories are to be taken seriously and that we as storytellers and story listeners/readers/learners can work together to learn from and with these stories" ("Indigenous Storywork"). These views are shared by the Indigenous authors identified in this study. The views of (Shawn) Wilson and Archibald advocate for a new paradigm for the importance of Indigenous voices and storytelling as a component of decolonization.

The following are the major Indigenous visual artists are discussed in this chapter: Kent Monkman, Caroline Monnet, Christi Belcourt, Alex Janvier, as well as minor references to others. Kent Monkman is a Cree multimedia artist working in the mediums of painting, film, performance and installation. Caroline Monnet is an Algonquin and French multidisciplinary artist from Quebec. In 2020, she was celebrated receiving the Pierre-Ayot Award, Sundance Institute's Merata Mita Fellowship and REVEAL Indigenous Art Award. Christi Belcourt is a Métis visual artist, environmentalist and advocate for social justice. Alex Janvier is a famous Dene Suline and Sauteaux artist (deceased 2024). In 1992, Alex Janvier was elected as a member of the Royal Canadian Academy of the Arts. In 2007, he became a member of the Order of Canada. In 2008, he received the Governor General's Award for Visual and Media Arts (Janvier).

Indigenous artistic voices stand in resistance, refusing to be silenced by the forces of settler colonialism. Their work embodies defiance against historical and ongoing oppression,

reclaiming space through creative expression. This intersection of art and lived experience challenges colonial narratives, asserting resilience. No longer restrained, Indigenous voices carry messages of survival, justice, and renewal. Now is their time to share, witness, listen, and engage with their truths.

Based on the complexities of Indigenous culture and experiences, it is unsurprising that Indigenous art is diverse. Its variety is inclusive of all Indigenous peoples and their distinctiveness. Indigenous lives are not similar, their existences are unique. A commonality is their dissimilarity and difference from Eurocentric standards. Indigenous art is not one thing, nor can it be blanketed with a generic label. Much Indigenous art tells stories with subliminal messaging.

The McMichael Art Gallery, Kleinburg, Ontario, has the largest permanent Canadian collection of Indigenous Art offering many artist-based exhibits throughout each year. The public is learning significantly about Indigenous life and its values through these expressive artworks. Many of these pieces are loaned out as part of travelling exhibitions seen by wider, regionalized Canadians.

Emerging from an underground movement, Indigenous artists fight back against settler colonization to depict intersectional clashes of significant and systemic concerns including equity, culture, race, ethnicity, spirituality, political systems, harmonized diversity, and acceptance.

Damage-based research invites oppressed peoples to speak, but “only speak from that space in the margin that is a sign of deprivation, a wound, an unfulfilled longing. Only speak your pain” (Hooks 152 and Tuck 413).

Desire-based research recognized the oppressed in their complex personhood - as “people who, at different points in a single day, reproduce, resist, are complicit in, rage against,

celebrate, throw up hands/fists/towels, and withdraw and participate in uneven social structures” (Tuck 420).

The artistic voice of Kent Monkman’s work engages directly with these colonial narratives and story-work, intentionally disrupting settler frameworks of memory and representation. Monkman’s art critiques settler narratives not by simply adding Indigenous perspectives to established histories, but by restructuring the frameworks themselves. Monkman achieves his visualizations by subverting the visual language of colonial art traditions, particularly 19th-century Euro-American landscape painting. Rather than outright rejecting these forms, Monkman appropriates and repurposes these to challenge the authority of settler representations.



Fig. 5. Kent Monkman, *The Scream*, 2016.

Monkman's artwork leverages this method to confront the erasure of Indigenous histories within settler narratives combining both damaged-base and desire-based concepts. Atrocities inflicted on the ancestors influences current Indigenous individuals. By repurposing iconic colonial imagery, Monkman exposes the underlying power dynamics and challenges the presumed authority of settler colonial memory politics. His mimicry dismantles the visual rhetoric that reinforces settler futurity, asserting Indigenous presence in spaces previously marked by colonial absence.

By appropriating their visual language and exposing their ideological foundations, Monkman's interventions exemplify how artistic methods can challenge settler narratives. His work disrupts settler assumptions of space, time, and memory, creating openings for Indigenous presence and agency within cultural narratives long dominated by colonial ideologies. By unsettling these frameworks, Monkman's art reveals the constructed nature of settler common sense and advocates for alternative understandings of history rooted in Indigenous knowledge and resilience.

Each resistance artist challenges and seeks to disrupt Eurocentric history pertaining to Indigenous identity, and ongoing impacts of colonization on Indigenous Peoples in Canada. "In his art, Monkman reimagines colonial-settler relations through an Indigenous lens. Monkman accomplishes this "in a series of playful 'scenic' paintings by reconfiguring images and forms of previous Euro-American art movements: Landscape painting, American Western art and neoclassicalisms in particular" (The CanLit Guides Editorial Team).

Monkman depicts himself as Two-Spirit Miss Chief Eagle Testickle. His art focuses on Eurocentric misconceptions of Indigenous Peoples as an educational tool. He also focuses on the resilience and strength of Indigenous Peoples in the face of ongoing colonization. Kent

Monkman is quoted as saying, “History is a narrative; it’s a collection of stories sanctioned by the ruling power, and reinforced through words and images that suit them. That was the whole point of taking on history painting: to authorize these moments that have been swept under the rug for generations.” (Whyte)

Monkman’s artwork is provocative. It is designed to seek controversy. The image below is representative of his art style embodying story-work.



Fig. 6. Kent Monkman, *Protecting the Medicines*, 2023.

Describing two-spirit people as having a mix of feminine and masculine or spirits is a common understanding for Monkman (Monkman 2016). Miss Chief, the alter-ego of Kent Monkman, first emerged in the 2001 painting *Heaven and Earth*. In this early depiction, she presents a predominantly masculine appearance with an androgynous quality. The ambiguity in this scene is central to understanding the role of sexuality in Monkman’s work. Miss Chief

embodies both masculinity and femininity, merging these identities seamlessly. She also straddles the line between Native and White, a duality reflected in her tanned yet sometimes pale complexion.

In the early 2000s, Miss Chief made occasional appearances in Monkman's work, but by 2004, she had become a defining feature of his artistic identity. Through her, Monkman inserts himself into his paintings, mirroring 19th-century European artists who depicted themselves in their own works.

Monkman's continued portrayal of Miss Chief stems not only from the historical erasure of Indigenous gender identities but also from the hyper-masculinized, stoic, and heteronormative image of the "savage Indian" constructed by artists like Edward Curtis and George Catlin. Indigenous residential school survivor, Robert Houle replicates the scantily clothed muscular Indigenous male seen in Eurocentric art. With each appearance, Miss Chief actively dismantles these colonial constructs. Her hyper-feminine persona—adorned in extravagant headdresses, towering heels, and a Louis Vuitton quiver—radically challenges traditional assumptions of Native masculinity, both past and present. This subversion extends beyond gender, directly confronting the Euro-Christian narratives that dominated 19th-century North American history. Miss Chief does not conform to static categories; instead, she moves fluidly between gender identities, embodying suppressed queer histories and Indigenous traditions.

In crafting and embodying Miss Chief, Monkman actively challenges the stereotypical hyper-masculinized image of Indigenous men. By situating her both within and beyond historical confines, Monkman disrupts the Eurocentric narrative that has kept these representations frozen in time.

Monkman's story-work highlights this ongoing struggle. While Miss Chief challenges settler colonial constructs, her message risks being lost in translation, particularly to those

unfamiliar with Indigenous philosophies on gender and sexuality. Nonetheless, this presence marks a crucial step in reclaiming these narratives, offering a space where suppressed histories can be revived, and new conversations can emerge.

Settler colonialism is not just a relic of the past or marginalized communities. A clear example is Pride Toronto's handling of its collaboration with Monkman. The artist was invited to create a series of large-scale paintings depicting 2SLGBTQ+ histories across Turtle Island, displayed in a traveling exhibition that would reach both Pride festivals and remote Indigenous communities. However, despite the project's supposed commitment to inclusion, Pride Toronto attempted to assert legal ownership over Monkman's work, reflecting a broader pattern of settler colonial control over Indigenous artistic and intellectual labor.

Recognizing this exploitation, Monkman's studio withdrew from the project due to a lack of contractual security and concerns over creative autonomy. But the institutional appropriation did not end there. Just days after Monkman's withdrawal, Pride Toronto allegedly filed a report for a \$250,000 grant, falsely claiming a legally binding contract with the artist and using his artwork to secure funding. This blatant misrepresentation exemplifies how colonial power structures continue to dispossess Indigenous peoples—not just of land, but of culture, history, and creative expression. (Hooper)

The deep entrenchment of settler colonialism in society means that even organizations claiming to uplift marginalized voices often replicate this harm. To fully grasp its enduring impact, there must be a critical examination of how these systems operate today. True allyship requires more than symbolic gestures—it demands an active challenge to the structures that continue to erase and exploit Indigenous peoples. Resistance, as expressed in Monkman's refusal to participate under exploitative conditions, is essential in dismantling these ongoing colonial dynamics.

Another noteworthy, award winning, multidisciplinary Canadian Indigenous artist of Algonquin and French descent is Caroline Monnet. She uses a form of bright colour cubism to show power imbalance related to Indigenous cultural identity and this intersection with Eurocentric values. Monnet challenges traditional misrepresentations of Indigenous spirituality and culture.

Monnet curated an exhibit that actively resists settler colonialism and showcases Indigenous resistance through powerful artistic expressions. A video featuring her artwork is available in the video section. Monnet is an activist.

“Monnet points to a critical historic moment one hundred years ago when Chief Pakinawatik from Kitigan Zibi (Maniwaki) travelled 600 kilometres through waterways to Toronto with sixty other Algonquins to request from the Office of the Governor General that parts of their traditional territory be returned” (Toronto Biennial of Art).

Monnet draws upon her environment. This includes Indigenous individuals in and near Montreal. She consults with “intellectuals, artists, and scholars who have a strong influence in the Indigenous community” (Toronto Biennial of Art).

Monnet relates to their relevance and incorporates traditional Indigenous patterns and designs into her creative works. Monnet discusses preserving Indigenous culture and traditions within an urban environment. Within city life, she concedes there are multifaceted daily distractions, work, school, multiplicity of cultures, and remarkably Indigenous individuals maintain their heritage in unique ways.

“They live in the city so for me it’s interesting to talk about the hybridity of being indigenous and being urban and how we deal with our cultures and traditions. The patterns are inspired by traditional indigenous patterns passed down to me by the matriarchs in my family... It’s always interesting to me to look at traditions, something that is sacred and speaks to my indigenous heritage, and transpose that into something more contemporary to my urban lifestyle and reality” (Kovler).

Monnet describes the metaphoric masks Indigenous individuals put on to navigate through life in Canada. “The mask is about wearing your culture and your identity. I think that your traditions are always part of your psyche, and I see the mask as merging and morphing with their faces, their psyches. I feel society is often trying to put us into boxes...Institutions for example have to check boxes and include indigenous people” (Kovler).



Fig. 7. Caroline Monnet, *Voice Gone Cannot Speak*, 2022.

