

“Diversity is our Strength”?  
Memory, Trauma and Social Critique in  
Contemporary Canadian Literature by  
Indigenous Women

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## **Abstract**

This thesis aims to demonstrate how Indigenous female authors represent the traumas suffered from Canadian government policies between the early days of the Confederation of Canada and 1996. That year signifies the closure of the last residential school, which had for over a century been in practice to prevent children from growing up surrounded by Indigenous peoples. The residential school program was part of the Indian Act, the principal statute through which Indigenous peoples are governed in Canada, but which used to have the objective to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the dominant settler society. Although the residential school program is the best-known example of how the Canadian government tried to achieve this, it was not the only policy. Forced adoptions carried out between the 1960s and 1980s have had a lasting impact on both the parents and the children. Both these federal policies have caused traumas that continue to affect Indigenous peoples, even if they have not experienced them first-hand. This thesis seeks to explore the literary tools that Indigenous women use to portray the traumas and how they criticize a wealthy, democratic country that proudly presents itself as a multicultural-loving, inclusive society where diversity is the unifying factor between all Canadians.

**Keywords:** Indigenous Peoples/ Canada/ Memory/ Trauma/ Identity/ Residential Schools/ Adoption/ Literature

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### **Terminology:**

Upon reading and hearing about the topics discussed in this thesis, I came across countless definitions for the people who were subjected to violence and threatened with extinction since the arrival of the settlers in Canada. The aim was to find a term that could be used to describe the wide variety of peoples affected by the settlers' policies. The Canadian government installed the Indian Act in 1876 in order to assimilate the original inhabitants into the Western society. Today, the Indian Act is the principal statute through which the government manages reservation land and administers a variety of topics that affect First Nation peoples. First Nation is an overarching term for 634 registered communities and their members are referred to as (status) Indians. The problem, however, is that not everyone who identifies as Indian is granted official status. Though First Nations peoples are the largest group of those discussed in this thesis, they were not the only ones affected by the government policies. The Métis, who find their origins in contact with the French settlers, and the Inuit, who live in the Northern territories of Canada, were also deeply affected by the Indian Act.

There is a variety of terms applied to describe these people, but finding the one that best defines the people central to this thesis proved to be difficult. The possibly negative connotations of the term 'Indian' and the limited group of people that identifies themselves as such meant another phrase should be used instead. Although 'Native' is sometimes used in Canadian colonial context, it is in Europe too closely associated with the original inhabitants of the United States. The same reason made me decide against Aboriginal, which is by far the most commonly used term by the federal government, scholars and authors of the literature discussed in this thesis. Since Australia has a similar history of governmentally-run schools and discriminating policies, this could potentially be confusing to European readers. The Canadian government is currently invested in a national inquiry about women and they use the term Indigenous to refer to the ethnicity of these women. I adopted this term as it considered neutral and there is not a specific community that identifies with the term, nor is there any objection against it and the term does not have an offensive connotation.

## Introduction

This year's Canada Day, 1 July 2017, marked the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the moment of Confederation. Such a milestone gives reason to celebrate its (inter)national successes, but is also the moment to reflect on a violent colonial history. Prime Minister Trudeau was determined to do just this in the speech he gave that day on Parliament Hill, Ottawa: ““While many of us celebrate Canada 150, others do not. Indigenous Peoples in this country have faced oppression for centuries. [...] As a society, we must acknowledge and apologize for past wrongs, and chart a path forward – one that promises a bright future for all Canadians. [...] We can achieve reconciliation. But in order to get there, we must educate ourselves, dedicate our efforts to progress, and work very, very hard to see it through, over the coming years and decades.””<sup>1</sup> Since Trudeau was elected Prime Minister in October 2015, he has made it a priority to bring the challenges faced by Indigenous peoples to the attention. The first opportunity came when the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) presented its *Final Report* on 15 December 2015. The TRC was established in 2008 and did research into the matter of the residential school system that was in practice from the 1880s until 1996. The *Final Report* of the TRC included a list of statistics, which shows that 3,201 students died at the residential schools. Since these are only the registered deaths, Chair Justice Murray Sinclair told *CBC* this is likely to be an underestimate and the total amount of student deaths could in fact be around five to ten times higher.<sup>2</sup> One of the reasons it is difficult to come up with an exact number is the fact that over 200,000 Indian Affairs files were destroyed, which included information about residential school attendance.<sup>3</sup> Sinclair claims that the Chief Medical officer of the Department of Indian Affairs “was fired after flagging an alarming rate of deaths,” which could be the reason why the government stopped recording the number of deaths during the 1920s.<sup>4</sup> That was not the first time the atrocities of the residential schools were made public: In 1907, the editor of *Saturday Night* magazine asked what Canada was trying to do with their Indian wards, since “Indian boys and girls are

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<sup>1</sup>Canada, Prime Minister of Canada, “Canada Day Address by Prime Minister Justin Trudeau,” (Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada Publications, July 1, 2017), <http://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/speeches> (accessed August 3, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Mitchel Wiles, “Records Show 341 Student Deaths at Residential Schools in the North,” *CBC News*, December 15, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/residential-school-deaths-report-1.3365319> (accessed April 2, 2017), par. 3.

<sup>3</sup> Wiles, par. 4.

