

URBAN INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

Not just passing through



2019 RESEARCH REPORT



Terminology

CITY

A municipality with a population of 30,000 or more formal residents.

INDIGENOUS

All peoples and communities who are descendants of the pre-colonial inhabitants of Turtle Island and who have maintained the culture, beliefs, and practices of the First Peoples, including the state-defined categories of Status Indians, First Nations and Inuit, all Métis nations, non-status Indians, and Southern Inuit. This term is used in place of Aboriginal throughout the text.

NEO-LIBERALISM

An ideology that favours the transfer of public responsibilities and social services to the private sector. Though this term includes the word 'liberal', it is an ideology that can be supported from many political positions and is not limited to liberal thought.



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Overcoming the Sense of Contradiction

THOUGH IT CAN be simply stated that “Urban Indigenous Peoples is the term generally used to describe all [Indigenous] peoples (status and non-status Indian, Métis and Inuit) who live in urban centres in Canada” (Heritz 2018: 597), the idea of urban Indigenous peoples continues to meet resistance in the minds of many, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike.

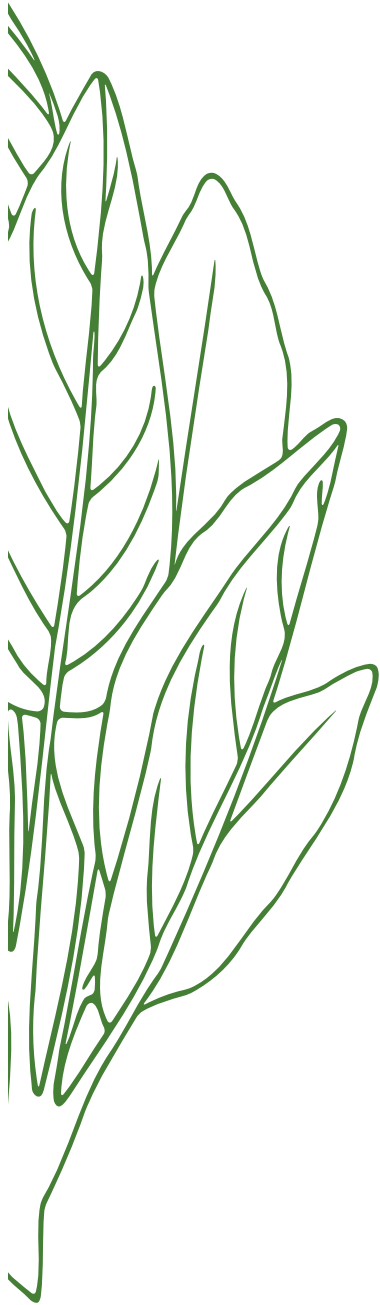
The Environics Institute conducted numerous studies on the experiences of urban Indigenous peoples; these studies found that non-Indigenous Canadians are more aware of Indigenous peoples’ historical experiences than they are of their “contemporary situation”:

There is a lack of awareness and apparent uncertainty about the most important issues for [Indigenous] people today, and in particular, about the problems faced by those living in cities. There is a significant gap between [Indigenous] peoples’ socio-economic reality and the perceptions of [non-Indigenous] urban Canadians. They believe [Indigenous] people have the same or better socio-economic and other opportunities as any other Canadians (Environics Institute 2010: 11).

This finding reflects the core conflict urban Indigenous peoples face in Canadian society today. Canada as an active settler colony continues to rely on the founding myths of the nation in its portrayal of Indigenous peoples. Canadians continue to think of Indigenous communities as remote and reserve-based (Evans et al. 2009), and there remains a “basic tension” about Indigenous peoples’ place in modern Canadian society (Environics Institute 2010: 11).

Thanks to the work of inquiries like the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1991, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Residential Schools in 2008, and the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls in 2016, Canadians are becoming aware of the historical struggles Indigenous peoples have faced¹. However, there is still very little awareness about the history of Indigenous peoples’ exclusion from urban centres and the ongoing consequences of these policies.

For example, Indigenous families are familiar with stories of grandparents waking their grandchildren in the night or seeming to appear suddenly in the morning to greet their grandchildren. Few Canadians may know that these late-night visits were common until the 1950s because Indigenous peoples living



the federal level, government policy assumes that urban Indigenous peoples “have abdicated ... all claims to [Indigenous] rights” (Belanger 2011: 141).

Despite strong calls from the United Nations Special Rapporteur to ensure equal services for Indigenous peoples “both on and off reserve, including in the areas of education, health and child welfare” (Anaya 2015: 166), federal, provincial, and municipal governments continue to adopt “a policy orientation” that refuses to accept responsibility for urban Indigenous peoples (Belanger 2011: 141; DeVerteuil & Wilson 2010). In practice, all levels of government continue to avoid clarifying jurisdictional responsibility for urban Indigenous populations, leaving the vast majority of Indigenous peoples without adequate services (Snyder et al. 2015).

An uncomfortable irony of the refusal to acknowledge urban Indigenous peoples is the “fact that almost all cities were built on sites of pre-existing Indigenous settlements” (Carli 2013: 5). Rather than recognizing the right of Indigenous peoples to live in and, for some, return to, historically Indigenous centres, provincial and municipal governments continue to erase Indigenous peoples’ visibility from policies and programs.

As a result of this erasure, Canadian policy-makers continue to “neglect Indigenous people’s need for culturally appropriate services and supports” in critical areas such “as education, employment, housing, and healthcare” (Alaazi et al. 2015: 31; Regroupement des centres d’amitié autochtones du Québec 2017). Indigenous people are therefore treated as strangers in their own home and are forced to create their own cultural spaces and services in urban settings (DeVerteuil & Wilson 2010).

Overwhelmingly, governments have supported the development of Indigenous service providers, as this transferral of responsibility lifts both the burden of service provision and the consequences of accountability from federal and provincial governments onto Indigenous communities. Unfortunately, government support for these initiatives is not reflected in funding: “funding for urban [Indigenous] services has not matched the growth of the urban [Indigenous] population” and these services “remain grossly underfunded” (Snyder et al. 2015: 8).

The “urban programming and policy gap” (Snyder et al. 2015: 8) that urban Indigenous peoples live in is not only facilitated by government through conscious exclusion, it is also sustained by policy actors and service providers who create “resistance from within the social services delivery system” (DeVerteuil & Wilson 2010: 506). Racism against Indigenous peoples has been described as “pervasive, debilitating, limiting, suffocating, unending, violent, [and] demeaning” and it pervades “all levels and structures of Canadian settler society, both institutional and individual” (Thistle 2017: 27).

Urban Indigenous peoples’ access to services is “impaired by subtle (and not so subtle) racial and ethnic barriers” at all levels (Evans et al. 2009: 13) including “front-line and emergency services, community supports, law enforcement, education, [and] work life” (Thistle 2017: 27). Because the vast majority of urban Indigenous peoples are non-status and Métis who “have few entitlements as [Indigenous] people”, there is “a massive hole in the effective provision of social and health services” for the most marginalized people in Canadian cities (Evans et al. 2009: 13).

The Urban Indigenous Context

Though the majority of Indigenous peoples around the world live in urban environments, they are still assumed to be rural: “the common image is of isolated communities cut off from the modern world, largely disengaged from the challenges and advantages of the urban future” (Stephens 2015: 55).