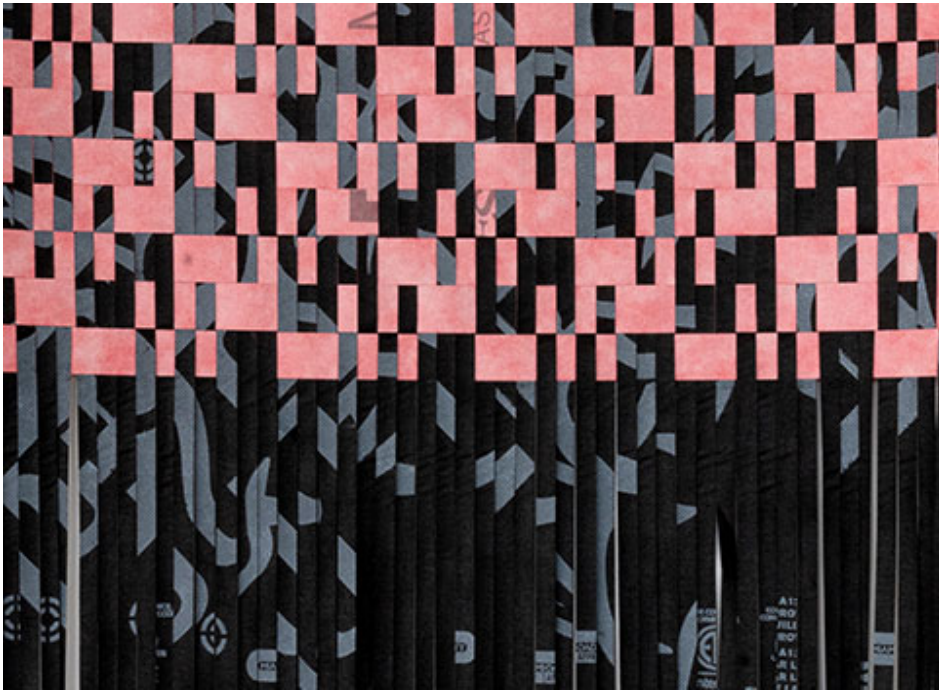


Fig. 8. Caroline Monnet, *Kikinaham -To Sing Along With* 01, 2023.

Métis visual artist Christi Belcourt blends traditional Indigenous beadwork art forms with contemporary techniques. Her art depicts the story-work of enduring strength and resilience of Indigenous cultures intertwined with nature themes. Through her intricate beadwork inspired floral designs and powerful storytelling, she invites viewers to reflect on the interconnectedness



Fig. 9. Christi Belcourt, *The Wisdom of the Universe*, 2014.

of all parts of the ecology and protection of the natural environment. Her paintings demonstrate Belcourt 's respect for the cultural heritage of her ancestors.

Belcourt explains that all living things have a right to co-exist. Belcourt's artwork critically engages with settler colonialism and the ongoing resistance of Indigenous Peoples. Through her work, she exposes the historical and ongoing injustices of colonization, challenging the Eurocentric narratives that have long silenced Indigenous voices. As an act of resistance, Belcourt urges Indigenous communities to reject the imposed structures of colonial oppression, reclaim their cultural identity, and assert their sovereignty. Her art becomes a powerful tool for decolonization, fostering resilience and defiance against the settler colonial systems.

One of her art installations at the McMichael Gallery included Belcourt creating a painting live. The mastery of her work is a representation of the incredible talent of Indigenous artists. Talent of historic Indigenous artists was for generations hidden from most Canadians. Belcourt represents the importance of nature and the concern that ecology is vanishing due to colonial and Eurocentric capitalist interests.

Some of Belcourt's paintings are biographical focusing on Indigenous struggle for identity. "...Belcourt being told that she could not apply for arts funding because she is Métis and also a Non-Status Indian" (Boyko). Some of her paintings express personal pain and anger when confronted and maneuvering systems of settler colonization.

Alexan Simeon Janvier was a First Nations painter helping to introduce contemporary Aboriginal artforms. Janvier is often referred to as Canada's first Indigenous modernist artist (McMaster). He was a member of the Indian Group of Seven. In late 2017, Janvier personally opened an exhibit at the McMichael Gallery. His presentation resembled a personal conversation with the gallery guests followed by a brief question and answer segment. Janvier provided a very personal sharing and glimpse into his artistic motivation. This celebrated

traveling exhibition held the largest number of paintings by an Indigenous artist, comprising one-hundred and fifty pieces. Janvier has been an artist for more than sixty years, *“What I love about art is that it is what I am. It makes my spirit and my spiritual life complete. There isn’t any other reason”* (Janvier).

Janvier’s art is inspired by his cultural and spiritual heritage juxtaposed with modernist abstract painting. He takes inspiration from his family’s beadwork and birchbark basketry. Into his eighties, he was a surviving member of the “Indian Group of Seven” which takes its name from the famed Canadian Group of Seven. Although Janvier is mostly known as a visual artist he also crosses over to include writings and inscriptions to accompany some of his paintings as statements of what he endured while attending the Blue Quills Indian Residential School, located near St. Paul, Alberta (Janvier. Speaking Engagement 2017). Many artists allow their art to speak, Janvier felt strongly that he needed to compliment some of his work with autobiographical details. This ensure there can be no misinterpretation of the art and its intent. Hidden images within his art are Janvier’s way of saying, look closer and closely, can you see what has been done? Janvier invites the observer to immerse themselves. Viewing an entire exhibit of Janvier’s art is to metaphorically share his experiences and criticisms of the Canadian government treated Indigenous peoples and stripped away their sovereignty.

Many Indigenous children attending Residential Schools lost their ancestral languages. However, Janvier retained his Dene language, “Fortunately, I had a good foundation in my language. I learned from the old people, the elders and old ladies, and they made sure I was well instructed in my language, in my culture and in my livelihood” (Janvier).

Janvier was an engaging and humorous speaker simultaneously delivering a political message. He mentioned that at age eight he was taken from his home and sent to Blue Quills. He expressed the only positive element was that every Friday afternoon the students were given three hours of creative time, and this is where he started developing his artistic talents.

Janvier left Blue Quills in the early 1950s. The negative impact of this time never diminished. Afterwards, he attended college and later taught art. About fifty years later, in 2001, he provided an inscription to the back of the linen canvas for a painting he called *Blood Tears*.

The inscription details a series of losses attributed to the ten years he spent at the Blue Quills Indian Residential School: loss of childhood, language, culture, customs, parents, grandparents, and traditional beliefs. He was taken off the land, he loved and severely punished for speaking his



Fig. 10. Alex Janvier, *Blood Tears*, 2001.

language— Denesu'liné. Being a little boy did not matter and 'many, many died of broken bodies' and 'broken spirit' (Truth and Reconciliation Report).

The experiences at Residential School shaped Janvier's life, leaving lasting scars tied to the broader system of settler colonialism. His criticism of residential schools highlights its role in dismantling Indigenous identity and enforcing colonial control: "... all it did was prepare most students for jail or a life on welfare" (Canada's Residential Schools 481). This reflects how the residential schools functioned as instruments entrenching systemic marginalization.

Janvier also condemned the residential school system's attempts to erase Indigenous ways of being: "You were successfully ready to go to heaven and not worth a damn in this world when you left. You couldn't earn a living. All the life skills had been drawn right out of you and replaced with a bunch of values that meant nothing... The Indian-ness was drawn right out of you" (Canada's Residential Schools 481).

The trauma extended beyond Janvier himself, affecting his entire family. His siblings, like so many others, suffered irreparable harm: “Most of his brothers and sisters died at a young age; he (Janvier) felt ‘the school just killed them on the inside’” (Canada’s Residential Schools 481). This reflects not only the brutal physical and psychological impacts of the system but also how residential schools functioned as tools of cultural genocide—weakening Indigenous families and communities to uphold settler dominance.

Janvier’s art and inscriptions help to inform others of this travesty in Canadian history. Although there is a lot of personal pain represented in some of Janvier’s art, other of his artforms are positive and beautiful. The influence of beadwork and storywork are evident in Janvier’s’ incredible floor mosaic at the Rogers Centre.



Fig. 11. Alex Janvier, *Iron Foot Place*, 2016.



Fig. 12. Alex Janvier, *Iron Foot Place*, 2016.



Fig. 13. Alex Janvier, *Iron Foot Place*, 2016.

Alex Janvier worked in an abstract medium hiding his messages within the carefully crafted swirls (Houle).

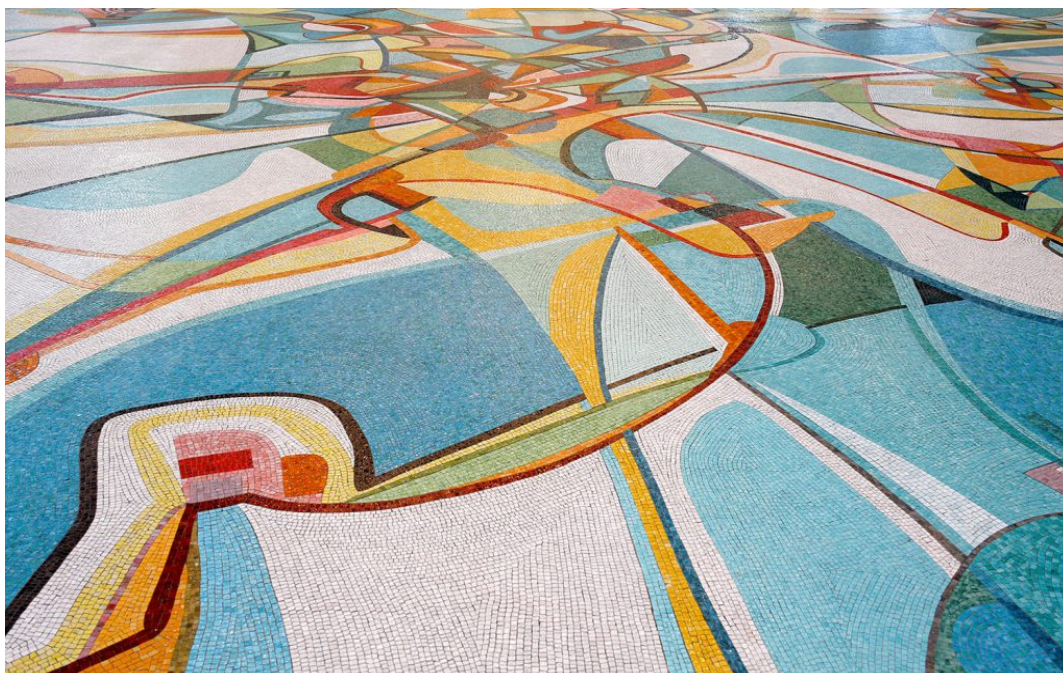


Fig. 14. Alex Janvier, *Iron Foot Place*, 2016.

Another prominent Indigenous artist and residential school survivor, Robert Houle echoes Janvier's experiences and storywork, expressing, "Indians don't idealize nature at all. It is interesting that in western thought, nature is idealized and at the same time violently controlled" (Houle).



Fig. 15. Robert Houle, *O-ween du muh waun (We Were Told)*, 2017.

As demonstrated through their art, Indigenous experiences impacted by settler colonialism are unworthy of celebration. Indigenous artists reflect deep scars and divides within Canadian histories. Instead of celebrating, many Indigenous individuals and communities view Canada Day as a time for mourning and reflection on what was lost due to colonization and the ongoing results of systemic wrongdoings and injustices.

Settler colonialism extends beyond historical land dispossession. It continues to manifest in everyday norms and cultural frameworks shaping perceptions of Indigenous peoples, their histories, and their territories. This persistent influence has been described as "settler colonial common sense" (Snelgrove, Dhamoon and Corntassel 8), a term that refers to the unconscious assumptions and practices that normalize settler dominance. This so-called common sense is entrenched in ideas about land, identity, and memory, shaping material realities sustaining outmoded narratives while obscuring histories of violence and dispossession.

Professor Mark Rifkin expands on this concept with "settler time," a framework that critiques how Indigenous histories are often framed within colonial narratives of progress and decline. Rifkin emphasizes the importance of recognizing alternative temporalities, what he terms "temporal sovereignty," where Indigenous Peoples maintain their own narratives of continuity and change, independent of prevalent colonial frameworks (Rifkin x). Rifkin highlights that Indigenous resistance is not merely a refusal of modernity but an assertion of alternative ways of relating to time, space, and identity (Rifkin 38). A rejection of linear settler colonial timelining disrupts false narratives confining Indigenous presence to a colonial past, reinforcing Indigenous agency in shaping their own futures.