<sup>4</sup> Chinta Puxley, “Feds Stopped Keeping Track of Children who Died in Residential Schools ‘Probably Because Rates Were So High,’” *National Post*, May 31, 2015, <http://news.nationalpost.com/news/canada/feds-stopped-keeping-track-of-children-who-died-in-residential-schools-probably-because-rates-were-so-high> (accessed March 18, 2017).

dying like flies [...] Even war seldom shows as large a percentage of fatalities as does the education system we have imposed on our Indian wards.”<sup>5</sup> This statement was proven to be correct: the TRC calculated that the odds of dying at a residential school were 1:25, while those of a Canadian serving in the Second World War were 1:26.<sup>6</sup>

Since the late 1980s, survivors have started opening up about their experiences, which were often traumatic and were mentally, physically and sexually abusive. They raised public awareness about the federal policies that traumatized them and their ancestors and continue to affect Indigenous peoples today. The residential school system was an assimilation policy of the Indian Act, the principal statute that now works together with First Nation peoples. The Act was, however, originally installed to “do away with the tribal system and assimilate the Indian people in all respects with the other inhabitants of the Dominion as speedily as they are fit to change.”<sup>7</sup> The residential school system may be the best-known example of how the government tried to achieve this, but it was not the only measure that affected Indigenous peoples. In the 1960s, the government expanded the influence of child-care services to Indigenous peoples. Instead of providing care, these instances would succeed in tricking or forcing new parents into giving up their child for adoption. The idea that children would benefit from a western upbringing was why thousands of Indigenous children born between the 1960s and 1990s have no recollection of their biological families and were not brought up with the values and customs of their heritage. These children did not understand what being an Indigenous person consists of, yet they were recognized as one by their white environment. This often led to a conflicting sense of identity and self, with all its consequences.

This thesis is interested in the portrayal of these traumas caused by the Indian Act policies in contemporary literature written by Indigenous female authors. This thesis argues that women were particularly targeted by the policies described. Traditionally, women play a significant role in Indigenous societies, but their position was greatly damaged by the patriarchal system that stems from settler contact.<sup>8</sup> Through literature, they have reclaimed their prominence by writing with urgency about their traumas.

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<sup>5</sup> Qtd. in: Maureen Kathleen Lux, *Medicine that Walks: Disease, Medicine and Canadian Plains Native People, 1880-1940* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2001), 124.

<sup>6</sup> Daniel Schwartz, “Truth and Reconciliation Commission: By the numbers,” *CBC News*, June 02, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/truth-and-reconciliation-commission-by-the-numbers-1.3096185> (accessed April 12, 2017) par. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Bob Joseph, “21 Things You May Not Know About the Indian Act,” *CBC News*, April 13, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/21-things-you-may-not-know-about-the-indian-act-1.3533613> (accessed May 20, 2017).

<sup>8</sup> The Aboriginal Justice Commission, “Chapter 13- Aboriginal Women,” *The Justice System and Aboriginal People*, <http://www.ajic.mb.ca/volumel/chapter13.html#2> (accessed April 22, 2017).

To understand these traumas from a European perspective, chapter one will analyze how Canada is still portrayed by the western European media according to its national myth of tolerance and multiculturalism. This has been especially the case since Justin Trudeau became the Prime Minister in 2015. A summary of federal policies concerning the assimilation of Indigenous peoples will then follow, which will also include the formal apology of former Prime Minister Stephen Harper to the residential school survivors. Although he already issued this statement of apology in 2008, relatively little has since changed for Indigenous peoples. This will be the topic of chapter two, which will comprise of a thorough analysis of the motives and meaning behind the apology. Many scholars, among whom Eva Mackey and Pauline Wakeham, are very critical of Harper's intentions and see conflicting attitudes of Harper towards Indigenous peoples throughout his terms as Prime Minister. Chapter one and two will thus form the historical background and political context to the literary analysis of chapter three.

Literature can be used as a means to offer criticism to society or a government and this is precisely what Indigenous females are currently showing in their literature. In a variety of genres, they demonstrate how they and their communities continue to face challenges caused by (historical) federal policies. This thesis is interested in the representation of their traumas, which differs depending on the generation of survivors they belong to. In this thesis, a comparison is drawn between survivors of the policies of the Indian Act and Jewish survivors of the Holocaust, particularly in the field of memory studies. Important contributors to this field include Jessica Lang and Marianne Hirsch and their theories will explain the different strategies applied by the first and second generation of survivors to represent their traumas. This will form the introduction to the literary analysis, which forms the core of this thesis. The selected literature includes a memoir by residential school survivor Bev Sellars, a novel about the Sixties Scoop by Carol Daniels, poetry collections by Lisa Bird-Wilson and Louise Bernice Halfe and a short-story collection by Leanne Simpson. Although the authors vary in age and background, they demonstrate similarities in their literature in terms of themes and strategies to write about trauma. This detailed analysis will ultimately offer a counter perspective to the misleading nation-building myth, which is especially valuable in the year in which the settlers' history is commemorated.

## Chapter 1

### “Canada”: Behind the Mythical Façade

For decades, Canada has been hailed in the international discourse for its reputation as a tolerant state that treats its minorities compassionately.<sup>9</sup> Eva Mackey, an associate professor at Carleton University, Ontario, claims that the origins of this belief go as far back as the nineteenth century, at the time of the Westward expansion. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police is said to have contributed to the expansion, and thus to the subjugation of the Indigenous inhabitants, “with much less bloodshed and more benevolence and tolerance than the violent United States expansion to the South.”<sup>10</sup> The ‘Benevolent Mountie Myth’ generated the idea that their American counterparts, the cowboys, were cruel individuals who slaughtered Native Americans, while the ‘Mounties’ were a peaceful and civilized unity that worked together with the Indigenous peoples in Canada to expand the British power.<sup>11</sup> This supposed gentleness became an essential element in the forming of a national identity just after the Canadian Confederation of 1867.<sup>12</sup> The myth Canada’s peaceful colonialism became a symbol for Canada’s stance towards minorities and the politics of multiculturalism. It also led to the coining of the term ‘cultural mosaic’, which distinguishes the Canadian development of multiculturalism from the American ‘melting pot’.<sup>13</sup> The myth was reinforced during the Pierre Trudeau-administrations (1968-1979 and 1980-1984) and was highlighted with the introduction of the Multiculturalism Policy of 1971. The Trudeau era is remembered for its inclusive views of a Canadian identity, which shaped not only the nation, but also its international profile as a tolerant and multicultural country. With the appointment of Justin Trudeau as the Canadian Prime Minister in October 2015, “Trudeaumania” has found its way back into the international discourse as Justin Trudeau is seen as the ultimate figure to restore the myth that was internationally celebrated during his father’s

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<sup>9</sup> Eva Mackey, *The House of Difference: Cultural Politics and National Identity in Canada*, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2002), 1.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Daniel Francis, *The Imaginary Indian: The Image of the Indian in Canadian Culture* (Vancouver, BC: Arsenal Pulp Press, 1992), 69.