The idea that Indigenous peoples are divided by a rural/urban dichotomy undermines Indigenous peoples’ place in urban settings while perpetuating notions of assimilation (United Nations 2010). Contrary to the dominant image of Indigenous peoples as remote and rural, “some generations of [I]ndigenous communities have only ever lived in cities” (United Nations 2010: XIV).

Despite this long history of urbanization, Indigenous peoples continue to face the complex challenge of defining urban Indigenous identity (Stephens 2015). Much of the research on urban Indigenous experiences around the world has focused on settler colonies like the United States, Canada, and Australia, where forced displacement and assimilation programs have been implemented (Stephens 2015).

Canada is one of “the world’s most urbanized” countries with 81% of the population living in cities in 2017 (Cardinal 2006: 217; World Bank 2019). Though a large portion of Canada’s urban population is Indigenous, Canada does not widely report on the conditions of urban Indigenous peoples and “insufficient demographic and statistical information” makes it impossible to accurately estimate the urban Indigenous population (Cardinal 2006; Carli 2013).

Because urban Indigenous peoples are overlooked in counts and in policy, the

particular challenges and discrimination they face are misrepresented and neglected, as are their inherent rights (Cardinal 2006; Alaazi et al. 2015). However, the greatest challenge that urban Indigenous peoples face “is not urbanization itself but the overall structural attitudes of society towards [I]ndigenous peoples” (Stephens 2015: 60).

The Statistical Story: A Partial Image

The geographic experiences of Indigenous peoples around the world are characterized by dispossession of land. A study of 64 countries covering 82% of the world’s land found that only 18% is Indigenous controlled, with 20% of this land in Canada alone (Rights and Resources Initiative 2015). Though this seems like a significant share, Indigenous land in Canada is predominantly sparsely populated northern tundra and taiga, 75% of which is found in the north, containing less than 0.1% of the population (Rights and Resources Initiative 2015).

Censuses have provided some insight into the distribution of urban Indigenous peoples. In 1941, 3.6% of the Indigenous population was recorded as residing in urban areas; this count increased to 6.7% in 1951, 12.9% in 1961, and 30% in 1971 (Langford 2016). Today, it is estimated that 38% of status, 74% of non-status, 66% of Métis, and 30% of Inuit live in cities, with 80% of all Indigenous peoples living off-reserve (Fast et al. 2017; Morris 2016; Statistics Canada 2016).

However, it is also well-documented in research that census counts of Indigenous peoples underestimate urban Indigenous populations two to four times (Rotonodi et al. 2017). Urban Indigenous peoples are less

likely to be counted by censuses “due to factors such as poverty and its associated lack of living at a fixed address, historical distrust of government due to past and present colonial policies and migration between geographical locations” (Rotonodi et al. 2017: 2).

Though the statistical story is incomplete, findings such as the estimation that “urban Indigenous people are eight times more likely to experience homelessness” (Thistle 2017: 19) nevertheless point to important concerns that can be addressed with existing data. For example, it has been estimated that in Ottawa, 20% of youth experiencing homelessness are Indigenous, though they are estimated to make up only 1.5% of the population (Thistle 2017).

Similar estimates have been made in Vancouver, where 30% of youth experiencing homelessness are Indigenous though they make up only 2% of the population (Thistle 2017). Even this partial count of urban Indigenous homelessness demonstrates a clear need for more services and equal funding. Despite these numbers, Indigenous organizations continue to experience significant funding cuts.

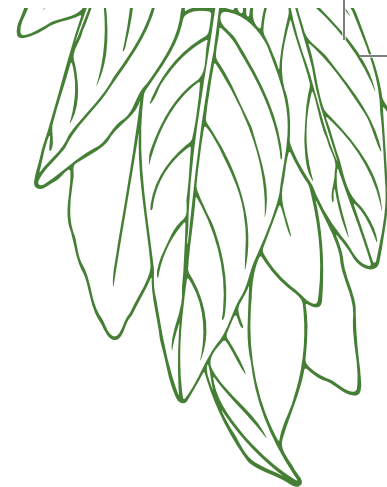
Between 2012 and 2015, First Nations organizations lost 65.5% of funding, Métis organizations lost 37%, and non-status organizations lost 14% (Morris 2016). Despite their growing numbers in cities and the considerable challenges they face, Inuit organizations lost 71% of funding during this time (Morris 2016). With Indigenous populations growing rapidly, and urban populations projected to reach 10% in Canada’s five major cities by 2031 (Jewell 2016), it is clear that government policies and priorities are firmly fixed in the past.

A History of Indigenous Urbanization

Though historical Indigenous societies are depicted as hunters and gatherers who lived in isolated wilderness, the first peoples of North America lived in socially, politically, and economically complex societies with significant “mobility over huge distances for resources” and “intertribal trade” (Howard & Lobo 2013: 1). For example, the city of Toronto is located on territory that was inhabited for thousands of years and that served as an “important stopping off point along a major migration and trading route” with permanent settlements (McCaskill et al. 2011: 41).

The erasure of Indigenous peoples’ urban histories and the exclusion of Indigenous peoples from the history of Canadian cities serves an important function in the colonial imagination (Edmonds 2019). The false image of pre-colonial Indigenous societies as primitive and scattered within “an empty land” supports the belief in “stadial progress” (a model of social progress based on a simplified history of development in Europe) (Edmonds 2019: 8).

According to the model of stadial progress, Europeans at the time of colonization were at the highest stage of progress, having passed from hunting and gathering to pastoralism, agriculture, and then industrialization, and were therefore entitled to the lands of Indigenous peoples, who were primitives without society or rights (Edmonds 2019). Supporting this belief was the philosophy of *terra nullius*, an international law from the 15th century that deemed Indigenous peoples “too ‘uncivilized’ to constitute sovereign nations”, allowing their “lands to be considered



legally unoccupied” (Schaeffli & Godlewska 2014: 234).

The belief in stadial progress and the law of terra nullius were supported by and conceptually bound to what is now called the doctrine of discovery: the colonial belief that Indigenous lands belonged to the colonial power that first ‘discovered’ them (Schaeffli & Godlewska 2014; Wolfe 2006). These ideas, together with other notions of imperialism and colonialism, justified not only the dispossession of Indigenous peoples but also the dehumanization that permitted widespread genocide.

Colonialism in the Americas “destroyed almost one quarter of the earth’s population within 150 years” (Amadahy & Lawrence 2009: 106). Indigenous peoples today are the survivors of this genocide and “have descended from the 2-5% of Indigenous peoples who survived” (Amadahy & Lawrence 2009: 106). The nearly complete and violent ethnic cleansing of the first inhabitants of North America served to create the empty lands that were imagined in the law of terra nullius and opened space for settlers to create a new homeland (Gordon & Ram 2016).

An important aspect of ethnic cleansing is the destruction of “any proof of the displaced population’s presence” and the “erasure of any signs of their culture and history” (Gordon & Ram 2016: 22). The elimination of Indigenous peoples, places, and histories not only served to create space for settlers and prevent the return of Indigenous peoples to their lands (Gordon & Ram 2016), it also eliminated the problematic history of Indigenous peoples as complex and advanced societies, and erased any evidence of Indigenous urban experiences.