The Eurocentric logic practiced by settler colonialism of Indigenous elimination did not stop with physical removal. Instead, it evolved, shifting into legal and social mechanisms that sought to assimilate Indigenous peoples into settler society or erase them entirely. Canadian residential schools began as a Christian and later as a federal political agenda to eliminate Indigenous culture through forced assimilation of Indigenous children. To enable expediency, the Canadian government expanded on the original Christian missionary residential schools. The philosophy included removing Indigenous children from their native homes, placing them in government-funded mandatory boarding schools, and somehow transforming them from Indigenous to White. The process was not short-lived, lasting from the 1830s to the 1990s, just

over 150 years. The goal was to remove future generations from Indigenous land. This reclaimed land could be used for settler purposes. The concept of assimilation is often interpreted as related to race. As previously discussed, although race may have initially appeared as an outward issue, settler colonization was not solely about race. As King describes, it was more of an issue of inconvenience. Indigenous people presented an obstacle to the lands (King). Eurocentric settlements could only expand once the inconvenience was removed. This issue is explored in King's, *The Inconvenient Indian*.

The concept of dissociative amnesia—the unconscious blocking of traumatic events—emerges frequently in Indigenous narratives (Spiegel). While some survivors of residential schools have been able to reclaim their pasts through storytelling, others remain unable to revisit their trauma. Some stories are told through lens of childhood memories, explaining why many Indigenous autobiographies are written in the style of early reader texts. The process of remembering, for those who can, is a powerful act of resistance against the forced forgetting imposed by settler-colonial systems.

Indigenous resistance to settler colonialism is deeply tied to the exclusion felt on Canada Day, a celebration that marks the founding of a nation built on the dispossession of Indigenous lands and the oppression of Indigenous Peoples. Sadly, July 1, 1867, Confederation, did not signify unity for all—it institutionalized colonial violence, systemic racism, and the marginalization of Indigenous communities.

Settler colonialism is not a historical event but an ongoing structure continuing to shape Indigenous experiences. Decolonization is not merely about recognition. This requires dismantling colonial frameworks and restoring Indigenous sovereignty independent of other national and political influences and structures.

“Indigenous Sovereignty arises from Indigenous Traditional Knowledge, belonging to each Indigenous nation, tribe, and community. Traditional Indigenous knowledge consists of spiritual ways, culture, language, social and legal systems, political structures, and inherent relationships with lands, waters, and all upon them. Indigenous

sovereignty exists regardless of what the governing nation-state does or does not do (Karim).

Reconciliation, often touted as a solution, must go beyond symbolic gestures to address the material realities of Indigenous Peoples—ending the continued isolation of Indigenous communities that lack necessities such as safe drinking water, employment opportunities, and adequate housing. These are not accidental oversights, but direct consequences of colonial policies designed to suppress Indigenous self-determination relating to several factors including poorer health lower levels of education, and inadequate housing (Joseph).

“So why is it so important to understand the history of genocide in Canada? Because it’s not history. Today’s racist government laws, policies and actions have proven to be just as deadly for Indigenous peoples as the genocidal acts of the past. What used to be the theft of children into residential schools is now the theft of children into provincial foster care. What used to be scalping bounties are now Starlight tours (deaths in police custody).... Racism for Indigenous peoples in Canada is not just about enduring stereotypical insults and name-calling, being turned away for employment, or being vilified in the media by government officials – racism is killing our people” (Palmater).

Indigenous sovereignty is fundamental to their identity and spirit memories passed down through birthright. Indigenous sovereignty means that Indigenous peoples and nation-states are two separate governing entities co-existing on the same land. Indigenous sovereignty re-establishes what settler colonialism dismantled.

Indigenous scholars have long highlighted these systemic injustices. Retired York University Métis professor Dr. David McNab, in his book *No Place for Fairness*, critiques the Canadian government’s failure to uphold treaty obligations and Indigenous land rights. Similarly, York University Indigenous professor Bonita Lawrence examined how settler colonialism continues to shape policies that dispossess Indigenous Peoples. The refusal of the Canadian government to honor treaties exemplifies the persistence of colonial power structures, reinforcing the dispossession and exclusion that Indigenous communities resist to this day and to block Indigenous sovereignty.

Canada Day celebrations, therefore, are not just a reminder of colonial oppression—they are a call to resist, to challenge settler narratives, and to demand justice. True decolonization involves dismantling settler colonial frameworks, reclaiming Indigenous lands, and centering Indigenous governance and sovereignty in reshaping Canada's future. “Due to this exclusion, Aboriginal people cannot see themselves in antiracism contexts, and Aboriginal activism against settler domination takes place without people of color as allies” (Lawrence 120).

Lawrence further discusses,

“For many Native people in Eastern Canada, the urbanization and assimilation pressures of the 1950s and 1960s meant that our parents married white people. This interval also featured large-scale immigration of people of color, so that today urban Native people form tiny, paler islands floating in a darker “multicultural” sea. Over the past 15 years or so since the Oka Crisis, in common with many urban mixed-bloods, I have struggled to learn about my own Indigeneity. In this context, my light skin separates me from the people of color that my mother would have viewed as allies” (Lawrence 121).

Lawrence provides a further condemnation of settler colonialism. ““Despite our different positioning, experiences, and concerns, we have reached a common conclusion: that antiracism is premised on an ongoing colonial project. As a result, we fear that rather than challenging the ongoing colonization of Aboriginal peoples, Canadian antiracism is furthering contemporary colonial agendas” (Lawrence 123).

Can Indigenous sovereignty coexist in Canada? There is a precedence that all of Canada, except the province of Quebec, operates under the principles of Common Law, while Quebec is governed by Civil Law Statutes. A difference with Indigenous sovereignty is that ideally it would operate within provincial, territorial and federal government jurisdictions. This adds a complex dimension further complicated by Indigenous rights transcending the current Canadian – United States border.

The history of settler colonialism in Canada is marked by the displacement of Indigenous Peoples, the confiscation of their lands and resources, and the systemic

suppression of their cultural practices through lawfare and policies. These acts of oppression and cultural genocide cannot be perceived as incidental. On the contrary, these were deliberate strategies to erase Indigenous persons and impose Eurocentric dominance. Dismantling these structures is no easy task. Yet, Canada Day continues to celebrate a settler state built on Indigenous dispossession rather than signaling an end to these injustices. Year after year, celebrations of national independence remind Indigenous Peoples they remain subjected to the same legal lawfare and imposed political barriers designed to maintain settler control.

True decolonization requires recognizing that Indigenous worldviews and ways of living juxtapose and stand in direct opposition to the capitalist and extractive priorities of settler colonialism (Wolfe 388). While Indigenous sovereignty, governance and traditions emphasize harmony with the environment, settler ideologies prioritize economic exploitation and resource extraction. Inclusion cannot merely mean assimilating Indigenous Peoples into settler frameworks; it must include dismantling the steadfast colonial structures that impose Eurocentric definitions of success and progress as opposed to eco-friendly, sustainable practices.

“Decolonization is central to the work of human rights in our society, and consequently to the work of BC’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner. Decolonization is the dismantling of the process by which one nation asserts and establishes its domination and control over another nation’s land, people and culture. It is the framework through which we are working toward undoing the oppression and subjugation of Indigenous peoples in what is now known as British Columbia and unlearning colonial ways of thinking and being (British Columbia’s Office of the Human Rights Commissioner).

Fundamentally, decolonization involves reshaping Canada Day and rejecting harmful settler narratives that reinforce Indigenous erasure. It requires not just words but concrete actions—land back initiatives, the restoration of Indigenous governance, and the rejection of colonial policies that perpetuate marginalization. It also demands an end to the

celebration of colonial triumph and the beginning of genuine reconciliation grounded in the inclusion of Indigenous sovereignty.

Alternatively, perhaps Canada Day should not be marked by fireworks, but by a collective reckoning with history and a commitment to equitable justice (Francis, Klyne, and McCallum). Rather than celebrating a colonial state, a new vision of Canada—one that centers Indigenous resurgence and self-determination—must take root. Only through such transformative changes can true decolonization begin to be recognized and materialize.

“In Canada, the hierarchical authoritative practices are extremely euro-centric and fail to recognize the spiritual and personal autonomy Indigenous groups practice that are distinct from one another. The stark differences between governing and territorial division have caused Indigenous rights and claims to be ignored and thus created a lack of sovereignty. This has mainly been motivated by the potential of profits, power and control over Indigenous People and their land” (Karim).

There should be a process for Indigenous validation and sovereignty as a precursor to a reimagined Canada Day. How history is remembered, and who decides which narratives endure? Perhaps history is neither purely objective nor entirely subjective, but instead a shifting interpretation shaped by those who tell it. The challenge lies in the fact that history can only be written in hindsight, filtered through the present perspective and influenced by gaps in collective memory (Adams).

Chapter 4: Indigenous Role Models and Stories About Residential Schools

Thelma Chalifoux is the first Métis woman appointed to the Senate of Canada. She states, "Role models...are people "who make a difference," people who make others' lives 'a little better' (Lusty).

Many children who attended residential schools grew up without Indigenous role models to guide them. These children were not allowed to speak their Native languages or repeat Indigenous stories.

Role models provide guidance, inspiration and establish positivity. Peer role models mentor beliefs and values while simultaneously reinforcing optimism. However, an issue affecting many Indigenous peoples is the lack of role models. Indigenous communities rely on their elders as role models for guidance. "Elders are storytellers, teachers, protectors, healers and pivotal members of Indigenous communities in Canada. Many grew up speaking an Indigenous language, learning ceremony and living off the land. Several are also survivors of residential school..." (Lypny).

Due to political attempts to assimilate Indigenous children into mainstream Eurocentric society, many traditions were lost. Today, for various reasons including residential schools, many Indigenous communities lack demographic populations of elders as role models. Psychologist Dr. Marilyn Price-Mitchel explains the significance of role models; "Positive role models boost young people's motivation by modeling a guide to achieving success. For example, they likely have an ability to inspire others, a clear set of values, a commitment to community, an acceptance of others, and an ability to overcome obstacles" (Price-Mitchell).

A significant reference for a need for Indigenous role models is contained within a 1980 Inter-Disciplinary Studies master's thesis by Duke Redbird, an Ojibway descendant from southwestern Ontario. Redbird is a member of the Ontario Métis & Non-Status Indian Association and a significant contributor to the development of Indigenous peoples in Canada's

literature. “It would be hard to find a better description of the need to develop strong positive Métis Models for the Métis people to identify with, and for the proliferation of those models through media of mainstream society. Although many people in the white society take “image” for granted, or regard it as superficial, that luxury is only available to those who have established their image in the mainstream society” (Redbird 49).

Cree descendant, university professor and author Tracey Lindberg also identifies a shortage of Indigenous role models. In her debut novel, *Birdie*, Lindberg references the only role model for her title character is Indigenous actor Pat John playing Jesse of the defunct television series “The Beachcombers.” “In her bag, she carries decades-old clippings of Pat John, an actor from the show—” a healthy, working Indian man” (Clare).

In a published interview with American Chippewa author Louise Erdrich, she comments; “In *The Blue Jay’s Dance*, I was looking for role models, and that was very hard to find” (Tedrowe).

A void of societal and community Indigenous role models can sometimes be fulfilled within a nuclear family unit. Indigenous author and scholar of Kiowa descent, N. Scott Momaday, expresses the importance of the family in creating environments where children will be able to achieve self-actualization. Momaday describes the positive influence his parents played as personal role models in *The Names A Memoir*, “...they involve me in a tide of confidence and well-being. What on earth was not possible? I must have been carried along in the waves of hope and happiness that were gathered in the hearts of my young and free and beautiful parents” (Momaday 61).

American medical expert Sophie Bloom describes the importance of parents as role models. “Parents serve as role models not only through direct interactions with their children, but through the examples they set with their attitude and behaviours within the family and in the outside world. By addressing their concerns, sharing their lives, and maintaining a constructive

perspective, parents can contribute to their children's personal growth and development” (Bloom).