<sup>13</sup> It was the Scottish-Canadian writer John Murray Gibbon who came up with the term in his book *Canadian Mosaic: The Making of a Northern Nation* (1938).



administrations.<sup>14</sup>

The charismatic Canadian Prime Minister has sparked a renewed interest in Canada from the international press, which it had not been given during the Harper-administration (2006-2015).<sup>15</sup> Since Trudeau was appointed Prime Minister, Canada has taken a leap on international rankings about progressiveness, tolerance and personal freedom.<sup>16</sup> Again, Canada's mythical status as a tolerant nation is confirmed by Western media. The current optimism towards Canadian politics was illustrated by an article from *The Guardian's* Gaby Hinsliff, which was titled: "There is a Vision of what a Progressive Britain Could Be, It's Called Canada."<sup>17</sup> The article reaffirms the Canadian myth of tolerance and benevolence on numerous levels and it acknowledges the distinction between Canadian and American policies. The article can be better regarded as an ode to Canada from across the pond. Hinsliff bases her argument that Canada is more progressive on the claim that it is the "fifth happiest country in the world."<sup>18</sup> The comparison with the United States is drawn with a nod to then presidential candidate Trump as she argues that Canada is currently better representing the core values of the American Dream: life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.<sup>19</sup> "Canada", the introduction to her article reads, "seems to be pulling on the elusive trick of remaining tolerant, relaxed and at ease with itself in challenging circumstances such as terrorist attacks."<sup>20</sup> She refers to the Canadian policy of allowing 25,000 Syrian refugees into the

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<sup>14</sup> Gaby Hinsliff, "There is a Vision of what a Progressive Britain Could Be. It's Called Canada," *The Guardian*, March 31, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/31/vision-of-progressive-britain-called-canada-justin-trudeau-trudeaumania> (accessed January 4, 2017), par. 1 and 6. "Trudeaumania", however, was originally used as a term to describe the affectionate way the media have spoken about his father. See Robert Wright, *Trudeaumania: The Rise to Power of Pierre Elliot Trudeau* (2016).

<sup>15</sup> *The Guardian* filed 75 articles under the tag "Stephen Harper" in 2015, his final year in office. Not one of those discussed Harper's personality or anything else than his political career and his name was mentioned in only 20 headlines, and 9 simply referred to him as 'PM'. In comparison, up until July 31st, 2017, 59 articles were archived under "Justin Trudeau" in 2017. His name appeared in 41 headlines, 'PM' was used in one headline and one article filed under 'Trudeau' was about Mrs Trudeau. This means that in the first seven months of 2017, an average of 8.42 articles a month were filed under "Trudeau" in comparison to 6.25 a month under "Harper" in 2015 (which included the federal election, and thus a significant increase in articles dedicated to Canadian politics).

<sup>16</sup> Canada was ranked the second-best country in 2016, and its "levels of tolerance" were a reason to also rank the country second in the subsection Personal Freedom. See: "Best Countries Ranking 2016," *US News*, nd. <https://www.usnews.com/news/best-countries/canada>, (accessed April 5, 2017). And: "The Legatum Prosperity Index 2016," *Prosperity*, n.d. <http://www.prosperity.com/globe/canada>, (accessed April 7, 2017).

<sup>17</sup> Gaby Hinsliff, "There is a Vision of what a Progressive Britain Could Be. It's Called Canada," *The Guardian*, March 31, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/mar/31/vision-of-progressive-britain-called-canada-justin-trudeau-trudeaumania> (accessed January 4, 2017).

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, par. 9. Hinsliff does not support her argument, but CBC News also claimed this in 2015, when the United Nations revealed its first "happiness" ranking since 2013. See "World Happiness Report Ranks Canada 5<sup>th</sup>," *CBC News*, April 23, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/world/world-happiness-report-ranks-canada-5th-1.3044556> (accessed April 7, 2017).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, par. 9.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, par. 8.

country, which had come to the international attention in 2015. Trudeau greeted them with the statement “you are safe at home now”.<sup>21</sup> It then becomes clear that Trudeau, who Hinsliff regards as the figure who best represents modern-day Canada, plays a designating role in the argument she tries to make.<sup>22</sup> At the time her article was published, Trudeau had only been in office for five months, but the international press had already turned him into an international renowned celebrity, which often had little to do with his politics.<sup>23</sup>

When his politics are discussed, the stark differences between the Canadian and the British media coverage become visible. For example, when Trudeau invited Ivanka Trump to a musical in New York City in February 2017, the British and Canadian press both focused on different aspects of that event. While the Canadian reports described the play as a story about “Canada’s assistance to Americans after 9/11...with a subplot about prejudice against Muslims,” the British press said it was a “a true story of generosity, compassion and acceptance as the US is in the heat of a debate over immigration and open borders” and “[a] story of a remote Canadian town that – at a moment when the world was gripped by fear of terrorism – put aside fear-mongering and welcomed thousands of strangers from abroad.”<sup>24</sup> The Canadian media did not link the event to its current politics. It was not the first time that the distinctness of the Canadian immigration policy was emphasized: British media directly reported that the webpage about immigration of the Canadian government had crashed after having been consulted too often when Trump became the president-elect.<sup>25</sup> By contrast, the

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<sup>21</sup> Ian Austen, “Syrian Refugees Greeted by Justin Trudeau in Canada,” *The New York Times*, December 11, 2015, [https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/12/world/americas/syria-refugees-arrive-in-canada.html?\\_r=0](https://www.nytimes.com/2015/12/12/world/americas/syria-refugees-arrive-in-canada.html?_r=0) (accessed January 4, 2017).