Census counts of Indigenous peoples underestimate urban Indigenous populations

2 TO 4X

Though colonization is often understood as an event that occurred in the past, settler colonialism is an ongoing process. As noted by Patrick Wolfe (2006), “invasion is a structure not an event” (388). Unlike extractive colonialism, where an imperial power dominates a territory and population to gain resources and wealth through exploitation, settler colonialism seeks to replace the original inhabitants, and continuously dominates this territory and population through the constant production and reproduction of colonial practice.

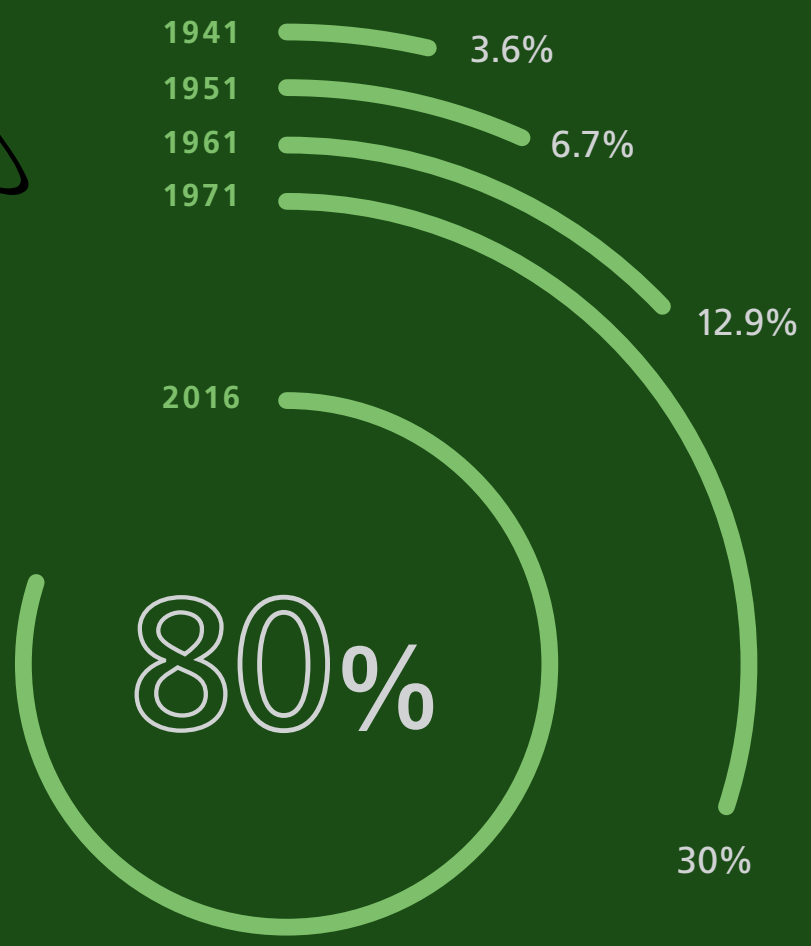
Settler colonialism requires continuous enforcement by the state and it is perpetuated through “the exploitation of marginalized peoples in a system of capitalism established by and reinforced through racism” (Bonds & Inwoods 2015: 2). In Canada, the belief in white supremacy “continues to produce social and spatial relations” based on a racial hierarchy that exists alongside the erasure of Indigenous peoples (Bonds & Inwoods 2015: 6; Amadahy & Lawrence 2009).

Though many Canadians do not think of Canada as an active settler colony, the colonial state continues to enact “a racialized structure wherein whites have long enjoyed advantages over Indigenous peoples” and the outcomes of these advantages are clearly expressed in disparities in “income, wealth, education, land control, political power, criminal victimization, and health” (Denis 2015: 224).

An important example of how Indigenous peoples are placed in Canada’s racial

Percentage of Indigenous peoples living in urban areas from **1941** — **2016***

*NO DATA FROM 1981 TO 2015



38%
OF STATUS

74%
OF
NON-STATUS

66%
OF MÉTIS

30%
OF INUIT

Estimated breakdown of all Indigenous peoples living off-reserve

hierarchy can be seen in the records of Quebec's Bouchard and Taylor Commission, an inquiry held in 2007 and 2008 on the reasonable accommodation of minorities. At the outset of this Commission, Charles Taylor and Gérard Bouchard justified the complete exclusion of Indigenous peoples from deliberations because it was "not clear that they are stakeholders in the society" (Schaeffli & Godlewska 2014: 241).

State-legislated racial classifications, exemplified in Status practices, are another expression of the Canadian colonial state which has long sought to restrict Indigenous peoples' rights, identities, and access to land (Wolfe 2006; Donnan 2016). Indigenous lands and societies have been completely transformed by settler colonialism, and relations between Indigenous peoples have become divided and subject to "creeping bureaucratic" control which is enacted over peoples and spaces (Donnan 2016: 39; Johnson 2012; Wilson & Peters 2005). Cities in Canada have played an important role in these colonial processes.

Settler Cities and Indigenous Reserves

The city is thought of as the opposite of nature; it is site of modernity and progress, ideas that are associated with settler society while the natural world and wilderness are places associated with Indigenous peoples (Howard 2016). Settler narratives present a historical, colonial struggle to tame the wilderness of Canada and establish thriving centres of civilization, growth, and development (Veracini 2010; Egan & Place 2013).

Canada, in this narrative, "came into being through 'a struggle over geography'", a story

that overshadows the violence of Indigenous dispossession and relocation into confined reserves that were "carefully mapped off" and excluded from the "emerging settler society" (Egan & Place 2013: 130). This process created "two opposite and polarized spaces": the settler colonial territories centred in cities and Indigenous reserves at the periphery (Gagné & Trépiéd 2016: 10).

With the establishment of the reserve system, the remaining lands between colonial cities and reserves were "materially and conceptually" emptied, allowing for the complete expansion of settler ownership across Indigenous lands (Wilson & Peters 2005: 398; Wolfe 2006; Edmonds 2019). At the centre of the colony, the city served as a site of national expansion by drawing immigration and facilitating industrialization (Edmonds 2019).

Cities also served as the administrative centres from which Indigenous peoples were controlled by policy-makers who determined regulations for Indigenous peoples both on and off reserve. Across Canada, "[v]arious levels of government, ranging from individual Indian agents, to departments, to the courts and houses of parliament, worked to maintain the separation" of Indigenous peoples and cities which were for settlers (Wilson & Peters 2005: 399; Gagné & Trépiéd 2016; Edmonds 2019).

The relocation of reserves away from cities continued "well into the 1900s ... as they were considered a nuisance" (Rotz 2017: 165). This separation served to segregate Canada geographically and conceptually, cementing the divide between primitive Indigenous reserves and modern Canadian cities (Rotz 2017). Because of this divide, Indigenous people who left reserves were assumed to be rejecting their culture and seeking to assimilate

into Canadian settler society (Wilson & Peters 2005).

Victoria: The Land of the Lekwungen

The city of Victoria offers an important example of how Indigenous peoples have been constructed as inherently non-urban. Before colonization, Victoria was inhabited by the Lekwungen, who were relocated to reserves and perceived as nuisances and vagrants in their own homelands (Edmonds 2019). The historical process of segregation shaped the city and continues to influence settler-Indigenous relations today (Edmonds 2019).

When colonists first arrived in the area, they described the island as an idyllic and untouched wilderness, ignorantly mistaking “cultured and intentional landscapes” as untamed nature (Simpson & Bagelman 2018: 3). Though the colonists were unable to recognize this, the environment they found was in fact a “dynamic and highly productive food system, crafted and managed by the Lekwungen over millennia” (Simpson & Bagelman 2018: 3).

