British Colonialism: Perpetuating Structural Violence Through Perceptual Misunderstandings in Canada

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It is not possible to achieve reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada while upholding the British colonial model. Perceptual differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people perpetuate misunderstanding and maintain structural violence. This article presents two lenses that allow us to see this violence and how perceptual misunderstandings continue to reinforce colonialism and conflict. Viewing conflict through these lenses can redress the continued colonization of Indigenous people in Canada by creating an opportunity to align our perceptions. The first lens presented explores divergent perspectives of the colonizer and the colonized in relation to ecology and agency. The second lens describes the need to understand the co-creative, relational, and relative nature of meaning making.

Lived rights are "the difference between legal words on paper and actions that result in positive changes in the daily lives of disadvantaged people, locally and globally."[1] Achieving *lived rights* allows all people to enjoy, in their daily lives, the rights that are assured to them in written law. However, to achieve this, the laws need to be first put into place at all levels of government. Despite the fact that most disputes do not break out into fully fledged conflict, a number do around the world, including in Canada. World wars, terrorism, feuding communities, civil war, and ethnic disputes are only some examples of the numerous conflicts occurring globally. As time goes on, these conflicts become increasingly protracted and therefore more and

more complex to transform and resolve.

One of Canada's most protracted intergroup conflicts is the ongoing, often hidden effect of colonialism. The effects of colonialism manifest in racism towards Indigenous peoples, higher rates of poverty and homelessness in Indigenous populations, and higher incarceration rates. After *MacLean's* called out Winnipeg for being the most racist city in Canada, it became more vital that we develop a stronger understanding of the issues at play in order to create positive changes.[2] It is clear there is a problem, and the following ideas provide a closer look at the continued effects of structural violence against Indigenous people in a Canadian context.

First, we explain the theoretical framework and outline the idea of structural violence central to this article. Then, we go through the social context by defining some of the historical trauma experienced by Indigenous people in Canada. The next two sections focus on two key points by introducing different perceptual lenses. The first lens is that of divergent perspectives of the colonizer and the colonized in relation to ecology and agency. The second lens is *relational relativity,* which describes the importance of understanding the co-creative, relational, and relative nature of meaning making. In the end, we conclude that sustainable change can begin to occur if we enhance our view through the use of both of these lenses to see the structural violence that contributes to the continued colonization of Indigenous people in Canada. With new understanding, we can start the journey together on the path of transformation needed to achieve positive peace.

STRUCTURAL VIOLENCE

It is important in writing this article that the reader understands Johan Galtung's work on *structural violence*.[3] Galtung constructed a typology of violence using three main categories: direct, cultural, and structural.[4] Galtung defines violence as being "present when human beings are being influenced so that their actual somatic and mental realizations are below their potential realization."[5] He further explains that structural violence is built into structures where there is unequal power distribution and therefore unequal life chances.[6] The oppressive framework encompassed by structural violence is indirect and avoidable, and operates through powerful organizations and institutions "that guarantees privilege amongst its leaders, prioritization of their political agenda, and an enforcement of their methods and ideologies."[7]

Galtung's concept of negative and positive peace is important to comprehend here as well. In the Peace and Conflict Studies (PACS) literature, structural violence is differentiated from personal or direct violence. Weigert describes negative peace as the lack of direct violence and positive peace as the absence of structural violence or social justice.[8] In order to understand violence then, it is necessary to understand the dynamic intersection of personal and structural violence. Structural violence does not need intent or awareness on the part of actors to exist. Our perceptual understanding can make us blind to systemic structural violence.

Tord Hoivik writes that "[w]e know that social structures kill and maim as surely as the bullet and the knife."[9] Galtung's goal of digging deeper, of moving beyond conscious and direct human choice, is significant for this analysis on the continued effects of colonization on Indigenous peoples in Canada. Simply put, despite the end of direct violence towards Indigenous peoples through systems like Residential Schools, remnants of these structures in policy have continued to have negative, violent effects.[10] Most importantly, these effects are often not visible through our usual perceptual lenses.