<sup>22</sup> Which Hinsliff calls “the whole hopey-changey thing”, par. 6.

<sup>23</sup> See Priya Elan, “Stylewatch: Justin Trudeau’s Socks at G7,” *The Guardian*, May 26, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/fashion/2016/may/26/stylewatch-justin-trudeaus-socks-at-g7>. Rebecca Shapiro, “The World Adores Justin Trudeau. In Canada, We’re Still Reserving Judgement,” *The Guardian*, April 29, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/apr/29/justin-trudeau-popular-world-canada-reserving-judgment-prime-minister-political-resume>. And: Ashifa Kassam, “Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau is Hero in New Marvel Comic,” *The Guardian*, June 28, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/jun/28/canada-prime-minister-justin-trudeau-marvel-comic>. All accessed on January 10, 2017. Reports on Trudeau as a celebrity rather than being the Prime Minister of the world’s second largest country is not exclusively limited to *The Guardian*, as other British news sources, such as the *BBC* and *The Independent* have also reported about Trudeau’s personality.

<sup>24</sup> Cloe Farand, “Canadian Prime Minister Praised Friendship with US During Introduction to the Musical on Broadway,” *Independent*, March 16, 2017, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/vanka-trump-justin-trudeau-musical-strangers-come-from-away-donald-trump-nashville-muslim-travel-ban-a7632666.html> (accessed March 20, 2017), par. 13. And: Ashifa Kassam, “Ivanka Trump Sees Show on Welcoming Foreigners as New Travel Ban Halted,” *The Guardian*, March 16, 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/mar/16/ivanka-trump-come-from-away-us-travel-ban-justin-trudeau> (accessed March 20, 2017), par. 1. The British *Independent* focused even more on the differences between the American and Canadian immigration policies, by referring to the 40,000 Syrian refugees who have been welcomed into Canada since 2015.

<sup>25</sup> “Canada’s Immigration Website Crashes During US Vote,” *BBC*, November 9, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/technology-37921376> (accessed January 2, 2017).

news only circulated on entertainment websites in the United States. Trudeau actively participates in enlarging the contrast between the American and Canadian policies concerning immigration, which can be illustrated by Trudeau's use of social media. Immediately after president Trump installed the controversial travel ban in January 2017, Trudeau released the following statement on Twitter: "To those fleeing persecution, terror & war, Canadians will welcome you, regardless of your faith. Diversity is our strength #WelcomeToCanada."<sup>26</sup> This way he reinforces the idea of Canadian tolerance and the cultural mosaic by distinguishing the Canada from the United States.

Trudeau is internationally applauded for his revolutionary stance towards minorities, varying from his gender-balanced cabinet to his involvement in the Canadian Gay Pride in 2016.<sup>27</sup> Trudeau's concern about building a better relationship between the Canadian government and the Indigenous communities, which resembles his father's policies, was also reported on in the international press. In December 2015, two months after his election victory, Trudeau was presented the *Final Report* of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which had been investigating the abuse inflicted on Indigenous people at the Indian residential schools. A visibly emotional Trudeau stated that as a father and former teacher, he was "overwhelmingly moved" by the "profoundly lasting and damaging" impact the residential schools have had on Indigenous peoples. He said his government has a plan "to move towards a nation-to-nation relationship based on recognition, rights, respect, cooperation and partnership" and saw the presentation of the report as a sign of "real and positive change."<sup>28</sup> An ambitious program was published on the government's website, detailing the changes the Trudeau-government wanted to introduce to strengthen the ties

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<sup>26</sup> Justin Trudeau, Twitter post, January 28, 2017, 12:20 PM,

<https://twitter.com/justintrudeau/status/825438460265762816> (accessed February 2, 2017).

<sup>27</sup> The British press often quote Trudeau's statements about his self-proclaimed feminism. See for example:

"Justin Trudeau Sworn in as New Canada Prime Minister," *BBC*, November 4, 2015

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-34725055> (accessed March 20, 2017). And: Heather Saul, "Justin

Trudeau: The Rise of the Feminist and Pro-Choice Canadian Prime Minister Who Wants to Legalise Marijuana

'Right Away'," *Independent*, October 20, 2015, <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/justin-trudeau-the-self-declared-feminist-and-pro-choice-prime-minister-of-canada-who-wants-to-a6700976.html> (accessed March

21, 2017). Compared to then British PM Cameron, who had proudly ensured that a record number of one third of

his 2015 cabinet would be made up of women, Canada was the more progressive country and Trudeau was

praised for that. See: Jessica Elgot, Rowena Mason and Andrew Sparrow, "David Cameron's New Cabinet

Lineup," *The Guardian*, May 11, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2015/may/11/david-camersons-new-cabinet-full-lineup> (accessed March 29, 2017).

<sup>28</sup> Canada, Prime Minister of Canada, "Statement by Prime Minister on Release of the Final Report of the Truth

and Reconciliation Commission," (Ottawa, ON: Government of Canada Publications, December 15, 2015),

<http://www.pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2015/12/15/statement-prime-minister-release-final-report-truth-and-reconciliation-commission> (accessed February 12, 2017).

between the government and the Indigenous peoples.<sup>29</sup> That this relationship forms a prominent part of his political agenda demonstrates that the Trudeau-government structurally invests in the lives of Indigenous peoples in Canada, rather than offering its sympathies on sparse occasions. Trudeau concluded that “the Government of Canada is committed to walking a path of partnership and friendship with Indigenous peoples. Today’s *Final Report* marks a true milestone on that journey.” Trudeau thus acknowledges the importance and significance of the *Report*, which aimed to mark the first steps in the reconciliation process.

Trudeau’s speech at the presentation of the *Final Report* of the TRC, in which he vowed to make investments like no other prime minister before him had done, forms the starting point for this research. His way of critically reflecting on neglect and abuse performed by a government has inspired the question central to this chapter, namely how the Canadian government was involved in the policies, of which the residential school program is the best-known example, that condoned structural mistreatment of the Indigenous peoples in Canada for over a century. Attempts at building a better relationship between the Indigenous nations and the former colonizer were started before Trudeau even set foot in parliament, and it would therefore be incorrect to assign him the role of initiator in the reconciliation process, but his speech marked a turning point in the governmental stance towards the trauma inflicted upon Indigenous peoples since the Confederation.