Bloom further explains role models. “Through their personal qualities and achievements, they can inspire others to strive and develop without direct instruction. Due to their regular presence and interaction with their children, parents can serve as consistent and evolving role models for their children” (Bloom).

Momaday was fortunate that both of his parents were proud of their heritage and highly employable. The Momaday family realized to earn livelihoods required adaptations to the society where they lived instead of allowing racist attitudes to define or limit them (Momaday 127). They moved around for employment purposes prior to settling down with both obtaining teaching positions on a reserve in the state of Arizona. Momaday’s recollection of his upbringing contrasts from some of the other Indigenous writers discussed in this paper due to the beneficial home life he experienced growing up in a secure two-parent environment, constant reinforcement of family values, and a sense of financial security.

Other times, a void of role models can be filled through fiction. Unfortunately, historical fictional Indigenous role models often embody racist attitudes. Indigenous American scholar and author, Thomas King recalls a childhood story of one his friends being a fan of Straight Arrow, a juvenile serial western radio program airing from 1948-1951. King discusses Straight Arrow in *The Inconvenient Indian, A Curious Account of Native People in North America* because of its consistency with a portrayal of the Noble Indian. Mild-mannered imaginary rancher, Steve Adams is a Comanche Indian who was raised by a White family. In American folklore there are special trusted Indians who were raised by Whites. Adams becomes aware of his hidden past and becomes a warrior, Straight Arrow, coming to the aid of Whites. The premise for the story has all the racist influences of the 1940s and 1950s popular cowboys and Indians theme

proving an interesting dichotomy that trustworthiness is based on indoctrination into White culture (King, "Inconvenient Indian" 22).

Fanciful fabrications cannot be considered true role models for Indigenous children. Straight Arrow is the embodiment of racialization, and the type of role model White culture would like to condition Indigenous children to emulate. Mid-twentieth century Straight Arrow has similar characteristics to the storyline created by mid-nineteenth century American author, James Fennimore Cooper for his Indigenous fictional icon in "The Deer Slayer" novel series.

The shortage of role models and the quest for identity assurances are confirmed by Erdrich, Momaday, Lindberg and other Indigenous authors. The shortage of Indigenous role models can be compensated through stalwart efforts of Indigenous artists and writers. Monkman draws inspiration from a few historical and contemporary Indigenous role models, Norval Morrisseau, and Robert Houle. Chalifoux expresses the responsibilities of role models, "If you are a role model, you are also a servant of your family, of your community, of our people" (Lusty).

Understanding the messages embedded in Indigenous writing is essential to recognizing the impacts of settler colonialism and the ongoing resistance of Indigenous communities. During the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the Canadian government tried to assimilate Indigenous peoples and eradicate their ethnicity and heritage through mandatory attendance at residential schools, sometimes referred to as Indian Residential Schools. This federal political agenda proved to be a very disturbing time for Indigenous children and their parents. A few of the schools were day schools, however, the vast majority were dormitory style residential schools located at far distances from the students' home villages and settlements. Some students tried very hard to forget their experiences at these institutions, but many others could not. Today, some of their experiences of cultural genocide while at residential schools, juxtaposed along

with happy stories of their home communities are being published. This is a way to share their truths and to eradicate misconceptions held by most Canadians.

Indigenous professor and resistance writer, Emma LaRocque is from the Plains Cree and Métis Peoples. In *Tides, Towns, and Trains* she talks about being sent away from her Big Bay, Alberta community to attend school in the pursuit of what the government described as higher education. As a child, she felt the pull of two worlds: the one of her People and the other of the forced influences of Eurocentricity. (LaRocque, "Tides, Towns and Trains").

Schooling LaRocque away from her community was an undisguised initiative towards assimilation. In many ways, residential schools were a form of emotional sterilization as well as a form of ethnic cleansing. Attaining higher education meant involuntarily forfeiting Indigenous culture. LaRocque as an historian recognizes, "...Native peoples resisted ideological impositions, economic exploitation, cultural insults, and personal abuse" (LaRocque 25).

Suddenly being alone and an overwhelming feeling of loneliness are prevalent themes in many survivor stories from residential schools. Indigenous children were forcibly alone for the first time, separated from their parents and siblings while attending these mandatory, publicly funded institutions. Their feelings of loneliness escalated when they were forbidden to speak their languages, follow their faiths, wear traditional clothing, eat natural diets and isolated from loving, multi-generational families within supportive communities. These were melancholic times for many Indigenous children.

Some studies indicate many residential school survivors suffer from Residential School Syndrome (RSS), a form of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). This type of PTSD exaggerates intense perceptions of fear and anger. For residential school survivors, this leads to substance abuse issues related to alcohol, drugs, and others, including solvent sniffing. RSS also leads to major clinical depression and dysthymic disorder, a milder form of depression also affecting moods and thoughts (Brasfield). Symptoms vary including flashbacks and nightmares

leading to anxiousness and anxiety (Lego). RSS is a intergenerational problem affecting grandparents, children and grandchildren. Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart to illuminates unrecognized causal contributions of colonization to behavioral health (BH) disparities and “avoids victim blaming and pathologizing” (Brave Heart 8).

The relationship between culture and resilience is intricate, shaped by the enduring impacts of settler colonialism and intergenerational trauma (Brave Heart). However, research indicates that maintaining cultural continuity, characterized by strong community and family ties, contributes to healthier self-perceptions both now and in the future (Chandler and Lalonde, *Cultural Continuity as a Protective Factor*). Efforts to reclaim traditional cultural knowledge and practices reflect the deep-rooted strengths within Indigenous communities. These actions align with the concept of cultural continuity, described as the revitalization of Indigenous identity through engagement with land, language, spirituality, and cultural traditions (Chandler and Lalonde, *Cultural Continuity as a Hedge*).

The last residential school was closed three decades ago. RRS continues to haunt many survivors. Although many cannot escape the experiences, few want to revisit events at residential schools. In addition, obtaining survivor stories about residential schools published proved to be a difficult task. In *When the Other is Me: Native Resistance Discourse, 1850-1990*, LaRocque explains that Residential Schools made victims of Indigenous children. Impacts are still being felt by survivors and their descendants (LaRocque 96). Throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century, Indigenous writers encountered challenges finding willing publishers for sharing their experiences at residential schools. Publishers were reluctant to consider these stories as being commercially viable, fearing limited interest among book buying Canadians (LaRocque 84).

Some residential school survivors are deciding to share their experiences. These are a form of story-work. Because these stories and themes are told from childhood memories, some

of the story-work may seem subliminal. For those sharing their reflections, their storytelling combined with story-work is intentional stating these stories matter. (Canada Truth Reconciliation Report).



Fig. 16. Historic Canada, 2019.

Until recently, Indigenous authors struggled to get their voices heard, as there was a political disinterest that non-Indigenous Canadians should be interested and become familiar with atrocities occurring at residential schools. Several publishers felt these topics would not sell and the cost of publishing and promoting would not be recovered through book sales. However, with the publishing of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Report (December 2015), there is an increased attentiveness for understanding the hardships and harsh treatments inflicted upon Indigenous children during their formative, developmental years (Jordan-Fenton, xiii). Forced loss of their birthright languages meant Indigenous children could no longer communicate with their parents, grandparents, extended family members and local communities. This removal of their identities contributed to feelings of being an outsider. For many Indigenous children, being labeled an outsider lasted their entire lives resulting in a vanishing of their previously strong connections to family, culture, heritage, and identity.

Generally, although with some differences, residential schools constitute an extremely homogeneous group of institutions focusing on assimilation and erasure of Indigenous heritage. Residential schools were in remote areas, legislated by federal laws and mostly managed by

Christian church organizations. Due to different administrative practices and the geographically isolated locations of the institutions, this allowed for polarity of practices. From the perspective of the children, some administrators were milder in their treatments and policies, others harsher, however, none of the students' experiences can be classified as pleasant. All the residential schools caused a perpetual sense of heartbreak. All stories tell about forced transformations, unhappy attempts at assimilation, and loss of dignities. Similar real-life events are repeated in most autobiographical and biographical storytelling geared for primary grade readers, and the junior-intermediate grades level readers. Truly the value of many of these stories is relatability, written for audiences of children paralleling the ages of the Indigenous children when they attended a residential school. The experiences at residential schools are locked in the timeframe when these occurred. These were children facing experiences they could not understand at the time, nor afterwards.

Although the political factors of the residential schools are not directly the subject of the survivors' stories, this fact is mentioned as a validation of a common theme in Indigenous writing, expressing the unhappiness experienced by the students and their isolation of being alone and feeling lonely. Their experiences were real (Government of Canada).

The times at residential schools are documented in childhood recollections by residential school survivors. To gain a better appreciation for these experiences details of some stories are discussed. These stories are personal accounts of what happened as opposed to academic analysis. The realness and similarities of the stories authenticate an accuracy of experiences at residential schools. Desire-based research themes emerge naturally in these stories. Events happened. Validation is through capturing these memories for posterity.

The authors of *Fatty Legs, A True Story*, by Christy Jordan-Fenton and her mother-in-law, Margaret-Olemaun Pokiak-Fenton, were surprised with the success of this book. It is the autobiographical story of Olemaun's two-years spent in a residential school. *Fatty Legs* was first

published in 2008, two years prior to the initiation of the Canadian Government's Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (Jordan-Fenton, xiii). The success of *Fatty Legs* exceeded the authors' and publisher's expectations. A fact that proved the impetus for the authors' three additional books.

In *Fatty Legs*, Olemaun was initially reluctant to share what she had done to her stockings, "I didn't want my grandchildren to know I was naughty at one time" (Jordan-Fenton, 2020, xiv). Olemaun eventually relented and agreed to share her story because she thought no one would bother to read it. Quite the contrary, *Fatty Legs* is in multiple publications, in three languages, English, French and Korean, and has inspired a musical (Jordan-Fenton xiv). Until her death in 2021, just shy of eight-five years, Olemaun encouraged other survivors to share their stories (Jordan-Fenton xv).

Fatty Legs is a bittersweet story of an eight-year-old Olemaun, an Inuvialuit girl living in Canada's far north. She is excited to learn to read. Olemaun must attend a residential school located a far distance from her home. Her excitement quickly vanishes, turning to experiences where she is alone and lonely, as the reality of being a student at an institution unfolds. Not uncharacteristically, she is treated harshly by the nuns. Her braided hair is cut short, she is forced to wear an uncomfortable and not climate friendly uniform, and she is poorly fed, existing on a diet consisting mostly of cabbage soup. She is assigned more menial tasks than learning instructions. Olemaun is renamed Margaret, and she is forbidden to speak her language or follow her customs. She is humiliated by one of the nuns who forces her to wear red stockings.

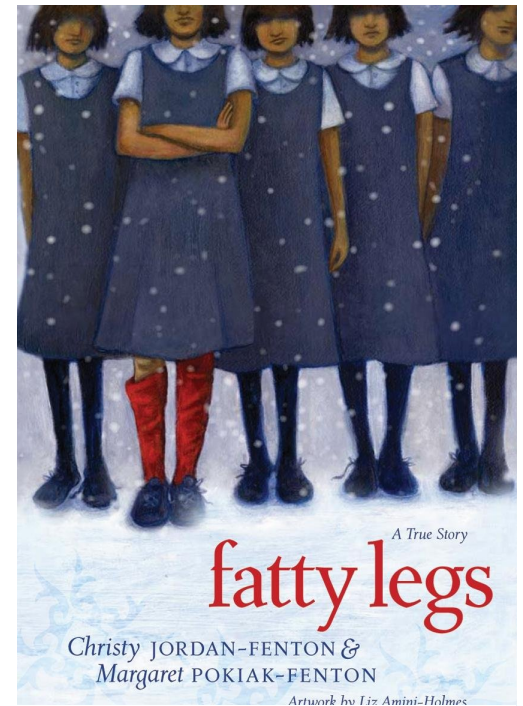


Fig. 17. Liz Amini-Holmes, *Fatty Legs* Cover Art, 2010.