SOCIAL CONTEXT

To understand how structural violence has continued to effect Indigenous peoples in Canada, we must look at the historical factors that set the stage for the ongoing marginalisation of Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples have experienced a uniquely devastating amount of trauma throughout Canada's history. This historical trauma plays a role in their continued social and economic marginalisation.[11] British and French settlement in Canada that began in the seventeenth century has had long-term effects on Indigenous peoples.[12] The British model of colonialism was first introduced and perfected in Ireland for over 500 years and then it was farmed out in the British colonial expansionism and foray into North America. In Ireland, the British colonial model separated Indigenous peoples from the land, imposed the Penal laws, banned intermarriage between Protestants and Catholics, created economic and political exploitation of local people, excluded Catholics from the legal profession, educational institutions, and from holding public office, and ensured religious and cultural control of the Irish natives through the Anglican church in the Irish pariah colony.[13] This very same oppressive system was then brought to Canada and the U.S. For

example, the Indian Act of 1876 saw the Government of Canada relocate Indigenous peoples onto reserves and force thousands of children into residential schools.[14] The Indian Act was similar to the 1690 Irish apartheid Penal laws that discriminated against Catholics, Methodists, and Presbyterians who were emancipated in 1830 and 1869 when the Penal laws were eventually repealed.[15] When the majority of residential schools closed in the 1960s, the assimilation continued through child welfare policies that placed Indigenous children in white families.[16]

Although these are only a few examples among many, the effects of these events have intensified due to "widespread social denial about [them] and an evasion of a sense of social responsibility for effecting…change required to remedy this situation."[17] The impact of this history is intergenerational trauma that continues to affect contemporary Indigenous children despite the end of the direct violence of these assimilation programs.[18] Further, numerous researchers have acknowledged that mainstream Canadian society has continued to stigmatise and stereotype Indigenous peoples causing them to endure ongoing day-to-day discrimination.[19]

Justice Murray Sinclair echoes these thoughts of continued structural violence when he speaks to this through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada saying "Canadians have been educated to believe in the inferiority of Indigenous peoples and in the superiority of European nations."[20] This process of colonization that seemingly exists only in the past is one that is still perpetuating ongoing violence today. Pricelys Roy sums up the effects of the trauma best, when she argues that "[j]ust because I have been doing well for the past 10 years does not mean I have healed or that I have forgiven the system that gave up on me…It is apparent that we live with intergenerational trauma."[21]

This structural violence is often invisible because of significant differences in perception. We need different conceptual lenses that will allow an aligned view of the continued structural violence against Indigenous peoples in Canada. The view these lenses provide can lead to a deeper understanding for those who do not see the ongoing structural violence and therefore cannot act against it. The following provides two such lenses to deepen our understanding of invisible violence directed against Indigenous peoples.

DIVERGENT PERSPECTIVES

In Joseph Conrad's classic novel, *Heart of Darkness*, his principal character, Charles Marlow, is depicted as a bold adventurer travelling deep into the jungle of the Congo. As he journeys upstream, defiling the ecology and destroying the sanctity of the jungle, it is as if he is in fact contesting her agency and "being in the world"[22] as they penetrate her "impenetrable forest."[23] This section of the book reads to many as a rape scene, and the subsequent deterioration of the men in the heart of the jungle as her revenge for their violent acts against her ontological being. The imagery of this literary event relates closely to the study of how colonization is fraught with lack of respect, on behalf of the colonizer, towards the physical surroundings of the oppressed culture. In this vein, the process of resource extraction in Canada, and North America at large, continues to perpetuate these colonial behaviours and methods. The lens shared below explores this concept. For the sake of clarification, the term resource extractor, whether it is the company or nation doing the extracting, is interchangeable with the term colonizer. The divergent perspective model on colonialism found below encourages a deeper understanding of causation as it relates to the colonizer's ability to violently contest the agency of the colonized and the variables that inform these actions, namely ecology and agency.[24]