In 1876, the Canadian government implemented the Indian Act, which the TRC described as “a piece of colonial legislation by which, in the name of ‘protection,’ one group of people ruled and controlled another.”<sup>30</sup> The government assumed greater control over Indian legislation and regulations, which also meant that the education of Indigenous children was now a federal responsibility. Deputy minister of the Department of Interior, Dennis, advised Prime Minister Macdonald that if the government wanted to succeed in educating and assimilating Indigenous peoples, residential schools were the key to that. He said that by instructing “our Indian and half-breed populations” in farming and mechanical trades, they would become self-sufficient and that this would lead to “final absorption into the general community.”<sup>31</sup> This resulted in the assignment given to Nicholas Davin, who had “nothing in his background to suggest he had any direct involvement with the Canadian Aboriginals”, to

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<sup>29</sup> “Justin Trudeau To Hit Reset on Canada’s Relationship with Indigenous People,” *Huffington Post Canada*, December 8, 2015, [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/12/08/justin-trudeau-to-hit-reset-on-canada-s-relationship-with-indigenous-people\\_n\\_8747470.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2015/12/08/justin-trudeau-to-hit-reset-on-canada-s-relationship-with-indigenous-people_n_8747470.html) (accessed April 18, 2017).

<sup>30</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Manitoba: University of Manitoba Press, 2015), 55. Download via: <http://nctr.ca/reports.php> (accessed January 29, 2017).

<sup>31</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring*, 62.

do research in the United States on their boarding schools' policy, to see whether this could also be implemented in Canada."<sup>32</sup> After a short investigation in the United States, he advised the government to open boarding schools with the help of Christian missionaries, who had had a system of boarding schools for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people before the Confederation. Around 1883, the first schools to be based on Davin's advice opened and these were also the first schools to be fully funded by the Canadian government, instead of the church. These schools were called industrial schools and were geographically and ideologically different from the religious boarding schools. However, the distinction eroded over time and 'residential schools' has become the common term to refer to the schools built after 1880 since the 1920s. Although the Canadian government still claims that these industrial schools were initially aimed at making Indigenous peoples economically self-sufficient,<sup>33</sup> the TRC says the schools were "always more than simply an educational program: it was a conscious policy of cultural genocide."<sup>34</sup> It was believed that the schools would enable their students to become specialized in a trade and would thus contribute to Canadian society. Another reason why the government would fund the schools, was that it was hoped that students would not return to their reserves and would, because they were so adapted to the Christian faith and society, voluntarily give up their Indian status.<sup>35</sup> This is what Public Works Minister Langevin said in Parliament in 1883, when he was asked to justify governmental investment in these schools: "if you wish to educate these children you must separate them from their parents during the time that they are being educated. If you leave them in the family they may know how to read and write, but they still remain savages, whereas by separating them in the way proposed, they acquire the habits and tastes—it is to be hoped only the good tastes—of civilized people."<sup>36</sup> He echoed the words of Davin, who had concluded in his report that industrial boarding schools were preferred over industrial day schools, because it was feared that "the influence of the wigwam was stronger than the influence of the school."<sup>37</sup> It became apparent that funding the schools completely was almost

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<sup>32</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 1 Origins to 1939. The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2015), 1: 155.

<sup>33</sup> J.R. Miller, "Residential Schools," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, October 10, 2012, edited June 29, 2016, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/residential-schools/> (accessed February 15, 2017), par. 2.

<sup>34</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring*, 62.

<sup>35</sup> Which was, like any aspect of First Nation life since the implementation of the Indian Act of 1876, now federally regulated.

<sup>36</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools*, 1.1: 159.

<sup>37</sup> Nicholas Flood Davin, *Report on Industrial Schools for Indians and Half-Breeds*, (Ottawa, 1879). Internet archive of the University of Alberta, <https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=aeu.ark:/13960/t7np2g21f;view=1up;seq=1> (accessed March 12, 2017), 1.

impossible, as the schools were not nearly as self-sufficient as initially thought. The government started to cut the salaries of the already cheap missionaries, but this only deteriorated the quality of education. In 1891, the government started to give schools a per capita grant funded by the Department of Indian Affairs. This caused a sense of competition between the different churches responsible for educating the pupils. According to the TRC, the residential school system “operated with few regulations.”<sup>38</sup> Although attendance was never officially compulsory, the 1894 amendment of the Indian Act made it easier for the Department of Indian Affairs to have children sent to residential schools. Attendance was still voluntary, but if an Indian agent of the Department thought a child was withheld from proper education or care, the child could be placed in a boarding or industrial school against its will.

Due to miscalculations of the costs of the industrial schools, the government considered ending the system in the early twentieth century.<sup>39</sup> The churches, alarmed by this potential loss of religious spirits, agreed to raise their share in funding, but to no avail. This meant the closure of most of the industrial schools and the ones that remained more closely resembled the Christian boarding schools. They still received a per capita grant, and a new revision of the Indian Act in 1920 made attendance practically compulsory. Children had to attend the residential schools for at least ten months a year and this put an end to day schools for Indigenous children. The Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, stated that “[the government’s] object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question.”<sup>40</sup> With the new regulations concerning attendance, more children attended the schools each year. This continued until the Great Depression, when funds were even more limited and the circumstances at the schools were even poorer. The rate at which the Indigenous population was growing, was also of great concern to the residential schools, which could not accommodate all pupils. In 1938, the superintendent of Welfare and Training for Indian Affairs, Hoey, concluded, “the old idea of providing a course of instruction designed to transform the Indian into a White Man has failed. Existing economic conditions suggest for a great many years an overwhelming majority of our residential school graduates must return to

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<sup>38</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring*, 62

<sup>39</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada’s Residential Schools*, 1.1: 197-98.