Olemaun rebels and deals with the hideous red stockings. At age ten she left the school able to read in English and French. She is neither Margaret nor Olemaun, and she feels like an outsider within her family and community. After a personal struggle, she became better able to fit in at home and reintegrate within her community (Jordan-Fenton 83-84).

Fatty Legs inspired three additional children's picture books by the authors. One of these books, *Not My Girl*, expands, and develops the plot of

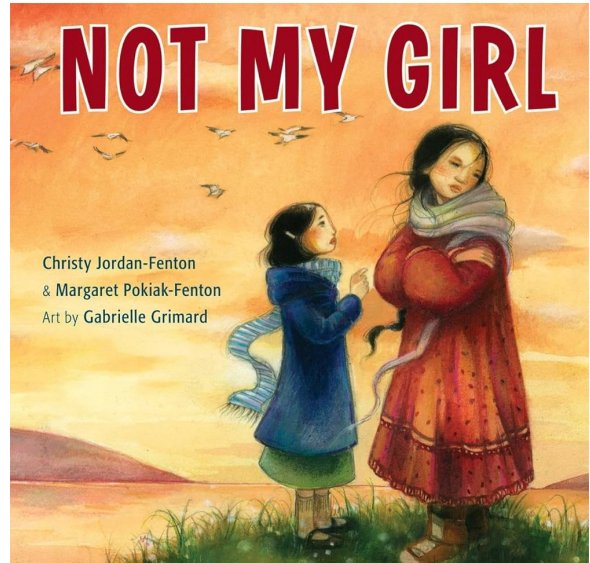


Fig. 18. Gabrielle Grimard, *Not My Girl* Cover Art, 2014.

Olemaun's return from residential school. Shockingly, her mother does not recognize her.

Although Olemaun could read, she lost the ability to speak her Inuvialuit language. Her father spoke English because he attended a residential school as a boy. He translates for Olemaun. It is a devastating feeling for Olemaun to repeatedly be called an outsider. Eventually, Olemaun rejoins her family and community, but she is forever scarred from the experiences at the residential school. "The school continued to disrupt intergenerational family relations beyond its walls through language" (Dion and Griffith 9).

Olemaun's story is shared sixty years after she attended a residential school. There are many unanswered questions in *Fatty Legs*. Olemaun only had her childhood knowledge to draw upon. These experiences were not discussed when returning from a residential school. Other familiar survivors kept their horrific secrets private. Before Olemaun left for residential school, her elder half-sister, Rosie, refused to relive her experiences by sharing. When persistently asked, Rosie replied, "I don't know. You ask too many questions" (Jordan-Fenton & Pokiak-Fenton 5). Their father too was silent on his experiences providing Olemaun with no insights. A few years later, after Olemaun returned home, her younger siblings attended residential schools

even though this was not the preference of her father. By this time, "...the government made school attendance a condition for receiving child benefits, he gave in and agreed that they, too, could go and learn to read" (Jordan-Fenton & Pokiak-Fenton 83-84). Remarkably, Olemaun's story is shared in a manner which indirectly allows the readers to think about whether there should be judgment of the government. *Fatty Legs* is simply her story. However, after reading, it remains impossible not to have an opinion.

Olemaun's excitement to learn to read was not unique among Indigenous children. Many knew they would need to attend a residential school to gain the skills of reading and writing. The young children were unaware of the personal sacrifices they would need to make to learn. Personal sacrifice was unfathomable to comprehend at such early ages (Jordan-Fenton 7). Olemaun's experience is like Phyllis Webstad's recounting in her autobiographical memoir, *Phyllis' Orange Shirt*.

Another memory is told in *Phyllis' Orange Shirt*. Phyllis is excited to learn to read. Her grandmother buys her an orange shirt which Phyllis saves to wear on her special day of departure for residential school. At the institution, the orange shirt is stripped off her, she is given a uniform to wear, her braids are cut off, and her existence mirrors Olemaun where her Indigenous heritage is symbolically and forcibly removed. Both girls' time at a residential school is relatively short: two years for Olemaun and one year for Phyllis. Both Olemaun and Phyllis provide insights that Indigenous children wanted to learn. Their experiences identify the personal repercussions attached to this learning of being alone and feeling lonely. These are

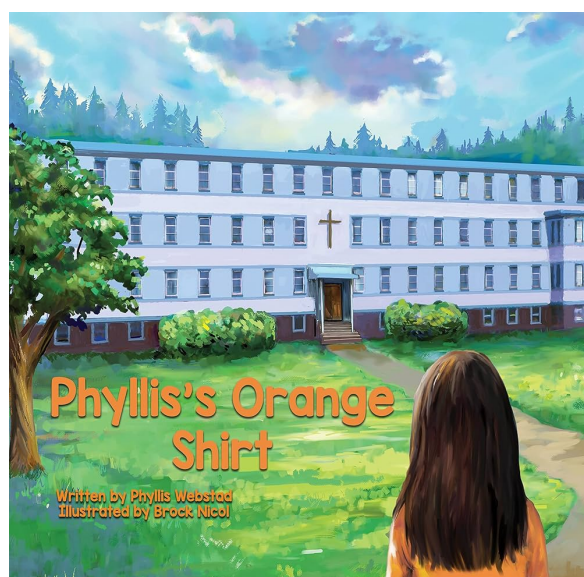


Fig. 19. Brock Nicol, *Phyllis's Orange Shirt* Cover Art, 2019.

highly emotional prices to pay for an education. Stepping inside the outsider's world proved consequential. Today, we honour Indigenous people with Orange Shirt Day.

Canada is fortunate that the story of *Fatty Legs* was freely shared. Jordan-Fenton saw the significance in her mother-in-law's story. In contrast, many of the residential school survivor stories are locked deep inside their personal memories. For many, they are too painful to think about, much less to share. Jordan-Fenton talks about the honour and respect to be paid to those who prefer to remain silent saying, "...it is important to stress that many residential school survivors will not wish to talk about or revisit what they experienced. Best practices include respecting their silence" (Jordan-Fenton vi).

Public interest in *Fatty Legs* proves to be remarkable, especially since there is a significant and lengthy history of Indigenous voices being stifled, "...having been denied access to the discourse of public policy, Indigenous people have made public their life stories as eyewitness accounts...and record the effects of these policies..." (Dion and Griffith, 2018, 2). In addition to being silenced, many potential Indigenous voices are not shared because of a feeling of shame. Susan Dion is a Potawatomi-Lenapé academic. Her mother echoes Jordan-Fenton's statement that some Indigenous people prefer to remain silent of their experiences, stating, "My strongest memory when I finally found a way to talk with my mother about her life was her sense of insult. Her words stay with me: 'they judged us incapable, as if we didn't know how to take care of ourselves and our children'" (Dion and Griffith 3). Dion's mother's brief statement demonstrates the damaging, racist attitudes towards Indigenous people. Even when trying to suppress these feelings, Dion's mother could not escape the feelings of a very personal injustice of being considered in

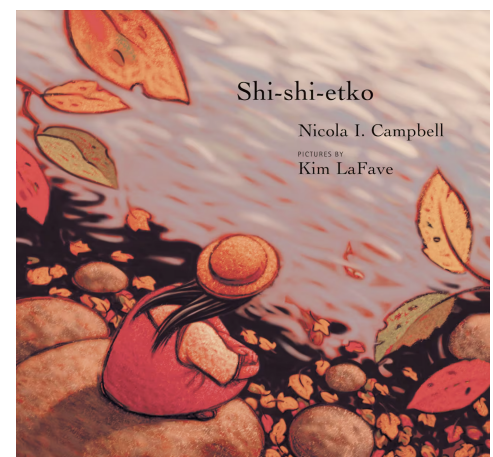


Fig. 20. Kim LaFave, *Shi-shi-etko* Cover Art, 2005.

such a biased, unfair, and preconceived manner. Her capabilities did not matter. She was lumped together with a racialized group.

Most indigenous children were well cared for in loving families, a fact demonstrated in *Shi Shi Echo* by Nicola I. Campbell. This bittersweet story depicts the last few days prior to a young Indigenous girl's forced departure to a residential school. Shi Shi's mother is a loving, caring, knowledgeable woman who spends time with her daughter whom she will not see for a long time.

The Train by Jodie Callaghan, Mi'gmaq First Nation in Gespe'gewa'gi (Quebec) is another heartfelt story. An elderly uncle tells his young niece why he waits by the now-decaying train tracks where in his boyhood, a train transported him and his cousins to a faraway residential school. The next six years he was alone and felt lonely in a sterile institution. He lost more than his childhood. His niece asks why he sits and waits. Her uncle replies, "I'm waiting for what we lost that day to come back to us" (Callaghan 23). Could there be a better reason to share? The aging uncle knows that it is too late for him, but for the generation of his young niece, he is hopeful.

The Train represents settler colonial technology invading traditional lands. This technology took the children to destinations far from their homes. When the transportation was no longer needed to bring children to residential schools, the trains stopped coming and the tracks were left to be overtaken by nature. The tracks symbolize destruction and ruin on multiple levels. The fact that the tracks are still visible represents the ongoing pain for Indigenous individuals and survivors of residential schools.

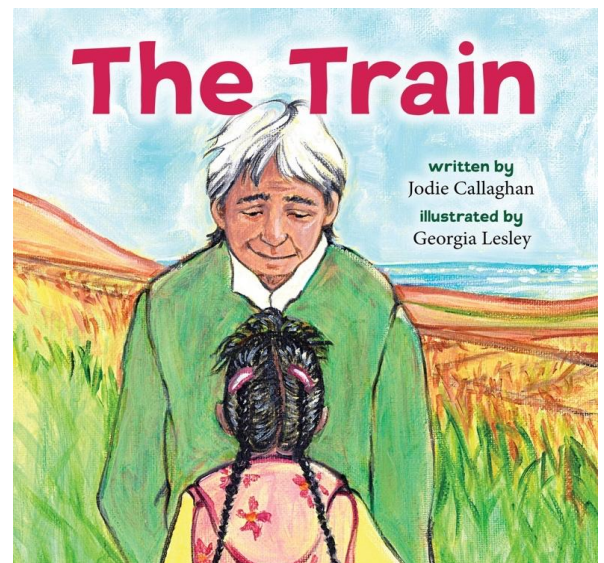


Fig. 21. Georgia Lesley, *The Train* Cover Art, 2005.

“While the Indian residential school system and state institutions more generally attempted to dismiss and even eradicate Indigenous knowledge and ways of being... children drew on their ancestral teachings to survive” (Dion and Griffith 4). Dion and Griffith further explain, “While residential schooling as part of the larger project...to eradicate Indigenous ways of being, in many ways it was these lessons learned at home that allowed Indigenous children to survive” (Dion and Griffith 7).