To diverge means to be separate from another, or to experience a difference in direction; this word is relevant when we consider the experience of colonization. Two groups of people experience an event together, yet both experience it from extraordinarily different positions. These positions mold perspectives that extend beyond the initial point of contact and colonization period, and continue to inform the lived experience of those involved. Divergent perspectives reflect this separation between the perspectives of the colonizer and the colonized. It is a model used to demonstrate the different perspectives born from the colonial process and their connection with several variables including agency, ecology, and peacebuilding. As a means of grounding this concept in a specifically North American context, accompanying this theory is a short case study on the Dakota Access Pipeline. This case study is explored through the lens of divergent perspectives, where we explore the perception of the colonizer and the colonized in relation to ecology and agency, in an effort to understand both the causation behind the actions of the colonizer, as well as the perspectives of all parties involved.

The Dakota Access Pipeline (DAPL) is a proposed method to transport

crude oil from the Bakken oil fields in North Dakota to Patoka, Illinois. Proponents of the DAPL emphasize that the oil is 100 percent domestically produced and that the pipeline will reduce dependency on rail and truck transportation. The pipeline is lauded to assist the United States be more energy independent and positively impact the local economy by creating upwards of 10,000 jobs.[25] Protesters against the pipeline argue that it will desecrate the ancestral lands of the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe; it could potentially damage the environment and water supply and burden the tribe despite the fact that tribal members will likely not benefit at all from the economic development associated with the DAPL.[26] As of spring 2017, oil is being run through the pipeline and under Lake Oahe in North Dakota. Those in opposition to the pipeline continue to fight for the end to the DAPL in the name of the sacred lake and water security.[27] There are many groups voicing opposition to the pipeline, but the scope of this perspective focuses on the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe and their conflict with the parties, namely Energy Transfer Partners (ETP), pushing to proceed with the pipeline through reserve land.

Expanding our understanding of agency is at the forefront of recognizing its relationship to colonization and conflict. It is "embedded in 'contextual conditions' within an ontological site, the location and often the source of human conflict"[28]; we must study contested agency as it exists in its unique position and locale.[29] Agency is often violently contested, and in order to understand it, it is critical we consider a more holistic perspective by taking additional factors into consideration.[30] Inspired by Thomas Boudreau's desire to expand on our understanding of agency, this theory incorporates a discussion on physical space as both the colonizer and the colonized experience it. This divergent perspective on agency is critical to understand and incorporate when discussing conflict as it informs the colonizers' justification.

Our ability to act within the physical world is altered based on how secure we feel in our environment and the dependencies that we have on the concrete objects that surround our being. For example, it is likely that individuals whose surrounding ecology is not under threat need not be so acutely aware of how their physical space affects their agency. In other words, the threat to their agency is not so explicitly tied to their physical surroundings and they are in turn free to discount how physical environment affects the agency of others. On the other hand, if a population has

experienced significant threat to their surroundings or to the physical world around them, that in turn would affect their agency and their view of the weightiness of ontological agency would be more profound. It is this disconnection with the ontology of agency that causes the colonizer to disregard the ecology of the colonized. This divergent perspective on agency would follow logically as such:

- Colonizers: no threat to their physical world, physical world does not constrict them, their perception of agency is not dependent on the physical world.
- Colonized: physical world under variable threat, deteriorating quality of physical world constricts them, their perception of agency is dependent on the physical world.

If the colonizers accept Boudreau's idea that agency is intrinsically related to the physical world, they would have to also acknowledge the seriousness of their acts on a colonized group when it involves the process of wrongfully infringing on their locality. Further, if they were to view their own space as being profoundly linked to agency, it follows that they would then have to mirror this revelation as it pertains to the location they are choosing to repurpose for their own needs. Accepting that the physical world is a part of what makes people who they are and informs how they exist in the world, we recognize that by destroying the physical we are contesting both the identity and the agency of the other.