<sup>40</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring*, 54. On D.C. Scott: The phrase “kill the Indian to save the child” is often wrongly attributed to him. In fact, it was Carlisle Industrial School founder Richard H. Pratt who uttered the phrase, which he had adapted from American General Philip Sheridan’s “the only good Indian is a dead Indian.” D.C. Scott was also one of the Confederate poets, see: Donna Bennett and Russell Brown, ed, “Duncan Campbell Scott: 1862-1947,” in *A New Anthology of Canadian Literature in English* (Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, 2002), 190-91.

their reserves and make a living there.”<sup>41</sup> That the schools remained in operation until the late 1990s, was due to the fact that they were trapped in a system where the government was unable to find the resources to fund the schools sufficiently, while the funding the schools received depended on the number of children attending the schools, due to the per capita regulation. Neither the church nor the government took full responsibility for the residential schools. This led to a long period of stagnation, in which the churches were, in name of the government, able to provide any sort of education they desired, though be it with a small budget. Government involvement was limited; even the Department of Indian Affairs could only come up with four pages of regulations regarding the schools. The TRC has compared the regulations of public schools at that time and concluded that the Manitoba Public Schools Act of 1954 was ninety-one pages in length.<sup>42</sup> This is only a small indication of how the government neglected its responsibility towards Indigenous students. Student enrolment reached a peak in the year 1956-1957, when 11,539 students attended a residential school.<sup>43</sup> The number of schools had begun to decline since the 1940s, which meant that the remaining schools were overpopulated. This decline was partially reversed in the 1950s, when the government expanded its educational influence to the previously ignored Northwest Territories.<sup>44</sup> It is, however, very difficult to find exact figures of attendance, because these schools increasingly had taken on the role of child-welfare institutions since the 1940s.<sup>45</sup> Another difficulty in gaining access to precise data is the fact that federal regulations were non-existent. The Indian agents working for the Department of Indian Affairs could take away children from their families and send them to schools as soon as they thought the children were not given what they considered to be the proper care and education. One regulation that did affect the lives of many children in schools was the Canada Food Guide in 1961, which was implemented after numerous recommendations and inspections from institutions such as The Red Cross. Since the schools were overpopulated and the government still funded them with a per capita grant, this did not mean that the quality of food was better. Despite the Food Guide, nutritional experiments were still carried out without consent.<sup>46</sup>

After the school year of 1965-1966, the Department of Indian Affairs stopped

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<sup>41</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools*, 1.1: 198.

<sup>42</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring*, 62.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid, 63.

<sup>45</sup> See for example: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools: The History, Part 2. The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2015), 1.2: 147.

<sup>46</sup> See for example: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools*, 1.2: 228.

reporting on annual residential school enrolment and in 1967, legislation was passed which included the regulation that schools did no longer receive a per capita grant, but were instead given a “grant [...] to cover expenses no matter how many kids were enrolled.”<sup>47</sup> Indigenous children were increasingly allowed to live on the reserves and attend day schools with non-Indigenous children while the government started to become more involved in the actual practices in the remaining residential schools. This coincided with a federal document that proposed a “massive transfer of responsibility for First Nation people from the federal to provincial government.”<sup>48</sup> This was part of a “consultation process with Aboriginal peoples across the country” after the election of Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau.<sup>49</sup> It was during his reign that most of the residential schools were closed, although the Gordon residential school in Saskatchewan, remained open until 1996.

In the final years of the 1980s, Indigenous people began to be heard when they pushed for the prosecution of those who had abused them at the schools and for compensation for former students. According to the final report of the TRC, such initiatives lead to “a limited number of prosecutions.”<sup>50</sup> It was not until 1990 that the item appeared on the political agenda when Phil Fontaine, then Grand Chief of the Assembly of Manitoba Chiefs, spoke in public about the abuse he and his fellow students had endured. It attained the attention of Euro-Canadians, of whom many will have been completely unaware of what had happened at those institutions. In 1996, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) published a report that urged non-Indigenous Canadians to start working on a better relationship with the Indigenous communities. The report included recommendations on how to start this process of reconciliation, but the report was mostly ignored by the government, which only responded two years later when the Minister of Indian Affairs, Jane Stewart, issued a Statement of Reconciliation, in which she addressed the possibility of building a new relationship. She concluded that the government of Canada “formally expresses to all Aboriginal peoples in Canada [their] profound regret for past actions of the federal government.”<sup>51</sup> She also introduced a \$350 million healing fund for trauma counseling and added a \$250 million budget to restore and improve impoverished reserves. It was, however, a statement offered by

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<sup>47</sup> Bev Sellars, *They Called Me Number One: Secrets and Survival at an Indian Residential School* (Vancouver: Talonbooks, 2013), 124.

<sup>48</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring*, 69.

<sup>49</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Canada's Residential Schools*, 1.2: 21.

<sup>50</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring*, 129.

<sup>51</sup> Canada, Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, “Notes for an Address by the Honourable Jane Stewart, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development on the Occasion of the Unveiling of *Gathering Strength-Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan*, January 7, 1998,” Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, [http://www.aic-niac.gc.ca/ai/rqpi/apo/js\\_spea-eng.asp](http://www.aic-niac.gc.ca/ai/rqpi/apo/js_spea-eng.asp) (accessed April 8, 2017).



the Department of Indian Affairs, and was not meant as an official apology from the government. Furthermore, the statement can, even today, only be found on the website of that specific department and not on the website of Parliament.