The concept of Indigenous ingenuity is exemplified in Ben Sures’ allegorical picture book for young readers, *The Boy Who Walked Backwards*. Leo Day is a young Indigenous boy forced to attend a residential school. Upon arrival at the institution, he undergoes the often-told familiar events; his long hair is cut, he is forbidden to speak his birthright language and forced to speak only English. Sures explains that Leo is subjected to the learning contradiction that Jesus was so special that he was allowed to have long hair. Leo is permitted to return home for Christmas. He no longer feels alone and lonely. Leo gets up early on the morning he is to be collected to return to the residential school. He walks

backwards into the forest behind his family’s home. Hiding behind trees, he waits in silence for the truck to arrive to collect him for his return to the institution. His fresh footprints in the snow, leading out of the trees, fool the collectors that he cannot be in the forest. Not able to find him,

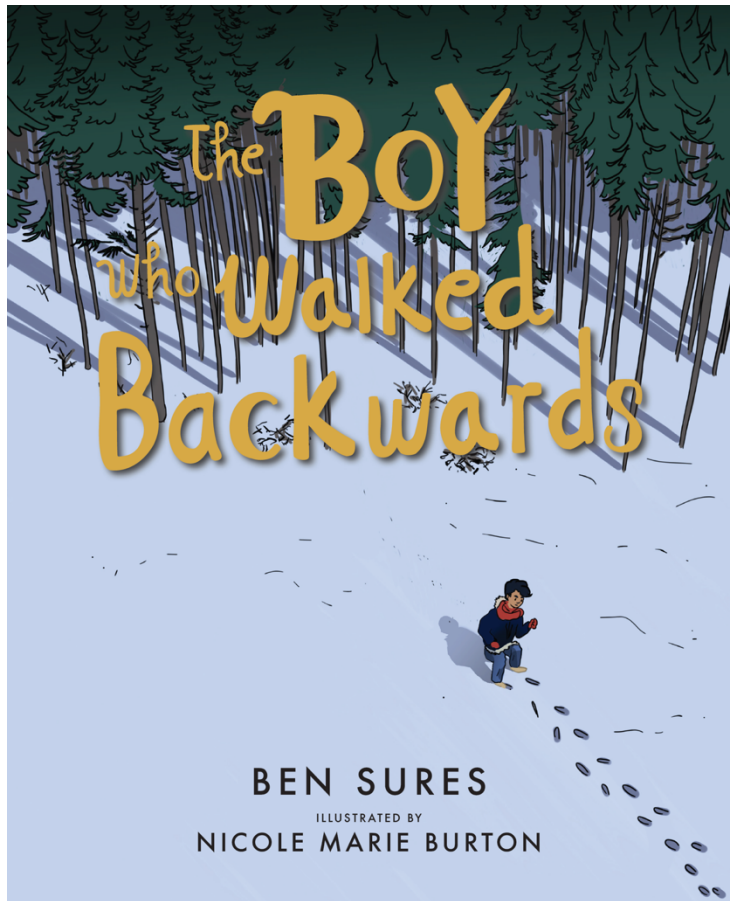


Fig. 22. Nicole Marie Burton, *The Boy Who Walked Backwards* Cover Art, 2018.

the collector leaves. When Leo can no longer hear the truck, he races home. His parents are happily surprised. Using Indigenous ingenuity Leo never returns to a residential school.

It is difficult for outsiders to understand a unique way of life practiced by Indigenous people, especially when there is a different language often existing only in oral format. Translations are prone to misinterpretations. Even when being diligent, much value and truth can be lost in original translation attempts. One way to compensate and overcome this dilemma is through artistic renderings included with the written text.

Joanne Schwartz discusses preserving Indigenous and especially Inuit stories traditionally told and retold through oral storytelling. Schwartz discusses the positive and negative aspects of capturing these stories into illustrated picture books. Oral stories are atmospheric, containing environmental conditions like howling wind, thunder, and darkness to inspire the storytelling. Even illustrated written text cannot accurately replicate the sensations of the stories often told orally by an elder.

As mentioned, *Fatty Legs* is an excellent example of how illustrations portray Inuit feelings and thoughts. (Jordan-Fenton 3) The stories told by survivors of residential schools are real. Jordan-Fenton explains that although her mother-in-law consented to sharing her story, in many ways, Olemaun is an exception. Too many survivors find it too difficult to recall their time at a residential school, much less to share the details. Jordan-Fenton relates these stories to Neil Gaiman's thoughts on the significance of scary fairy tales where he writes, "...the stories are not important so that children can know that dragons exist, but so that they can know that they can defeat them" (Jordan-Fenton xv-xvi). Olemaun faced her dragons, and so did Leo, and others too. The survivors did just that, they survived the residential schools. These stories show how some very bright and determined Indigenous children dealt with being alone and feeling lonely in a sterile institutional environment established to remove their Indigenous spirits. Quite to the contrary, for many of the children discussed, the time spent in the outsider's residential

school reinforced their Indigenous knowledge and identities. There remains hope that more survivors will come forward to tell their stories. Their truths may finally help to alleviate some of their feelings of loneliness.

Telling stories of times spent attending a residential school from the perspective of childhood memories are effective in placing real-life experiences onto the horrific existence at these institutions. These are unedited stories without psychological analysis. These are real childhood experiences. The value of these stories is that they maintain the integrity of what really happened from an insider's perspective. In a sense, those sharing their experiences of residential schools exemplify immense resilience and strength. By confronting the harsh realities of these institutions, they reclaim their stories and resist the ongoing impacts of settler colonialism. Their testimonies transform pain into empowerment, challenging historical injustices and asserting their survival as an act of defiance. Their histories continue to defy our most fundamental sense of humanity.

“Just knowing that someone measured our 'faculties' by filling the skulls of our ancestors with millet seeds and compared the amount of millet seed to the capacity for mental thought offends our sense of who and what we are! It galls us that Western researchers and intellectuals can assume to know all that it is possible to know of us, on the basis of their brief encounters with some of us” (Smith).

Chapter 5: Appreciating Indigenous Identity – Resistance Writers

Until recently, survival in Canada as an Indigenous person can inherently prove challenging due to underlying racism and prejudice. To escape victimization, many living outside their home communities chose to hide their identities and to live as white or white-passing. Today, some of the masks of hidden identities are being removed, in a similar way as the Thunderbird removes its feathered head.

Tom Wilson's *Beautiful Scars* is a love story involving an Indigenous birth mother, an official White mother and a young boy being protected from as much systemic racism as possible in the second half of the twentieth century. This was a challenging time for Indigenous People, some Residential Schools were closed, others were still open. The individuals involved in this segment were real people of a time in Canadian history.

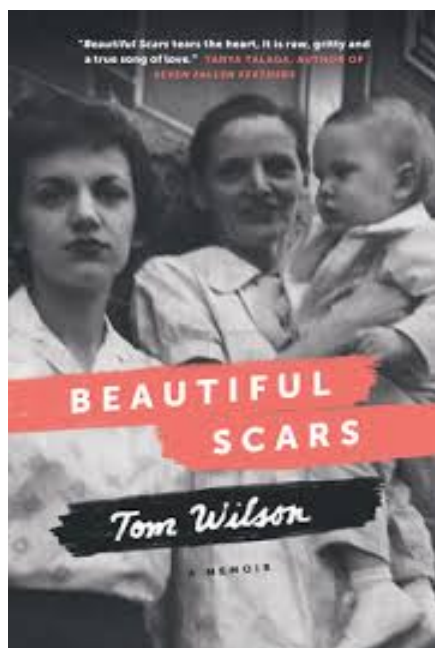


Fig. 23. Tom Wilson, *Beautiful Scars*, 2017.

Several of the Indigenous authors researched for this paper choose to express themselves through storytelling. One of these is Tom Wilson; "...a three-time Juno winning, multi-gold-record Canadian musician." (Wilson. Back Cover) He is also an artist displaying his visual art in galleries in Canada and the United States. Wilson's debut book, *Beautiful Scars* was released on November 21, 2017. This is not really a memoir as much as it is a semi-autobiographical chronicle of a phenomenal discovery of Indigeneity. *Beautiful Scars* became a Canadian documentary film released in 2022.

(Atom) By telling his story and being vulnerable, Wilson accomplishes empathy and respectfulness through artistic

activism, a dynamic interplay where creative advocacy elicits empathy as a catalyst for social

change. In this case to remove social stigma. Wilson's discovery completes the puzzle of his identity. His life now makes sense, and he is proud of his heritage.

Wilson discovered his heritage when he was age fifty-three. Imagine being a grandfather and finding out your parents are not your real parents, and that you are not who you thought you were? Wilson learned he was adopted. At the time of discovery, his adoptive parents were deceased and as an only child, he had no immediate family members to confide in and ask questions about his origin, or so he thought. He accessed the internet to search his roots and found "23andMe", a genealogical site matching DNA samples to others. Very quickly, he received a response. It was from someone who was a newly discovered half-sister. There are more siblings too. Wilson arranged to meet these unknown and hidden family members. He learns that some of his newly found relations live on a reserve. Wilson realizes; "I am a Mohawk" I repeat it over and over again like a quiet prayer. Saying it will make it real." (Wilson 207-208)

Wilson always knew that he looked different from the other children in the suburban Southern Ontario neighborhood where he grew up; "...Hamilton kids told me straight out that I looked like an Indian. I was called wahoo, a chief and a savage." (Wilson 183) These, and similar taunts only intensified over time. When he was in high school, Wilson asked his adoptive mother about these racist comments and her response surprised him; "I asked Bunny if I had Indian blood. She told me to stop being so foolish. "How could you ask such a question in front of your father who fought in the war and got blinded, just to come home and face a question like this?" (Wilson 183).

As he matured, the need to uncover his background intensified. An elderly Indigenous woman named Janie was a longtime family friend of Wilson and his deceased adoptive parents. Wilson drove Janie home one evening in 2014 after a birthday party at his house. Wilson anticipated if anyone could fill in the pieces of his life, it might be Janie. Wilson was concerned

that his questions might make her feel uncomfortable. He asked if she knows who his real parents are since she was present around the time of his birth. Not all surprises are in Hollywood movies, and after a long pause, Janie confessed that she is his biological mother. Wilson asks her about his name. Janie replies honestly.

“When you were born, I wanted to call you Thomas George, but Bunny thought it was too Native. I said that was important, but Bunny said no. So you were called Thomas Cunningham after George Wilson’s father (adoptive father). To tell you the truth, Bunny wanted to hide that you were an Indian. She wanted everyone to think she had you. She hid the truth from everyone, and anyone who suspected or knew differently was banished” (Wilson 189-190).

Tom Wilson thought he was adopted. The truth is, he was not. “I tracked down the doctor who delivered me... I ask him for my adoption papers, and he told me there are none. I was never legally adopted. I was just signed over to Bunny and George, and the names on my birth certificate were changed...to Beatrice (Bunny) and George Wilson’s” (Wilson 189).

Learning that he is a Mohawk filled in some of the missing pieces in understanding his own life. There is no doubt that Wilson’s adoptive mother, Bunny, loved him dearly. There is nothing in *Beautiful Scars* to suggest otherwise, or to indicate that Wilson was not wholly accepted into his White family. On the contrary, out of love, Bunny chose to hide his identity so that he could escape the prejudice that surrounded Indigenous Peoples during the mid-twentieth century. Even the falsification of Wilson’s birth certificate was to protect him from prejudice by removing all traces of his Indigeneity. Wilson states Bunny chose his clothes to conceal his physical characteristics; “I think Bunny modelled me after Prince Charles.” (Wilson 192) He explains further adding more details. “All she wanted to do was make me less Indian than I was. And some short pants with high socks and a white shirt with a blazer might draw attention away from my Mohawk features...” (Wilson 192).

Was Bunny wrong in her actions to hide his identity? Perhaps there are no simple answers to this question. Possibly, answers are contingent on the perceptions of Indigeneity

during the 1960s, a time when some Residential Schools were still in existence and when political parliamentary changes for Indigenous rights were being enacted. Under Prime Minister John Diefenbaker's administration Indigenous Peoples gained legal recognition as Canadian citizens and were granted civil liberties through the first Canadian Bill of Rights in 1960 (McNab. *"Failure"* 6).

By falsifying Wilson's identity and birth certificate, Bunny anticipated she was assuring the boy she called son a life free of the racist attitudes that were part of the Canadian culture of the mid-twentieth century. Although Wilson was sometimes taunted with racist names by some of his school-aged peers, Bunny assured that he was permanently insulated in the world she created for him (Wilson 193). As best she could, Bunny enabled Wilson to avoid the racialization experienced by several others of Indigenous origin. Wilson believes that during the era in which Bunny lived, political circumstances concerning Indigenous inequity assured her she was doing the right things. (Wilson 192) However, Bunny's best intentions denied Wilson knowledge of his rightful heritage. For more than fifty years, Wilson wondered why he was a misfit; "I've been Thomas Cunningham Wilson ever since. An Irish-French kid. Not Indian – no way. No Indian blood in me. None. Zero" (Wilson 192). With new knowledge, he was able to better understand the missing pieces. "I was sent out into the world as a kid who was from "over there" somewhere, a European kid when it was evident from looking at me that I was from here. I was deep in the earth I stood upon. A Native North American among people from another planet" (Wilson 192).