This argument is nowhere more relevant than with the conflict between the Dakota Sioux and ETP. Using this model to discuss the DAPL issue, we identify ETP as the colonizer and the Sioux as the colonized. Clearly it is the case that the ETP is acting from a perspective of the colonizer. It is coming from a position of power and strength—an energy giant who has never felt the reproach of a greater power on its property or person. This narrow perspective helps propel DAPL's agenda forward without concern for the physical space of the Sioux. ETP fails to understand the connection between disturbing the physical space of another and how this affects agency in general. On the other hand, the long-standing violations against the personhood and physical space of the Dakota Sioux has embedded into them a perspective of agency that is in tune with agency's reliance on the sanctity of physical space. For example, in 1958 the Oahe Dam was constructed to harness the Missouri River for hydroelectric power. Although it was successful in this task, it also proved tremendously destructive to the Standing

Rock reservation. It flooded homes and forced many to leave the land and surrender their homeland.[31] These experiences, both in recent history and over the course of the colonial process, have linked the Sioux peoples' agency tightly with the land on which they reside. The systematic repurposing of their homestead property for the gains of the colonizer has not only taken the land and resources of the Sioux, but as agency is embedded into contextual conditions, it has also affected the agency of the peoples.

An attempt at peacebuilding without understanding the birth of the various perspectives of those involved will lead to a catastrophe in peacemaking efforts. Learning to incorporate different perspectives into our understanding allows us as peacemakers to have an additional window into the hearts and minds of those involved. While there is a considerable amount of work to be done in Canada to address the damages committed and perpetuated against the Indigenous population in this territory, this divergent perspective lens can be particularly useful when recognizing why we continue to struggle to come to a solution. People can feel threatened by issues that other parties simply do not understand based on a lack of first-person experiences. When we develop models that demonstrate this, we invite people to recognize that there are deep craters in our knowledge of how others experience circumstances and why conflict is ultimately perpetuated.

RELATIONAL RELATIVITY

Analyzing conflict between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples cannot be done without understanding the relative nature of perception. The concept of *relational relativity* proposed here argues that people's beliefs about how others see them impacts their perception of themselves as well as the "other" and can cause or exacerbate conflict. The notion of relativity is important as even seemingly minor conflict is complex and has many dimensions that one must consider in its analysis. Sean Byrne's and Neal Carter's Social Cubism model,[32] Lana Russ-Trent's Integrative Inductive Social Cubism (IISC) model,[33] and Thomas Matyok's et al. Social Cubism 2.0 model[34] illustrate the multidimensional nature and phenomenological dimension of perception.

Byrne and Carter's Social Cubism model[35] can be illustrated by a Rubik's Cube with six facets/dimensions that constantly interact with each other. What this model contributes to our understanding of the causes of

conflict and its resolution is the idea that we must look at the many facets of conflict as well as their relation to one another. For example, historical factors impact political and economic factors which impact psychocultural factors, which in turn impact the way we understand and respond to the other factors.

Russ-Trent's IISC[36] is a three-dimensional model that attempts to address the variations within each of the six facets described by Byrne and Carter's Social Cubism model. The IISC model is described as three Rubik's Cubes containing eighteen facets interacting with one another, "a cube with a cube within a cube." The author highlights the "relational contexts" and describes the three levels of complexity as those relating to structure, group and the individual variations. Russ-Trent states that the individual cubes "must be seen as relative to each other and dynamic."[37] She also argues that "a working theory of conflict will have to be located and articulated at the phenomenological level," which highlights phenomenological meaning making within these interactions.[38]

Matyok's et al. Social Cubism 2.0 model also builds on the work of Byrne and Carter and describes a three dimensional spiral (or cone) that can be used for "deep analysis" of conflict transformation.[39] The authors point to the need for a three dimensional model that includes the facets of space and time. Matyok et al. argue that "a model of social conflict must be sufficiently complex to make sense of the chaos" inherent in conflict.[40]

The notion of relational relativity draws from the three conceptual models described above but adds a fourth dimension—relational relativity. The notion of relational relativity can be likened to Einstein's theory of Special Relativity. The concept, described simply, states that what you will see or experience is "observer-dependent."[41] That is, your perception is influenced by where you are in time and space relative to where the object/other is in time and space. Relational relativity provides us with an additional lens, or unit of analysis, with which to imagine and analyze conflict and peacebuilding and further illustrates the complexity of those efforts.