The city of Victoria began as a fur-trading fort owned by the Hudson’s Bay Company, and remained a small trading centre until the Fraser River gold rush brought large numbers of migrants who sought to formally settle in the region (Edmonds 2019). The gold rush brought significant changes to the area and fuelled rapid industrialization, including resource extraction based in mining, forestry, and fisheries, which “radically transformed” the land and Indigenous peoples’ relation to it (Edmonds 2019: 9).

As the city began to grow and private property holdings increased, Indigenous spaces in the city were seen as “chaotic and unprofitable” places that risked devaluing adjacent properties (Edmonds 2019: 9). The further removal of the Lekwungen from the area was supported as a means to increase private property holdings, decrease the inconvenience the Lekwungen posed to the public through their presence, and ensure that the land they were on would be used for colonial profit (Edmonds 2019).

It was also assumed by settlers that the Lekwungen, like all Indigenous peoples in North America, would soon “become extinct”, at which time the reserves they occupied “would once again become the property of the Crown” (Edmonds 2019: 11-12). Indigenous peoples were therefore seen as a temporary burden to be pushed aside to make way for expanding settler cities and interests, and their presence in these cities was treated as anomalous and contemptible.

Indigenous people were routinely removed from the city streets; any efforts to establish a community within city limits was met with resistance, and at times their homes were demolished (Edmonds 2019). Curfews were enacted to prevent Indigenous people from being in the city at night, and Indigenous women were criminalized as sex workers who threatened the health and “racial purity” of the city (Edmonds 2019: 14).

The vilification of Indigenous peoples as vagrant, dirty, and immoral served to maintain strict segregation and helped justify the expulsion and “wholesale removal” of Indigenous peoples from Victoria in 1868 and 1869 (Edmonds 2019: 15). Municipal and colonial segregation entered into law and the city was formally defined as a place where

planned. Contrary to predictions that were being made up until the 1980s, urban Indigenous peoples did not assimilate and are today “seeking ways of ensuring that their legitimate place” in urban environments is recognized (Desbiens et al. 2016: 81).

Adapting to the Settler City

Uncertain how to deal with the influx of urban Indigenous peoples, “government and voluntary organizations increasingly turned to social scientists” for policy reform (Langford 2016: 3). It was widely determined that a policy of integration rather than assimilation should be attempted, and the government began implementing policies based on the idea that Indigenous peoples were “an ethnic rather than a racial group” (Langford 2016: 3).

This kind of thinking allowed the government to erase the history of colonialism and to continue to advance a stadial notion of development where one could “successfully integrate [...] into the dominant culture of urban space” by following a path of “linear progression from ‘primitive’ to ‘civilized’” society (Neale 2017: 76). The underlying premise of integration assumes that ethnic minorities, in support of multiculturalism, choose to abandon cultural aspects that are deemed incompatible with the dominant culture, allowing them to become part of the mainstream society.

Despite government efforts to integrate urban Indigenous peoples, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples found that “strong cultural identities were an important element of [Indigenous] people’s success in cities” (Peters 2011: 79). Though the Commission also found that urban Indigenous peoples face pervasive racism in

their everyday lives, Indigenous people have not abandoned their identities in the city (Peters 2011).

At the same time, racism must be stressed as one of the most pressing challenges facing urban Indigenous peoples in Canada. Racism towards Indigenous peoples has been characterized as “laissez faire” racism, a type of racism that involves stereotyping, blaming Indigenous peoples for the consequences of their own historical and structural marginalization, and resisting meaningful efforts to improve racist policy and social practices (Denis 2015: 221).

Urban Indigenous Organizations

Urban Indigenous peoples are erased from urban policy, overlooked by governments and non-Indigenous organizations, face discrimination at all levels of society, and lack coherent representation by any one national Indigenous organization (Heritz 2018). With few places to turn for culturally safe services, many people seek the services of urban Indigenous organizations.

Because urban Indigenous populations are diverse, Indigenous organizations may struggle to meet the challenge of providing cross-cultural services (Neale 2017). Nevertheless, organizations such as Friendship Centres, which have grown away from their colonial past under Indigenous governance, provide urban Indigenous people an opportunity to share in cultural activities and advance their interests in Indigenous arts and culture (Cidro et al. 2015; Langford 2016; Neale 2017).

Though urban Indigenous organizations have become constrained by reduced government funding, which in turn has limited their ability to undertake important advocacy work

and forced them to adopt a “more apolitical, reified deployment of culture”, these organizations continue to act as cultural footholds in the urban environment (Howard 2016: 217). Parallel to these services, urban Indigenous communities are also “creating an effective network of their own self-organizing institutions” where people are able to engage in important activism (DeVerteuil & Wilson 2010: 501).

Indigenous Services in the Neoliberal Era

With the vast majority of Indigenous people living in cities, the lack of culturally appropriate services has become a focal point of concern. Public services in Canada fail to meet the needs of urban Indigenous peoples because they operate with “assimilationist objectives” and often serve limited target groups (Heritz 2018: 602). Public services have also suffered from steep declines in funding and greater funding instability, which in turn has undermined the organizational capacity of service providers (Heritz 2018).

Throughout the 1990s, massive budget cuts were made to social services across Canada (MacDonald 2011; Gaetz et al. 2013). This dismantling of the welfare state is a process often referred to as retrenchment, a policy shift that was also accompanied by a turn towards neoliberalism. Under neoliberal politics, the state has increasingly turned to privatization of services and has downloaded the responsibility for service provision to Indigenous organizations while retaining “the actual decision-making power necessary to truly transform these policy areas” (MacDonald 2011: 257).

Because this “devolution of certain policy areas from Canadian government to

Indigenous peoples” is not complete, with government continuing to control what policies would be implemented, the neoliberal welfare approach creates advantages for the state (MacDonald 2011: 264). Government has been able to shift the burden of services that have problematic “colonial legacies” and where the state has a “less than positive record” onto Indigenous communities while “appearing to concede to Indigenous demands” (MacDonald 2011: 265-265; Snyder et al. 2015).

Through this approach, governments are able to remove themselves from demands by the public for greater accountability while maintaining control over the broader policy development and funding of these services. This has placed community organizations in a difficult position; Indigenous organizations have taken on additional responsibilities with fewer resources than needed and little power or autonomy (Snyder et al. 2015). This has left Indigenous organizations with the task of serving a growing population with inadequate funding in an environment lacking co-operative capacity (McCaskill et al. 2011).

Because Indigenous organizations struggle with constant financial scarcity, they are placed in greater competition with one another and are often unable to engage in meaningful policy advocacy (Snyder et al. 2015). Rather than supporting Indigenous governance, neoliberalism has made some Indigenous communities “cautious about independent service provision” because collaboration with government is often “tied to reductions” in funding, greater administrative requirements, increased competition, and harsh criticism when “closely monitored” services are found to be lacking (Coombes et al. 2012: 697).

Key Themes and Challenges

Deconstructing the Colonial Imagination

Though many people may react strongly to the idea that Canada is an active settler colony, Canada has never been decolonized and remains a settler state (Hugill 2017). Canada's government and state institutions continue to enact the "foundational fictions of discovery and terra nullius and genocidal policies" in the enforcement of the Indian Act and other legislation that continues to dispossess and erase Indigenous peoples from society (Tomiak 2016: 11).