Wilson's experience is like others of Indigenous backgrounds of his youth. Some parents tried to hide Indigenous heritage from their children as a protection against racialization, including an anthropologist and professor at the University of Quebec, Jean Morisset's

discovery of his hidden Métis heritage detailed in Ted Trindell's *Métis Witness to the North*.

Morisset writes of his discovery.

“He was my ‘arriere-grand-oncle’, whom I had never heard of because of my family history falsifications. Like all my parenthood that had vanished under the pervasive umbrella of Big White America, he had melted away in the gloom” (Morisset & Pellitier 23).

These stories of discovery of hidden identity and embracing their true selves are a form of resistance writing. “...to the Dene Nation, Trindell was an essential witness to history.”

(Morisset, Jean Métis) Learning true identities helps to move away from imagined existences.

This provides an agency and sovereignty over their lives. Sovereignty includes no longer blaming others for your life predicaments. This is the freedom to act according to your values.

This is crucial for Indigenous people and is a reclaiming of self.

During the last few Canadian censuses, more Canadians have come forward and identify with Indigenous heritage. This can be difficult to define because of arbitrary Indigenous classifications due to the Indian Act. Their hidden identities are vanishing. This is not to state that racialization no longer exists. Rather, many are no longer fearful of prejudicial consequences of Indigenous identity. Perhaps some of these contemporary individuals, like Tom Wilson, will become endearing Indigenous role models for future generations. Wilson emerged from a product of settler colonialism to revealing Indigenous ancestry and truths (Ward).

A lack of Indigenous role models and mentors places importance on storytelling by authors including Ben Sures. These mediums reach a wide audience and help to bridge the isolation gap where there are no elders to help Indigenous youth mature. Connecting with the past and influences of spirit memories can provide mentorship.

Sharing traditional stories can serve as a bridge to understanding the past and as a catalyst for changing the outlook. King states, “(t)he truth about stories is that that’s all we are.” (King. “The Truth About Stories” 2) Captivating readers’ interest and drawing them into his

conversational-style approach to storytelling; "...you have to be careful with the stories you tell. And you have to watch out for the stories that you are told." (King. "The Truth About Stories" 10) Explaining this ambiguity; "Stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous" (King. "The Truth About Stories" 9). Stories can sometimes present thoughts and concepts not otherwise contemplated. King comments; "...historians are not often appreciated because their research tends to destroy myths." (King. "Inconvenient Indian" 6) In this context, some Indigenous stories are being shared to change public perception and reduce racialization.

King imparts a viewpoint of Syilx Okanagan heritage and author, educator, artist, and activist, Jeanette Armstrong, "...through my language I understand I am being spoken to, I'm not the one speaking. The words are coming from many tongues and mouths of the Okanagan people and the land around them. I am a listener to the language's stories, and when my words form I am merely retelling the same stories in different patterns" (King. "The Truth About Stories" 2).

During an interview, Gregory Scofield, Cree and Métis heritage, talks about Indigenous influence within storytelling.

"When you're sitting down and writing a book and working out of the context of the community that I do, it's very important to me that when I'm working on something that I'm doing it very consciously. And I'm doing it very respectfully. It's like the old-time storytellers. When the old people are telling the stories you don't interrupt them. You don't look at them. You don't question them with your eyes. You sit there and you listen to them" (Richards).

Storytelling is an informal educational process. Much of Indigenous culture and knowledge continues to be shared and passed down through conversations and retellings.

"In the old days when storytellers would come to visit, if their story took three days to tell, if it was a sacred story, you would sit all day long at the table and they would tell you a story. And then you would go to bed, and you'd wake up again and they would continue the story for all the next day" (Richards).

Indigenous oral storytelling often has a non-linear construction intertwining past, present and future as events are revealed through a fusion of the continuum of these time periods.

“People in oral cultures ‘totalize’ and become subsumed into the world that words create; they perceive the world simultaneously as both a diachronic and synchronic totality ... past and present may coexist because words uttered in the present—as ‘presence’—have the power to reiterate past events” (Rask 42).

Some Indigenous stories begin with oral traditions. N. Scott Momaday, most associated as the first Indigenous person to win a Pulitzer Prize with his 1968 novel *House Made of Dawn*, is the first writer of what King refers to as the modern period of Native written literature.

Momaday’s Indigenous grandmother, an elder neither able to read nor write and whose use of language was confined to speech, “...(H)er regard for words was always keen in proportion as she depended upon them...for her words were medicine; they were magic and invisible. They came from nothing into sound and meaning They went beyond price; they could neither be bought nor sold. And she never threw words away” (King. “The Truth About Stories” 100).

Stories can also be passed down through Spirit Memories. Indigenous author, N. Scott Momaday’s mother unlocked the stories buried deep inside. Momaday inherited Spirit Memories; “Some of my mother’s memories have become my own. This is the real burden of the blood; this is immortality” (Momaday 22). Spirit Memories transcend generations assisting in a guided personal development process. Listening to Spirit Memories, Momaday identifies himself as always proud of his heritage. The positivism he displays in *The Names A Memoir* may help to change some of the stereotypical views of Indigenous peoples and help to dispel some racialization.

Since Indigenous identity is bound together through an existential blend of shared history, memories, symbols, and cultural characteristics, they believe spirit memories occur; as events take place, and as guidance through life’s journey (McNab). The memories locked within personal DNA (abbreviated for Deoxyribonucleic acid) are known as spirit memories which guide willing listeners along life’s journey. As life happens, there will be more stories of spirit memories.

Spirit memory invokes the spirits of one's ancestors who are always present along one's long journey through life. However, not everyone is prepared to pay attention. There appears to be a wide spectrum (McNab). Some Indigenous choose to live a life outside their communities and assimilate into Canadian culture. Others choose to embrace traditional Indigenous culture. For the second group of individuals there is a strong connection with spirit memories. Contained within the existential spirit memories are the importance of traditions and knowledge passed from generation-to-generation. It is this guidance that lets Indigenous people know that they are not alone and that theirs is a rich history (McNab).

Indigenous literature presents their stories. Louise Erdrich is an American Métis writer. An example of spirit memory pertaining to an attachment to place, and land is expressed in Erdrich's *The Blue Jay's Dance: A Birth Year* where she confirms her Métis roots. Through spirit memory, Erdrich has the feeling of being very much tied to her ancestral birthplace, the Turtle Mountain Reservation in North Dakota, even though she has never resided there.

Another example of spirit memories occurred when Erdrich was a student at college, and later as a young wife and mother living in New Hampshire. During these times in New Hampshire, in her autobiography, *The Blue Jay's Dance*, Erdrich writes about her frequent lamenting about her horizon sickness. This is the desire to return to her family and roots in Minnesota, where earth and sky merge in the distance and where the sunset lingers.

The Thunderbird represents guidance through spirit memories. Time fluidity, merging past, present and future, is part of what it means to be Indigenous. Originally shared as oral stories, these are now being written down to ensure permanence and lasting knowledge.

Christi Belcourt as the artist has been discussed. She is multifaceted and also contributes as an editor of resistance writing, Belcourt is deeply concerned with the unresolved issues of the missing and murdered Indigenous women.

"Keetsahnak: Our Missing and Murdered Indigenous Sisters is a collection of essays, published in 2018, edited by Belcourt, Kim Anderson and Maria Campbell. Belcourt wrote

the prologue entitled “Walking Dreams: Reflections on Walking With Our Sisters.” It describes the Walking With Our Sisters travelling exhibition and reflects on the Trudeau government’s attempts to address Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls and the related issue of systemic racism” (Boyko).

Some Indigenous authors are creating their own role models. There are several stories and shared memories by published Indigenous resistance authors. These writers include genres of short stories, novels, and volumes of poetry. A select few are chosen for discussion.

Yvonne Lamore-Choate is a descendent of the Quechan-Mojave Peoples. In her short story *Untitled*, she shares her experiences growing up. By Eurocentric standards, she and other Indigenous children were considered poor. However, they experienced much in terms of cultural heritage through nonmaterialistic family connections. Indigenous values are entrenched in important family, extended family, and community relationships. Living with each other and sharing life is of tremendous value reinforcing growing up as part of a vibrant community.

These are foundational values that are carried from childhood throughout lifetimes. The counter narrative for *Untitled* suggests is that non-Indigenous people have a great deal to learn from Indigenous Peoples concerning valuing one another instead of worshipping material possessions and the accumulation of financial successes. Lamore-Choate stresses Indigenous values focusing on the importance that people matter most. *Untitled* reinforces that everyone, Indigenous and non-Indigenous should ensure they are preoccupied with the right values.

The painfulness of Eurocentric colonization and encroachment is captured in three short stories using images of childbirth: *The Coming of Anondaks* by Katsi Cook, *Warrior Road* by Joy Harjo, and *We AIM Not To Please* by Mary Brave Bird.

Each short story presents different struggles and points-of-view intent on increasing an appreciation of Indigenous life experiences.

Katsi Cook a Native American Mohawk midwife. In *The Coming of Anontaks*, Cook presents metaphorically a very vivid image of natural childbirth. This short story is a metaphor for the difficulty of maintaining a natural Indigenous lifestyle amidst the encroachment of White

civilization. Cook juxtaposes a natural and normal living in harmony with nature through her very real hospital experiences of the time leading up to, during birth, and shortly afterwards. Cook explains that it is not nature that is the enemy but the government as they encroach on the natural lands of Indigenous People.

Through vivid description, readers almost feel Cook's labour pains, symbolic for how Indigenous People were losing their sovereignty and ability to live in harmony with nature due to pressures by non-Indigenous people to monopolize their lands for expansion of so-called white civilization. An amazing aspect of Cook's story is the comparison that although childbirth is painful, having to forfeit your land and historic rights to live within a natural environment is an equally painful experience. Whereas childbirth is temporary pain, loss of relationships with culture, land and ideals are permanent. Cook uses childbirth as the metaphoric threshold for pain measurement.

Joy Harjo belongs to the Muscogee People. *Warrior Road* is her sharing of birth experiences. Opposite to Cook's natural childbirth experiences in *The Coming of Anondak*, Harjo tells of two birth experiences (hers and her daughter's) occurring in an antiseptic-smelling hospital maternity ward. Initially, *Warrior Road* is a juxtaposition of reality and ideal, seeming like an ambiguous name for this short story. The term warrior conjures up the meaning of strength and independence. Childbirth is the metaphor for the loss of traditional values. Childbirth for Harjo proved more about the unnatural experiences of a government operated hospital and the medical insurance for non-Indigenous child-birthing techniques. It is not until Harjo leaves the hospitals with her infant and witnesses her daughter leaving with Harjo's grandchild that she ceremonially takes a warrior's stance introducing the babies to Indigenous communing with nature.

Harjo's sovereign rights to a natural childbirth, or to a birthing experience more in alignment to her Indigenous-based wishes, were overlooked by the hospital administrators.

Harjo's recounting of the medical offer of sterilization after birth for a seventeen-year-old mother seemed surreal, and a violation of personal rights and civil liberties limiting Indigenous females' right to bear children (J. Harjo).

Mary Brave Bird belongs to the Lakota People. She also uses metaphoric symbolism. Where *Warrior Road* touched on medical staff tricking young Aboriginal woman experiencing labour pains into subscribing to after-birth sterilization procedures, *We AIM Not to Please* was even more sinister with its references to involuntary after-birth sterilization. In *We AIM Not to Please*, Brave Bird expresses prejudice faced by Indigenous Peoples. Indigenous rights are not always protected under national government laws.