The idea of relativity is not new in PACS theory or practice. There is an implicit understanding that people's perspectives both within and across conflicts are relative to their position or context and experience.[42] Relational relativity expands this concept and argues that belief and meaning making about ourselves and others is impacted by our perception of *how we think "others" perceive us.* Together, we co-create meaning.[43]

Boudreau argues that conflicts are "a function of the elemental epistemic encounter."[44] That is, people continually interpret and reinterpret their beliefs about their interactions with others. Our personal sense of self is impacted by our perception (real or imagined) of how we think the "others" see us. For example, if I think someone believes I am lazy and stupid, it may not only impact my personal identity but also how I perceive that person and their intentions toward me. These perceptions may cause conflict as they impact my sense of identity and therefore the conclusions I draw about others and the decisions I make about how to behave.

Our perceptions shift over time and in relation to others. Relational relativity allows us to look more deeply at perceptual differences—what Russ-Trent describes as "uniqueness-subjectivity, intra-subjectivity and inter-subjectivity."[45] Relational relativity highlights the constant shifting of meaning given to relational facets between individuals and groups and across space and time. These shifts in perception impact people's beliefs about how the "others" see them and can create or sustain conflict.

Consequently, we use the concept of relational relativity to examine conflict in typical day-to-day interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff members in postsecondary institutions. Indigenous staff members often see non-Indigenous staff members as paternalistic and perpetuating colonial practices that further oppress them and their students. However, non-Indigenous staff perceive themselves as acting respectfully and that Indigenous peoples shouldn't see them as uncaring, ignorant and paternalistic. These differing perceptions about the same interactions can impact Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples' sense of self, namely their identity. Consequently, confusion, anger and defensive posturing on both sides often characterize relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff.

The context of postsecondary institutions in Canada is used here to illustrate how differences in perception about what people believe can contribute to conflict. Indigenous people's perception of what non-Indigenous people think about them is well documented in many historical records and can be found reflected in the present by reading any comment section from various news stories related to Indigenous peoples. [46]

Many of the beliefs held by non-Indigenous people are not based on fact, but on racist historical messaging and ignorance.[47] As Jamie Leatherman and Nadezhda Griffin note, actors of a "failed state" are often blamed for the failure due to their own "dysfunctional" population without considering

their colonial background. Also, not all non-Indigenous people hold the same beliefs about Indigenous peoples.[48] What is critical for our understanding is that Indigenous people think that non-Indigenous people hold these beliefs about them. The common beliefs noted below are based on conversations with both current and past Indigenous and non-Indigenous colleagues and others from a variety of postsecondary institutions. Examining these beliefs demonstrates how a consideration of relational relativity highlights differing perceptions and how these create and perpetuate conflict. Until we understand these perceptual differences, we will be prevented from moving toward understanding and positive transformation of our relationships.

Indigenous people think that non-Indigenous people don't care or don't know about their history as oppressors, settlers, and perpetrators of cultural genocide.[49] Even if non-Indigenous people acknowledge the hurt that was done to Indigenous peoples, many Indigenous people believe that non-Indigenous people think that everything happened in the past and so they hold no responsibility for the current situation. Many Indigenous people believe that non-Indigenous people think they should just "get over it."[50]

Karman Crey notes that for non-Indigenous people the events of the past seem very far away. She states that for Indigenous people however, "history is lived every day, and very personally. Perspectives that distance these events or diminish their magnitude are not only inaccurate, but will be perceived as profoundly trivializing and insulting."[51] She notes that the result is that Aboriginal students can become "angry and alienated and non-Aboriginal students anxious, perplexed and defensive."[52]

Indigenous people believe that non-Indigenous people have concluded that it is Indigenous peoples' fault that they live in poverty.[53] Many Indigenous people suppose that non-Indigenous people see them as lazy when it comes to schooling or making a living for themselves and their families.[54] They think that most non-Indigenous people believe they are "getting a free ride" because of different taxation and support for postsecondary education.[55] As Marlene Brant Castellano notes, "despite the evidence that Aboriginal people are participants and contributors to the vitality of community in Canada, the prevailing public perception is that we are problems resistant to solution and impediments to economic development."[56]

Many Indigenous people have concluded that most non-Indigenous people see their religious/spiritual beliefs/worldview as "savage" or "quaint."[57]

"We know that the Christian churches provided the moral justification for the colonization and sent missionaries to convert 'the heathen.'"[58] Indigenous staff members may believe that non-Indigenous staff perceive that the cultural practices incorporated into meetings and classes are to be tolerated, yet are not a critical part of the education process.