Completely relying on the initiatives of Indigenous individuals and communities, more than 8,500 former residential school students had filed a lawsuit against the institutions that were involved in the residential schools by 2001. The number increased rapidly and over 18,000 lawsuits were filed in 2005.<sup>52</sup> At the time it was estimated that there were between 80,000 and 90,000 survivors of the residential schools still alive of a total of over 150,000 children who had attended such a school between the Confederation and 1996. The government and numerous Indigenous organizations eventually established the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) in 2006, which consisted of the following elements, which will all be analyzed in Chapter 2: 1. A Common Experience Payment; 2. An Independent Assessment Process; 3. Support for the Aboriginal Health Foundation; 4. Support for residential school commemoration; and 5. The establishment of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.<sup>53</sup> Even though it was not specifically stated as a condition, a formal apology from the government was also part of the process of reconciliation between the Canadian government and Indigenous people. On 11 June 2008, then Prime Minister Stephen Harper addressed the Indigenous peoples of Canada, as he stated that the residential schools were “a sad chapter in our history [...] and today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.”<sup>54</sup> The Prime Minister apologized not only for the abuses inflicted upon Indigenous people at the schools, but also for the governmentally imposed powerlessness of the Indigenous peoples as they were commanded to send their children to the schools. He further recognized that the absence of a formal apology stood in the way of reconciling with the Indigenous inhabitants of Canada and was essential to their healing process. Unique to this event was the fact that the Indigenous representatives were permitted to address Parliament after the apology. Fontaine, then National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, said that the apology would help Indigenous people to put the pain caused by the abusive system behind them, and that “brave survivors, through telling their stories, have stripped white

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 130.

<sup>53</sup> The exact purpose of each of these components can be found in: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring*, 130.

<sup>54</sup> Canada, “House of Commons Debates, 39<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session,” *Edited Hansard* 142. 10 (June 11, 2008), <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=3568890&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=39&Ses=2> (accessed January 12, 2017).

supremacy of its legitimacy.”<sup>55</sup> Through Fontaine, the Indigenous community accepted the apology and this marked the first real step forward in the process of reconciliation. The British press reported on the event in a factual manner, and only quoted phrases from the apology. They refrained from judging the significance of the event and did not even refer to it in their overviews of the achievements of the Harper government when Trudeau took over. At least one of those articles implied Harper had done little for the Indigenous communities, whose massive turnout at the 2015 elections had significant impact on the results, as he had denied multiple pleas for a national inquiry for missing and murdered Indigenous women.<sup>56</sup>

Coinciding with the apology was the founding of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, a federally recognized organization that was given funding from the government to help uncover the hidden truths of the residential schools and thus find a way to improve the state’s relationship with their Indigenous peoples. This Commission was to reveal the complete history of the school system to non-Indigenous Canadians, further develop the healing process and organize seven National Events, which included gathering data for an archive and recommend commemoration activities.<sup>57</sup> For six years the Commission worked to achieve those goals and in June 2015, it presented a summary of the final report on its website. This received little attention from the government, which signaled the Harper government’s failure to seize its last opportunity to address the Indigenous society one more time. It was under the leadership of Trudeau that the *Final Report* was recognized by the government, and this signaled the first time that the government had issued a statement to its Indigenous inhabitants since the 2008 apology. It is therefore not surprising that the event, which was also reported on in the British press, was linked to the new Prime Minister, Trudeau. For years, the organizations concerning Indigenous people had been working in silence and had not been referred to by the government, and only two months after Trudeau was elected, the opportunity was there for him to take a stance. It can be argued that Trudeau

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> See for example: Ewen MacAskill, “PM to Apologise for Canada’s Treatment of Native Americans”, *The Guardian*, June 12, 2008, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2008/jun/12/canada.usa> (accessed February 2, 2017). And: “Profile: Stephen Harper: Ex-Prime Minister of Canada”, *BBC*, August 26, 2016 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-13217949> (accessed May 14, 2017). And: Ashifa Kassam, “Stephen Harper’s Conservative Praise Triggers Bad Memories for Canadians,” *The Guardian*, May 27, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/may/27/stephen-harper-first-public-remarks-legacy-canada> (accessed May 14, 2017).

And on the turnout: Éric Grenier, “Indigenous Voter Turnout Was Up — and Liberals May Have Benefited Most,” *CBC News*, December 16, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/grenier-indigenous-turnout-1.3365926> (accessed May 14, 2017).

<sup>57</sup> For a full description of the goals of the TRC, see: Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring*, 23-36.

had simply been lucky enough to be elected just in time for the report to be published, but it should be noted that Harper ignored the publication of the summary of the *Final Report* almost completely. Trudeau's popularity in Europe can thus, to a certain extent, be attributed to his quick response to Indigenous people, which formed a stark contrast with his predecessor.

The charismatic leader of the world's second largest country has gained much attention both from the national and international press. His investment to build a new relationship with Canada's Indigenous peoples has been applauded. With Trudeau as the figurehead, Canada once again re-establishes its position as a country that is perceived as tolerant and which celebrates differences. As 2017 marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Canadian Confederation, these features will most likely be highlighted by the international press. However, Canada has recent history of colonialism which cannot be forgotten in this context. The traumas inflicted by the governmentally run residential schools are still visible as generations of survivors are coming to terms with their experiences. This chapter sought to produce a timeline to identify the governmental policies in Canada concerning this schools program to show that there is an alternate side to the positivity that seems to be so inextricably linked to Canada's stance towards the Indigenous communities. While Canada received attention for their ability to address their colonial history in the 2008 governmental apology by Harper and Trudeau's plans to change the lives of Indigenous peoples for the better, the actual history behind the governmental policies reveal the atrocities they endorsed for centuries. This chapter aimed to analyze the events to explain the return of the old myth of Canada as a tolerant, multicultural-loving nation, which is only a façade that hides a complex and recent history of governmentally supported abuse and neglect of the Indigenous communities.