The idea of Canada as a new nation that was built on a "peaceful frontier" remains "deeply embedded in the Canadian mythology" (Woolford & Benvenuto 2015: 375; Rotz 2017). Colonial narratives are useful in delegitimizing Indigenous claims because they create a dichotomous fiction that opposes the heroic settler with the "incompetent, lazy" Indian (Rotz 2017: 163). These false historical assumptions support continued segregation, racial hierarchy, and discrimination (Rotz 2017).

In Canada, the impact of these colonial, racial narratives are "the taken for granted and hidden framework" that perpetuate structural advantages for white settlers and

disadvantages for others (Evans et al. 2009: 9). Racist notions are also propagated by media, which "accentuates" false assumptions and poorly informed beliefs about Indigenous communities (EnviroNics Institute 2016: 1). As a result, a majority of Canadians reject "the idea that mainstream society continues to benefit from ongoing discrimination" while dismissing Indigenous peoples' claims for equity (EnviroNics Institute 2016: 1).

The EnviroNics Institute provides an example of how these processes occur and interrelate in its 2016 report *Canadian Public Opinion on Aboriginal Peoples*. The Institute notes that despite the Supreme Court of Canada and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission finding that the residential school policy "was part of a deliberate policy of cultural genocide", 40% of Canadians "reject the idea of cultural genocide" and continue to believe that the "residential schools policy was not an intentional effort to destroy Aboriginal culture and connection to the land" (EnviroNics Institute 2016: 31).

Reconciliation: Limits and Considerations

For reconciliation to advance, "changes to the existing narrative need to take place



within institutions and within the general population” (Cooper & Driedger 2019: 4). If Canadians are unable to unlearn dominant colonial narratives or change the “status quo”, reconciliation will be reduced to “a romantic attempt to smooth over Indigenous-settler relationships” (Davis et al. 2016: 2; Rotz 2017).

Though it may be challenging for Canadians to confront the label of settler, “when this language is not specifically employed, critical insights about the nature and workings of settler colonial society are lost” (Davis et al. 2016: 9). In Canada, colonial identities, histories, and experiences are “obscured” to facilitate domination and ongoing assimilation efforts, and this same process can occur under the guise of reconciliation (Rotz 2017: 165).

By acknowledging Canada’s colonial reality, Canadians can begin to reflect upon their “deep emotional and cultural investment in the status quo” and begin to understand their role as “beneficiaries of past and present injustices” (Davis et al. 2016: 2). These first steps are essential in moving towards decolonization, as it has been found that compared to decolonizing territories, “[d]ecolonising relationships has proven much harder” (Veracini 2007: 7).

Indigenous Peoples and Ethnic Minorities

Because the government of Canada has come to view Indigenous peoples as “marginal and foreign groups who had to be brought into the Canadian mainstream”, assimilation policies have shifted towards a focus on integration (Bohaker & Iacovetta 2009: 430). In some cases, government


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policies towards Indigenous peoples have been combined with policies for newcomers, contributing to the false portrayal of Indigenous peoples as urban migrants (Bohaker & Iacovetta 2009).

The construction of urban Indigenous peoples as another ethnic minority to be incorporated through multiculturalism is another attempt by Canada “to divest itself of any formal recognition of Indigenous peoples” (Amadahy & Lawrence 2009: 115). This tension is clear in Canada’s performance of multiculturalism through support for Indigenous culture and ceremony, which are “not considered threatening to state power” while dismissing and resisting Indigenous rights and land claims across the country (Watts 2016: 162).

The Role of Municipalities

Federal and provincial governments have forced urban Indigenous peoples into an



Despite the Supreme Court of Canada and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission finding that the residential school policy “was part of a deliberate policy of cultural genocide”, [this idea is still rejected by]



40%



OF CANADIANS.

accountability gap by refusing to provide “direction regarding their representation in urban centres” (Heritz 2018: 597). Some municipalities have responded to this lack of direction by adopting their own Indigenous strategies or by creating Indigenous relations positions within local government (Heritz 2018).

Unfortunately, these efforts “fall short” of meaningful governance because these add-on initiatives fail to achieve any comprehensive policy reformulation (Heritz 2018: 597). For example, the Federation of Canadian Municipalities’ Big City Mayors’ Caucus has “committed to ongoing dialogue with the federal government” in order to better implement the Truth and Reconciliation Calls to Action (FCM 2016: 14).

Despite these types of commitments, urban Indigenous peoples remain a low priority for municipalities. In a study of the policy priorities of 1000 municipal mayors and councillors, it was found that Indigenous relations “barely reaches the realm of moderate importance to municipal politicians” (Lucas & Smith 2019: 4). When compared with other policy areas, urban Indigenous peoples did not appear in the list of the top 16 priority policy areas (Lucas & Smith 2019).

These findings demonstrate the need for greater and more coherent policy focus on urban Indigenous peoples. As noted by a respondent to the city of Hamilton’s Urban Indigenous Strategy Survey, it is not possible to reduce efforts to single offices or policy areas “because everything is critical and should be part of an overall strategy for improving our relationship with local Indigenous people” (City of Hamilton 2018: 12).

Questions of Authenticity and Urban Indigenous Identity

In a colony, “[o]ne of the most powerful technologies” is the ability “to name and contain the original inhabitants” (Maddison 2013: 289). In Canada, the government’s power to determine who is – and who is not – Indigenous has greatly impacted how Indigenous identities are “constructed, shaped and lived” (Maddison 2013: 289).

Government policies about who is and is not Indigenous have changed over time but they have consistently created significant divisions among Indigenous peoples (Lawrence 2009; Maddison 2013). These policies have also impacted urban Indigenous peoples’ experiences of identity and community by privileging “tribal lands” and dismissing urban life as “less authentic and less legitimate” (Gagné & Trépiéd 2016: 2).

Though the vast majority of Indigenous peoples live in urban centres, the insistence that rights and identity must be tied to land obscures urban Indigenous experiences and perpetuates the notion of Indigenous peoples as “nature in human form” (Wilson & Peters 2005: 400). Indigenous identities are also fragmented by a rural/urban divide, creating significant challenges for urban Indigenous people whose identities exist outside of colonial notions of authenticity and who are “at risk of being stigmatized as false, assimilated, [or] westernized” (Gagné & Trépiéd 2016: 13).

Because of colonial interference in the construction of Indigenous identities, Indigenous peoples and communities have



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 colonial
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 identities,

Indigenous peoples and communities have been prevented from defining the ways in which their cosmologies, traditions, and relationship to land evolve in time and space.

been prevented from defining the ways in which their cosmologies, traditions, and relationship to land evolve in time and space (Maddison 2013). In addition to maintaining “a hierarchy of authenticity” (Maddison 2013: 293), colonial definitions of Indigeneity also contribute to “harmful and oppressive representations” of urban Indigenous peoples “as homeless and troubled” (Neale 2017: 79).

Urban Indigenous people who do not conform to these racist stereotypes are assumed to have assimilated and therefore are believed to be lacking “cultural authenticity” (Environics Institute 2010: 57). Underlying these assumptions is the persistent colonial binary of the urban, modern settler and the rural, primitive Indian; for an individual to be both modern and urban they cannot be Indigenous and are readily “dismissed as fakes” (Lawrence 2009: 23).