Indigenous people think that non-Indigenous people perceive them as people who can't care for themselves or their children. The TRC Summary Report argues that, "in establishing residential schools, the Canadian government essentially declared Aboriginal people to be unfit parents."[59] The conflict between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff members may not be a reaction to the non-Indigenous staff members themselves. It may be a pushback against having to use "White" processes when educating their children. The conflict will be exacerbated if Indigenous staff members believe that non-Indigenous staff members assume that they know better when deciding what Indigenous students need in terms of training for employment or the economic realities of those students.

Julieta Uribe argues that for some Indigenous people, to buy into the state's notions of economy and education is to "lose independence and to be culturally spirited, this means assimilation."[60] Crey argues that schooling has largely been a mechanism for assimilation. She states that, "educational institutions continue to represent a threat to Aboriginal Communities and cultures, leaving many Aboriginal people feeling deeply ambivalent about them and the history they represent."[61]

Passive acceptance of assimilation efforts and prescriptive government processes has not served the Indigenous population well in the past. The responses of Indigenous staff members are likely not personal, but based on a long history of cultural genocide and assimilation policies that has led them to postulate that non-Indigenous staff believe they know what is best for Indigenous peoples.[62]

The postsecondary institution is a microcosm of our larger society.[63] As such, analyzing the impact of people's beliefs about how others see them is imperative to our understanding of the conflict in these situations. The conflict between Indigenous and non-Indigenous staff members may be understood as a fight against internalization of the others' views of them. Given the history of the relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, mistrust and rejection of government processes represented by the postsecondary institution can be seen as a reasoned response rather than as

confusing and irrational behavior.

However, current assumptions that drive people's beliefs are based on historical assumptions and may be inaccurate. It is not only our perception of others' beliefs about us that impact past and current relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, but also the assumption that these beliefs are constant over space and time. Conflict and confusion may be due to a mismatch or misunderstanding of beliefs about the other that have changed over time.

The very beliefs non-Indigenous people had about Indigenous people was the rationale for the cultural genocide in the first place.[64] We can see how beliefs about the "other" form a continuous feedback loop across space and time, influencing each facet and transaction point. Relational relativity encapsulates the fluid, relational nature of perception and highlights the meaning made of these facets by the actors across space and time *and in relation to one another*. Deliberately exploring each other's beliefs about the other, rather than making assumptions may ameliorate conflict between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Not doing so perpetuates the dehumanization of both groups.

CONCLUSION

In order to move toward reconciliation, we must understand that violence toward Indigenous peoples by non-Indigenous people still continues. It is not the same direct violence of the past. However, ongoing invisible structural violence is perpetuated in our current systems against Indigenous peoples in Canada. To see this violence at all, we must broaden our perceptual ability. The two different perceptual lenses offered by this article allow us to do so and therefore to begin remedying this ongoing colonization process through structural violence.

The first was a lens regarding the divergent perspectives of the colonizer and the colonized in relation to ecology and agency. The second lens focused on relational relativity, which described the importance of understanding the co-creative, relational, and relative nature of meaning making. The significance of this study to PACS is found in seeing that the British colonial model has allowed for continued structural violence against Indigenous peoples in Canada. The process of colonization has not ended or been remedied; it is still ongoing and maintained through systemic structural violence. These lenses can broaden our perceptual understanding and inform

future approaches that are taken to address colonization in Canada. Only with this new understanding is progress possible as we walk together on a path of transformation needed to achieve positive peace or social justice.

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