The authors and creators of each of these short stories and visuals drew upon very personal perspectives. These stories are told by proud women to provide a perspective into Indigenous life experiences and views different from Eurocentric ideologies and perspectives. The heroines in these stories are role models juxtaposing what occurred and what should have been the outcome. At a time when MMIW is an important topic, stories by resistance women are extremely significant.

King expresses Indigenous history may on the surface appear as more stories are added. These are not haphazard random stories. They are not selected and told by chance. They are part of the guidance through spirit memories. Spirit world involvement through spirit memories reflects the intervention of the ancestors where time is nonlinear and fluid, melding past, present and future (Absolon). The stories reinforce Indigenous Wholistic Theory involving Indigenous epistemologies, worldviews, cultures, and traditions. Decolonization involves renewal of Indigenous values and cultures.

Gerald Vizenor, American Indigenous writer and scholar, embraces the cultural uniqueness of Indigenous literature. His concept of the trickster, like Kent Monkman's Miss

Chief, is a gender fluid, two-spirit, boundary-crossing figure navigating complex cultural identities. Vizenor believes, “survivance is not a theory but an action” (Vizenor 11).

Chapter 6: Voices Through Videos

To fully appreciate Indigenous art, one must engage with its non-written forms. This objective is pursued through a video series. I created these videos to highlight Indigenous artwork in various spaces, allowing the pieces to speak for themselves. While a two-dimensional static image on a page can only convey so much, video captures a more fulsome representation of textures, movement, and depth that can otherwise be overlooked. The video footage comes from visits to several galleries across the Greater Toronto Area, including the Art Gallery of Ontario (AGO) and the McMichael Canadian Art Collection—institutions that exist within a settler-colonial framework. These spaces, built on Indigenous lands, often shape the narratives around Indigenous art through a pre-established colonial lens. By showcasing artistic works in motion, I hope to challenge and convey these narratives and encourage a deeper appreciation of both the art and the ongoing resistance embedded within it. The music featured in the videos is from works by T. Patrick Carrabré's collection, further connecting contemporary Indigenous expression with these visual pieces.

Below is a list of five videos created to accompany this thesis allowing Indigenous art to have a voice.

- Time for Truth.
<https://youtu.be/QiiSVYvfqIE>
- The Dragon's Tail.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fk-h5qJ0pFg>
- The One Who Listens, Carolyn Monnet - presentation to viewers as if they were visiting the campus.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3tWqS9qO-1E>
- Visit to McMichael Art Gallery.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YyAv5StXE4c>

- Art Toronto showcases some of Kent Monkman's work at Art Toronto. The music is replicating the atmosphere at the busy art convention. The POV allows the Indigenous artwork and the space to speak for itself.

<https://youtu.be/U6ncY8xRzjo>

Indigenous artists use the spaces within their art to convey a prevalent storytelling theme of unity with nature.

Some Indigenous individuals, including Métis Dr. T. Patrick Carrabré create their own videos representative of their communities' lived experiences. Carrabré is a multi-talented artist -- composer, administrator, educator, conductor and radio host. A significant theme of his work relating to the Truth and Reconciliation era, confronts issues relating to deconstructionist techniques for decolonization and gaining respect for Métis people (University of British Columbia).

Carrabré presents a video offering a compelling exploration of settler colonialism, Indigenous resistance, and the role of art in decolonization. As a Métis musician who was part of the "60s scoop," Carrabré navigates the complexities of Indigenous identity, illustrating how colonial structures disrupted kinship ties and cultural continuity. Through his reflections on Métis history, he critiques the colonial frameworks that shape creative practices focusing on the false contested nature of Indigenous identity, and the impact of Western artistic dominance.

Carrabré's work highlights ways in which Indigenous artists resist these structures by reclaiming narratives and fostering community-centered artistic expressions. His collaborations with Inuit throat singers and other Indigenous musicians emphasize relationality, reciprocity, and the rejection of Eurocentric artistic hierarchies. Additionally, he critiques Western legal constraints, such as copyright laws, which fail to accommodate Indigenous knowledge-sharing traditions. Grounded in Indigenous epistemologies, his approach to music-making illustrates how creative expression can serve as both a site of resistance and a method of cultural resurgence.

Carrabré emphasizes the role of Métis artists in reclaiming history and identity, aligning with Louis Riel’s prophecy that “artists would wake up the Métis people.” He hopes the music instills pride in Métis heritage and sparks deeper conversations about Canada’s colonial history. The work also engages with the broader theme of freedom—both in Métis history and in Canada’s ongoing struggles for justice and equity.

Carrabré’s experience highlights the lasting impact of colonial dislocation and the ongoing process of reclaiming Indigenous identity. Raised outside his cultural roots, he found a reconnection through music, blending Indigenous and Western classical traditions to challenge colonial artistic hierarchies and foster cultural resurgence. His compositions, such as *100,000 Lakes* and *Teachings of the Water*, emphasize Indigenous storytelling and relationship to land, reinforcing the significance of place-based identity. Through collaborations with Indigenous artists, he resists the erasure of Indigenous musical traditions, instead fostering cultural mediation and community engagement. His work critiques the dominance of Western musical frameworks and advocates for a more inclusive space in Canadian art, where Indigenous narratives are not merely incorporated but centered.

Carrabré’s journey underscores the role of Indigenous artists in the decolonization process, using creative expression to reclaim narratives, resist cultural assimilation, and reshape artistic landscapes. His call for young artists to embrace their identities and advocate for diversity reflects a broader resistance to colonial erasure, positioning Indigenous art as both a tool for reconciliation and a means of asserting sovereignty within contemporary cultural spaces (Dr. Sun Yat-Sen Classical Chinese Garden).

Conclusion: Significance of Indigenous Culture

This thesis examines how Indigenous art and literature function as acts of resistance against settler colonialism, challenging imposed narratives and reclaiming autonomy over Indigenous histories, cultures, identities and sovereignty (Turner). Indigenous creative expressions are not merely a reflection of cultural continuity but a crucial form of defiance against the ongoing erasure and suppression perpetuated by colonial structures.

The Thunderbird remains a significant and defining symbol for Indigenous artforms and culture.



Fig. 24. Norval Morrisseau, *Astral Thunderbird*, 1980.

In the twenty-first century, Indigenous artists and writers are reshaping historical narratives, countering the misrepresentations imposed by colonial histories. Minoritarian artists use their works to reveal the truths that treaties and colonial records have sought to obscure. Art and literature become instruments of resistance, reclaiming spaces that have long been

dominated by settler perspectives. The question remains: how can artistic and literary expressions continue to serve as mechanisms for resurgence in the face of ongoing systemic barriers? By amplifying Indigenous voices and narratives, contemporary artists and writers ensure that their histories, cultures, and identities remain integral to the collective memory and future of Indigenous communities.

Indigenous communities are pivotal to the continuity of daily life. Stories are passed down from elders throughout the community. Oral traditions, storytelling combined with storywork are critical for connecting their people to their place and time, both past and present especially revealing spirit memories. Stories are an educational tool to teach spirituality, cultural traditions, and history of forefathers. Due to residential schools, there was an absence of elders as many Indigenous children and youth did not survive or never returned to their communities (Canada Truth Reconciliation Report). This resurgence of Indigenous storytelling and artistic expression counters the erasure inflicted by settler colonialism.

Not all Indigenous languages have a written format. Even where written format existed, many potential Indigenous authors were prohibited from writing in their ancestral tongue. Through past government attempts at assimilation, a recognized form of cultural genocide, most notably the Canadian Residential School System, Indigenous children and youth were severely punished for speaking or writing in their native language. When many students returned home from residential schools, they could no longer converse with their parents and the community. These children were seen as outsiders, a term used by Indigenous people for those not belonging. Not assimilated and no longer fitting into their communities, left a large percentage of Indigenous children and youth at odds with where they belonged and their identity. Since a future generation of elders was being lost year-by-year due to residential schools, many Indigenous communities later experienced a cultural shift as there were no elders to keep their stories relevant and passed on into the future.

Indigenous resistance narrative is sometimes visual. Belcourt contributes,

“Giniigaaniimenaaning (Looking ahead): Description of the Design is a six-page booklet published in 2012. With accompanying photographs, it describes and interprets a stained-glass window that Belcourt created that tells the history of Indigenous peoples and how dance, ceremony and a concern for the unborn offer keys to reconciliation and a better, more sustainable future” (Boyko).

In response to these violent disruptions, Indigenous artists and writers have actively reclaimed storytelling as a means of resistance. Art has become a tool of decolonization, preserving oral traditions in visual and literary forms. Symbols such as the Thunderbird, deeply rooted in Indigenous cosmologies, defy colonial suppression by ensuring that traditional knowledge remains visible and accessible to future generations.

Despite a long history of settler indifference or hostility toward Indigenous perspectives, recent years have seen a growing recognition of Indigenous voices in literature and media. However, even as Indigenous authors gain prominence, they often face pressures from publishers to sanitize their narratives to fit mainstream, Eurocentric expectations.

Capturing oral stories into art and literature is a way of preserving the past so that it can be part of the present. Past, present and future coexist on shifting linear and non-linear plains. Art, beadwork, sculpture, drawings, paintings are some of the visual mediums used to capture traditional stories. A more complex challenge is how to capture in writing the legends from oral Indigenous cultures. For some writers, it becomes important to translate these stories into English or French to preserve the stories when many traditions are being lost through technological progress and Indigenous peoples migrating from traditional lands. Indigenous writers face challenges because not all Indigenous terms translate into European languages. In several cases, there are no European words to express the Indigenous meanings. As examples, where there was no English equivalent, the following Indigenous words became part of the English lexicon, including caucus, hickory, pecan, squash, toboggan and succotash, tomahawk, totem, moccasin, wigwam and powwow (Verbivore).

A challenge for several Indigenous authors concerns the publisher's interest in creating taglines for books and editing their work to fit within a mainstream profile, and sometimes to correspond to the publisher's interest. Indigenous authors sometimes face the dilemma of forfeiting their identity to become published. Sometimes, Indigenous stories are edited to appeal to a predominately Eurocentric and white audience. Publishers take this approach to maximize commercial viability. However, this editing and sanitizing of stories is a form of suppression, censorship and cultural genocide. Indigenous authors often need to walk a tightrope of how authentic a story can be and remain commercially profitable for the publishers. Even when Indigenous authors are not seeking wealth from their writings, these stories will fail to be published if not amenable to mainstream values. This is significant as Indigenous people account for only five percent of the Canadian population, about two million of Canada's forty-one million.

Indigenous stories are important because they relate back to a North American time before European settlement. These offer a potential to learn about their culture providing insights into peoples who have been marginalized and politically removed from mainstream narratives, histories, and values. Without Indigenous stories, North Americans are left with the propaganda created by governments of nomadic people welcoming being conquered.

Since the start of the twenty-first century, there is an acceleration of Indigenous voices taking back control of the Eurocentric narrative that shaped how their stories have been fictionalized, dictated, and forcibly told to coincide with previous historical documentation. Indigenous artists are rewriting history. Minoritarian artists counteract histories where they were forced into their truth by treaties and show how they can work to retell their stories.

The question remains, how can art and literature continue to counteract and dismantle the damage inflicted by Eurocentric perspectives, especially when Indigenous voices have been restricted, silenced, or erased? Indigenous resistance as an ongoing and evolving struggle

against settler colonialism. Through art and storytelling, like the Thunderbird, Indigenous peoples reclaim their narratives, assert their presence, and ensure that their histories and identities remain an enduring force for future generations. The new role models are on the path to affirm sovereignty Indigenous sovereignty. Janvier sums this sentiment,

“It is not so much to know about me, but about the art itself. It is not only about representing culture or emotion but about the fact that we are the guardians of ourselves and our land. I try to send messages through my art to get people to think about the legacy that we are leaving behind for future generations. Life is not just about living fast, making money and taxing our resources” (Janvier).

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