Urban Indigenous people therefore face numerous challenges in defining and asserting their identities, and these challenges are further exacerbated by intersecting social hierarchies of power. When taking into account numerous layers of oppression relating to one’s “race, skin colour, Indian status, social class” and gender, the added pressure of defining oneself and community within an urban, colonial context becomes incredibly difficult (McCaskill et al. 2011: 34).

Settler Colonialism’s Resistance to Change

Settler colonialism, unlike “other types of colonial practice”, is “remarkably resistant to decolonisation” (Veracini 2007: 1; Wolfe

2006). Studies of the adaptation of settler colonial states find that these states have “displaced rather than addressed” their historical legacies and have sought to prevent decolonization through various strategies of control in response to Indigenous demands (Veracini 2007: 5; Barker 2009).

As Indigenous communities have succeeded in resisting both physical and legislated erasure, government strategies have moved towards “social, cultural, and intellectual” oppression (Barker 2009: 326). A notable contemporary expression of this strategy is to situate “the abuses of settler colonization firmly in the past [...] while leaving the present structure of colonial rule largely unscathed” (Rotz 2017: 164).

This approach is most evident in government statements and commitments regarding the ‘legacy’ of residential schools and contemporary reconciliation efforts (Rotz 2017). When discussions of settler colonialism are brought into the present, the “material stickiness” of colonial ideologies is often revealed in public backlashes against Indigenous rights (Rotz 2017: 168; Veracini 2007).

The refusal to acknowledge settler colonialism as an ongoing process is normalized in Canadian society, and various strategies denying the experiences of Indigenous peoples can be identified (Steinman 2016). These strategies include a denial of the existence of colonialism, concealment or diminishment of violence against Indigenous peoples, justification of Indigenous dispossession through false historical assumptions, exclusion of Indigenous peoples from mainstream society, cultural appropriation, and the “elimination of

possible alternatives in the past, present, and future” (Steinman 2016: 222).

Through these various strategies, settler colonialism in Canada is “continually reproduced” and the potential to even imagine what decolonization could look like is perpetually extinguished (Woolford & Benvenuto 2015: 382; Barker 2009). This facilitated ignorance regarding the possibility for a more equitable society not only sustains colonial notions, it also perpetuates inequality by disregarding Indigenous people’s experiences of systemic discrimination:

Ignorance in this sense entails an agreement to “know the world wrongly” and is powerful because it is socially sanctioned. In Canada, pervasive uncritical acceptance of the exclusionary laws and policies that continue to marginalize [Indigenous] peoples is rooted in ignorance that obfuscates the ways such policies uphold settler interests and renders such strategies possible and acceptable (Schaeffli & Godlewska 2014: 229).

Not knowing the colonial experiences of Indigenous peoples is itself an act of colonialism, one that is permitted by the privilege of living in a society that has been designed to conceal colonial violence and naturalize the dominant settler worldview (Schaeffli & Godlewska 2014). From this position, it becomes normalized and rational to view Indigenous people’s demands and resistance to the violence of colonialism as irrational, disruptive, excessive, and unnecessary.

Urban Indigenous Policy Priorities

A Note on Health

In current research on urban Indigenous populations, health and health care are readily apparent priorities. It is well documented that Indigenous people “experience significant disparities in health status, morbidity and mortality rates, and healthcare access” compared to non-Indigenous Canadians, with urban populations experiencing greater inequities than those on reserve (Goodman et al. 2017: 2).

It is estimated that 32% of urban Indigenous people live with a disability, “twice the national average” in Canada (Carli 2013: 6). Despite the increased need among urban Indigenous populations, health strategies and resources “are largely developed and contingent on reservation-based experience and research results” (Howard 2014: 49).

In addition to inadequate health resources, urban Indigenous people also face the challenge of pervasive “racism and stigmatization” in the healthcare sector (Goodman et al. 2017: 3). Indigenous peoples’ health concerns are often “trivialized by healthcare providers”, leading many people to be discharged

without treatment, sometimes with fatal consequences (Goodman et al. 2017: 7).

Because urban Indigenous people in need of health care often encounter racism and dismissal, and even blame, for their health needs, many choose to avoid seeking treatment in order to eliminate “the risk of further trauma” (Goodman et al. 2017: 8). In order to address the health needs of urban Indigenous peoples, policy leaders in the healthcare sector must acknowledge discriminatory practices and work with Indigenous organizations to ensure “equitable care for all” (Goodman et al. 2017: 13).

Housing and Homelessness

Safe and affordable housing is integral to the health and development of an urban life. Despite the fundamental necessity for shelter, housing remains a long-neglected policy concern for urban Indigenous people (Snyder et al. 2015). The federal government continues to ignore a growing urban Indigenous housing crisis and has focused instead, also inadequately, “on reserve-based housing” (Snyder et al. 2015: 4).

Over the past three decades, rental housing in Canada has been reduced while

household incomes have stagnated; as a result, Canadians are “spending a larger percentage of their income on housing” and it is estimated that almost 400,000 households are in “severe housing need” (Gaetz et al. 2013: 6). These factors have resulted in a housing crisis that is characterized by “exorbitant rents, shortages of affordable housing, and systemic erasure of Indigeneity from the urban sociocultural and political landscape” (Alaazi et al. 2015: 31).

The housing crisis is also the result of significant reductions in affordable housing along with “the dismantling of Canada’s national housing strategy in the mid-1990s” (Gaetz et al. 2013: 15). At this time, responsibility for social housing was transferred to the provincial level and the federal government’s policy “shifted from direct investment in housing to a monetary policy” including “tax incentives to encourage private home ownership” (Gaetz et al. 2013: 15).

Adding to the struggles of urban Indigenous people navigating the housing crisis, “experiences with racism in the rental market coupled with substandard housing conditions, poverty” and unsafe communities further contribute to high levels of mobility and transiency in the community (Snyder et al. 2015: 5; Beatty & Berdahl 2011; Gaetz et al. 2013; Thistle 2017). These factors intersect within the colonial context to create high levels of urban Indigenous homelessness.

Unfortunately, urban Indigenous people experiencing homelessness are often subject to blame by people who overlook the impacts of the colonial system and dismiss the problem of “ongoing dispossession of

Indigenous Peoples” (Thistle 2017: 18). Most often, homelessness is reduced “to simple material terms” and assumed to be the result of “poverty, addiction, and poor mental health”, leaving the structural reality of colonial occupation unaddressed (Christensen 2013: 821).

The government of Canada benefits from these blaming narratives because they distract from the state’s gross inaction,

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its “fiduciary abandonment of Indigenous communities”, and “federal, provincial, and territorial governments” roles in chronically underfunding Indigenous peoples and housing (Thistle 2017: 7).

Ignoring the role of government in facilitating homelessness among urban Indigenous peoples, dominant, racialized narratives suggest that “homelessness is viewed as an acceptable and even appropriate place for Indigenous Peoples to be” (Thistle 2017: 18). Through the normalization of settler colonialism, “the state and settlers have successfully displaced their blame for Indigenous homelessness onto the Indigenous individuals themselves” (Thistle 2017: 18).

Though Canadians have increasing access to testimonies, evidence, and research regarding the government’s role in “coerced rural-urban migration of Indigenous people through amenity deprivation and systemic discrimination”, the dominant narrative continues to ignore the responsibility of governments and advocate for a neoliberal response to homelessness, focusing on “fiscal austerity, decentralization of responsibility, and individual opportunism” as solutions (Alaazi et al. 2015: 31).

Much of urban Indigenous homelessness is hidden; it is experienced in high levels of transiency, and short-term, informal, or precarious housing arrangements. Despite this hard-to-measure phenomenon, some emerging concerns are evident, such as the increasing number of families and elders among the hidden homeless (Beatty & Berdahl 2011). As well, “Indigenous youth are also over-represented in homeless youth populations” and they experience higher

rates of incarceration and sexual exploitation” (Kidd et al. 2018: 2).

Though urban Indigenous populations experiencing homelessness are highly diverse, many share “experiences with residential school attendance, child welfare apprehension, and removal from traditional lands” (Kidd et al. 2018: 2). A feature of these shared experiences is the trauma of “a complex process of institutionalisation” resulting from successive contact with state institutions throughout their lives, from “residential school, child welfare, corrections, income support and public housing, and the emergency shelter” (Christensen 2013: 819). These systems continuously undermine the independence and self-worth of Indigenous people, disrupting rather than assisting them in their lives, their families, or communities, and leading them into cycles of dependence.

Child Welfare

Residential schools and the continued reliance on child welfare systems as a mechanism of assimilation have directly targeted Indigenous youth, who “in many ways, have taken the brunt of Canadian nation state-building projects” (Kidd et al. 2018: 2). These policies have created “deep cultural destabilization, destroyed institutions responsible for the socialization of Indigenous peoples, and [have] had the effect of traumatizing generations of First Nations, Metis, and Inuit” (Kidd et al. 2018: 2). They have also contributed to the erasure of traditional practices and roles in Indigenous communities, seeking to replace these with Western beliefs,

including religious dogmas and homophobia (Ristock et al. 2017).

These policies have also “undermined and disrupted Indigenous families in Canada, leading to the widespread severing of family and communities”, creating lifelong and inter-generational homelessness among Indigenous peoples (Christensen 2013: 809). Because Indigenous families are delegitimized by state interventions, Indigenous children’s sense of home is destabilized and undermined while children are forcibly moved to new locations and communities (Christensen 2013; Ristock et al. 2017).

Like residential schools, child welfare policies have been part of a conscious and intentional effort to deconstruct Indigenous families and communities.

The federal government decentralized Indigenous health, education, and welfare services in the 1950s and “handed over control to the provinces” (Bingham et al. 2014: 443). Within one decade, the number of Indigenous children in care increased from 1% to almost 40% (Bingham et al. 2014).

The mass removal of Indigenous children from their homes, families, and communities over the following 30 years has been called the ‘sixties scoop’ (Bingham et al. 2014; Ristock et al. 2017; Cooper & Driedger 2019). During this time, and still today, Indigenous children are placed in state care with non-Indigenous families, provided little access to their culture, subjected to abuse and racism, and rarely permitted to return to their

Indigenous women and girls ... [are]

50%

more likely to experience violent assault than any other racial group.



Indigenous homelessness in major urban areas of Canadian cities

2019



Research shows that Indigenous homelessness in major urban areas ranges from

20 – 50%

of the total homeless population.



Toronto

15%

Winnipeg & Thunder Bay

50%

Whitehorse & Yellowknife

90%

OF TOTAL HOMELESS POPULATION

families or communities (Bingham et al. 2014; Fast et al. 2017).

Indigenous children are also more likely to come “into contact with the child welfare system as a result of neglect, versus physical or sexual abuse”, despite poverty not being a permissible condition for child removal in state legislation (Stevens et al. 2018: 114; Trocmé & Blackstock 2005). The continued over-representation of Indigenous children in care reveals deep systemic racism and supports the criticism that the child welfare system “is simply the latest in a long history of legislated colonial violence aimed at eradicating Indigenous cultures” (Stevens et al. 2018: 108; Christensen 2013; Fast et al. 2017).

It is therefore no coincidence that urban Indigenous people experiencing homelessness commonly report personal or inter-generational histories of child welfare involvement (Christensen 2013). It is also not surprising that urban Indigenous youth, and particularly those of mixed ancestry, “struggle with issues related to identity and racism” (Fast et al. 2017: 155) or that Indigenous children in care are at “greater risk of becoming disconnected from their cultures” (Stevens et al. 2018: 104).

Indigenous children in care face a number of intersecting challenges, including racism, stigmatization, cultural disconnection, and frequent movement within the child welfare system “through multiple placements” (Stevens et al. 2018: 124). Indigenous children in care are “more likely to be moved repeatedly”, with little planning for transitional supports and no long-term preparation for the eventual termination of their care (Stevens et al. 2018: 105). Because of these systemic

biases, “many Indigenous children in care are effectively homeless from an early age” (Christensen 2013: 812).

Cities as Sites of Gendered, Colonial Violence

Historically, the movement of Indigenous peoples has been heavily policed and their presence in cities “strictly regulated” (Gagné & Trépiéd 2016: 11; Veracini 2010), yet the enforcement of colonial violence by police, security, and military “against Indigenous peoples goes largely unnoticed” (Barker 2009: 335). In particular, Indigenous women and girls experience extreme sexual violence and are not only “50% more likely to experience violent assault than any other racial group”, they are also most likely to be assaulted by white males, including state security personnel (Amadahy & Lawrence 2009: 119; Dhillon 2015).

The violence that urban Indigenous people experience is closely linked to systemic racism “within the law and justice system where there is strong evidence of racial profiling, the undervaluing of [Indigenous] victims, and the overcharging of [Indigenous] offenders” (McCaskill et al. 2011: 18-19). Systemic racism can also be seen in the lack of protection provided to Indigenous peoples, lenient sentencing or a lack of consequences for white offenders who commit crimes against Indigenous peoples, and state “complicity in sanctioning the invisibility of gender violence against Indigenous women and girls” (Dhillon 2015: 9).

Violence against Indigenous women in Canadian cities is so common that it has

become “pathologized as a natural symptom of [I]ndigenous failures to successfully assimilate into modern Canadian society” (Lucchesi 2019: 7). The violence that urban Indigenous women and girls experience is so extreme that it brings the idea of “Canadian cities as modern, liberal, civilized spaces” into question (Lucchesi 2019: 16), upsetting international notions of Canada as a just and safe society (Human Rights Watch 2013).

Internationally, and in Canada, Indigenous women in urban settings are subjected to “economic, political and sexual exploitation”, trafficking, and homelessness (United Nations 2010: 55). The pervasive sexual exploitation of Indigenous women in Canadian cities is met with “surprising silence in public policy and research” despite widespread awareness that they are over-represented among trafficked and exploited women³, and disproportionately vulnerable to violence and victimization (Bingham et al. 2014: 441; Bourgeois 2015).

Following the logic of the social contract⁴, it is the responsibility of the state to provide protection to its citizens; however, state officials are also direct perpetrators of violence against Indigenous peoples. In 2013, Human Rights Watch published their findings on the experiences of Indigenous women and girls in Northern British Columbia, and outlined the egregious and extreme violence that Indigenous women experience at the hands of local police authorities.

The report, entitled *Those Who Take Us Away*, details “reports of physical abuse by both police and judges, sexual assault, the terrorizing of Indigenous communities

through hyper surveillance, unjust detainment for intoxication, racist threats, and zero accountability for police misconduct” (Dhillon 2015: 11). These findings do not depict isolated incidents but reflect a broad culture of dehumanization that is expressed in similar accounts from across Canada, including recent reports in Quebec and Saskatchewan.

The normalization of violence against Indigenous peoples is concentrated in urban settings, where the enforcement of colonial power is required to reproduce and sustain extreme social, political, and economic inequality and segregation. This violence is also made permissible by the justice system’s failure to protect Indigenous people and enact meaningful legal consequences against perpetrators (Dhillon 2015).

Making Space for Urban Indigeneity

Contemporary experiences of urban Indigenous peoples clearly indicate that “there is very little in the way of systemic, comprehensive urban [Indigenous] policy” in Canada (Hanselmann 2011: 170; Ardoch Algonquin First Nation v. Canada [Attorney General] 2002; Lucas & Smith 2019). This problem exists because governments at all levels across Canada refuse to accept responsibility for urban Indigenous peoples (Belanger 2011; Hanselmann 2011; Snyder et al. 2015).

Urban Indigenous peoples also lack coherent, national representation (Hanselmann 2011) because reduced funding and a divisive consultation approach that employs nation-to-nation principles as

3

In three separate studies on the sexual exploitation of urban Indigenous women, it was found that 50 to 60% of trafficked and exploited women in Canada are Indigenous (Bourgeois 2015).

4

Social contract theory is the belief that people living in a state of anarchy once signed over some of their freedoms to the state in exchange for protection. This belief suggests that this contract continues today, offering citizens certain rights and freedoms to be delivered by the state that governs them.



a means for selective engagement and opportunistic exclusion at the national level have hampered policy coordination between national Indigenous organizations.

It must also be recognized that many urban Indigenous people are prevented from participating in policy advocacy because they are living the adverse consequences of racialized inequality (Amadahy & Lawrence 2009). Though government has recognized the “existence and functioning of urban” Indigenous communities and acknowledges that these are communities have rights (Ardoch Algonquin First Nation v. Canada [Attorney General] 2002: 22), little has been done to ensure these rights are protected.

As noted earlier, this status quo is maintained in part by the continued perception of urban Indigenous peoples as “visitors occupying an alien environment”, and the belief that urban Indigenous peoples are “displaced cultural curiosities” (Belanger 2011: 140). Indigenous peoples have long struggled to define who they are and to resist “political categories” that are forced upon them (Edmonds 2019: 15), and many are “choosing new paths” away from colonial definitions of their persons and communities (Lawrence 2009: 4).

Urban Indigenous communities are organizing across Canada, contesting the colonial belief that cities are non-Indigenous spaces, and “reformulating Western institutions and practices to support Indigenous cultures and identities” (Peters & Andersen 2013: 8; Neale 2017). Through these efforts, urban Indigenous identities are being recognized as positive, complex, authentic, and pluralist (Environics Institute 2010; Peters & Andersen

2013; Stephens 2015). However, the bulk of the responsibility for making cities safe places for Indigenous peoples cannot fall on Indigenous communities – governments and all of society have a part in decolonizing urban spaces.

The normalization of violence against Indigenous peoples is concentrated in urban settings, where the enforcement of colonial power is required to reproduce and sustain extreme

**social,
political,
and
economic**

inequality and segregation.



Looking Forward

Recommendations

The following recommendations have been informed by a comprehensive review of literature and research on urban Indigenous organizations.

- The government of Canada must recognize the erasure of Indigenous peoples from urban spaces as a form of “cultural violence” (Puketapu-Dentice et al. 2017: 3).
- Governments must begin to decolonize national narratives and create “discursive spaces for worldviews, protocols, and approaches” that are defined and valued by Indigenous peoples (Walker et al. 2017: 9).
- Government must take a leadership role in advancing antiracism efforts, with a particular focus on media and political discourse (Denis 2015).
- All levels of government in Canada must engage with Indigenous organizations equally to create comprehensive policy frameworks for urban Indigenous peoples (Snyder et al. 2015: 21).
- National Indigenous organizations must work together to coordinate effective representation of urban Indigenous peoples, and together work towards the creation of a clear policy voice for urban Indigenous peoples in order to advance their particular needs at all levels of government (Hanselmann 2011).
- Services and policies addressing the needs of urban Indigenous peoples must be informed by the principles of cultural-safety practice and must work to actively counter “patterns of exclusion and assimilation” (Fast et al. 2017: 156).
- Urban Indigenous organizations must be equitably funded and supported in recognition of the importance of Indigenous-led services, particularly in the areas of “addictions programs, child and family services, and housing services” (Environics Institute 2010: 73).
- The provision of safe, affordable, and suitable housing for urban Indigenous peoples must be a central policy priority for all governments (Walker & Barcham 2010).

- Housing policies must be informed by Indigenous organizations and communities and must be developed to support Indigenous “autonomy, self-determination, and nonhierarchical governance models” (Ion et al. 2018: 132).
- A national initiative to end Indigenous homelessness should be developed by the federal government, and Indigenous peoples “must be part of any solutions to homelessness” (Gaetz et al. 2013: 7).
- Specific policy considerations must be made for the most vulnerable and excluded among urban Indigenous populations, including people with disabilities, women and girls, and Inuit, who require culturally specific services and who may experience “cultural alienation in services designed for” non-Inuit Indigenous people (Morris 2016: 24).

Looking Forward

There are many challenges on the road to urban Indigenous empowerment. However, many of these are limitations that exist within people’s minds and can therefore be changed and overcome. Though it is difficult to imagine a future in which Canadian cities are decolonized and urban Indigenous peoples are afforded equitable space to live in safety, this vision is not impossible.

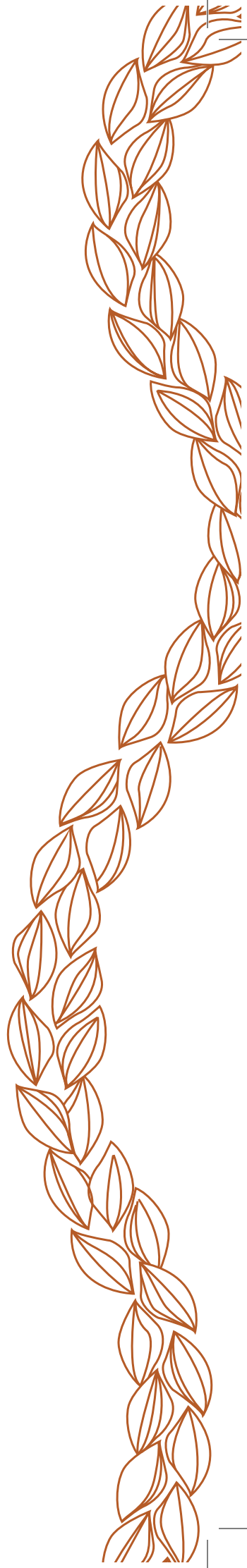
Decolonization does “not always take the spectacular form” of revolution; it can

be as simple as thinking outside of the limits that are forced onto society by a legacy of complacency (Simpson & Bagelman 2018: 9; Robinson & Roy 2015). Though history may limit our ability today, it cannot limit our imagination or the world we might create for each other tomorrow.

With Indigenous populations growing rapidly, and urban populations projected to reach

10%

in Canada's five major cities by 2031, it is clear that government policies and priorities are firmly fixed in the past.



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does "not always take the spectacular form" of revolution; it can be as simple as thinking outside of the limits that are forced onto society by a legacy of complacency.



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