## Chapter 2

### Canada: The Margin's Perspective

The significance of the 11 June 2008 apology was valued differently in Great Britain and Canada. The British press covered the event, but stated nothing about its uniqueness, while the Canadian media saw it as a “historic day” that “marked the first time a Canadian Prime Minister [had] formally apologized.”<sup>58</sup> Although the Canadian articles also quoted the Indigenous representatives who each read a statement in Parliament after the apology, there was not one article that questioned the Indigenous’ acceptance of it, as that was implied by stating that the Indigenous communities celebrated the apology and the attempt at reconciliation nationwide.<sup>59</sup> What the articles do mostly not report on, are the circumstances that eventually led to this pivotal moment in Canadian history. Only a year before Harper read the apology, he refused to express regret on behalf of the Government for the abuse of children in residential schools.<sup>60</sup> Two associate professors at Canadian universities, Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham, have argued that “the events of 2008 appear less the product of magnanimous government and more the result of extraordinary political mobilization and tireless negotiation by Aboriginal organizations.”<sup>61</sup> This criticism contravenes the profile of Canada as a tolerant country that has made an effort of reconciling with its formerly oppressed Indigenous communities that was at the heart of chapter one. This chapter therefore seeks to analyze the sincerity of that apology by unravelling the motives for the Canadian government to address its colonial past in this manner. The question this chapter attempts to answer is why (Indigenous) scholars have not regarded the apology in the same celebratory fashion as the Government and how this still affects the relationship between the Canadian government and the Indigenous peoples.

The 2008 apology was not the first statement of the Canadian government that addressed Indigenous peoples, but it was the first time the Government presented it as a

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<sup>58</sup> Bruce Campion-Smith, “Harper Officially Apologizes for Native Residential Schools,” *The Star*, June 11, 2008, [https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2008/06/11/harper\\_officially\\_apologizes\\_for\\_native\\_residential\\_schools.html](https://www.thestar.com/news/canada/2008/06/11/harper_officially_apologizes_for_native_residential_schools.html) (accessed May 16, 2017). And: “PM Cites ‘Sad Chapter’ in History for Residential Schools,” *CBC News*, June 11, 2008, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/pm-cites-sad-chapter-in-apology-for-residential-schools-1.699389> (accessed January 31, 2017).

<sup>59</sup> See for example: “Canada Apology for Native Schools,” *BBC*, June 11, 2008, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/7447811.stm> (accessed April 4, 2017).

<sup>60</sup> Craig W. Blatz, Karina Schumann and Michael Ross, “Government Apologies for Historical Injustices,” *Political Psychology* 30, no. 2 (April 2009): 233.

<sup>61</sup> Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham, “Introduction,” in: *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, ed. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 4.

formal apology. Analyzing the events that led up to 11 June 2008 will mark the significance of Harper's apology. In 1998, the Government issued a Statement of Reconciliation, a general statement about the mistreatment of Canada's Indigenous inhabitants since the arrival of the European settlers. It indirectly addressed a report by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) that was published in 1996 after a five-year long research into the possibilities of reconciling with the Indigenous communities of Canada. Although the report of the \$50 million costing study had been welcomed by the Indigenous leaders, the government had refrained from addressing it publicly, which did little to effectuate the promise of reconciliation on which the RCAP was founded. The inaction of the government and the refusal of Prime Minister Chrétien to meet with Indigenous leaders, led to a national day of protest in 1997 organized by the Assembly of First Nations, of which Phil Fontaine was the Grand Chief. When the Government finally responded in January 1998, it was through the Honourable Jane Stewart, minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, while Prime Minister Chrétien was "conspicuously absent".<sup>62</sup> Due to Chrétien's active involvement in the Pierre Trudeau-government, in which he had taken serious action to improve the Indigenous-State relationship with the 1969 White Paper, Chrétien's attitude towards them was surprising. However, this Paper was "roundly condemned because of its assimilationist tone and its unilateralist approach to Aboriginal rights and interests."<sup>63</sup> Almost thirty years later, Chrétien again failed to address the Indigenous community adequately.

Through this Statement, the Canadian government "formally" expressed its "profound regret for past actions" and acknowledged its role in the mistreatment of Indigenous Canadians.<sup>64</sup> Stewart said that "in renewing our relationship, we must ensure that the mistakes which marked our past relationship are not repeated" and that "Canada recognizes that policies that sought to assimilate Aboriginal people [...] were not the way to build a strong country."<sup>65</sup> However, the Statement was not intended as an apology and this, together with the absence of the Prime Minister and the negligence to specifically address the RCAP *Report*, led only one of the five representatives of the Indigenous communities to accept the Statement. Phil Fontaine, Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, was the only one

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<sup>62</sup> Michael Murphy, "Looking Forward Without Looking Back," in *The Chrétien Legacy: Politics and Public Policy in Canada* (Montreal: McGill's University Press, 2014), 168.

<sup>63</sup> Murphy, 162.

<sup>64</sup> Government of Canada, Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, *Address by the Honourable Jane Stewart Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development on the occasion of the unveiling of Gathering Strength — Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan, Statement of Reconciliation*, (Ottawa, ON: January 7, 1998), <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015725/1100100015726> (accessed April 5, 2017).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid*, 326-27.

who publicly stated he saw the event as a “step in the right direction, [which] celebrates the beginning of a new era.”<sup>66</sup> The Statement also came with a report called *Gathering Strength: Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan*, which researched the ways to reconcile with Indigenous people after centuries of mistreatment. Unfortunately, the original report was not archived on the government’s website, and only adapted versions of after 2000 can be requested. Even the original Statement cannot be found on the general Government website, but only on the page of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.<sup>67</sup> This all signals that the current Trudeau-government does not endorse the 1998 reconciliation plans.

The original report comprised of only thirty-six pages, a stark contrast with the more than 3500 pages, five-volume *Final Report* of the RCAP. Another component of the government’s response was the founding of a healing fund, aimed to “help those who suffered physical and mental abuse at the government-run schools.”<sup>68</sup> Although the intention of this healing fund was welcomed, it was the budget that sparked criticism from the other Indigenous leaders, for example Harry Daniels president of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, who said that he did not want to “trivialize” the \$250 million budget for the Fund, although he claimed it was “far less than they gave a helicopter company not to build helicopters.”<sup>69</sup> According to the *Washington Post* he referred to an aircraft order which was cancelled by Chrétien’s government at a cost of a half-billion dollars.<sup>70</sup> This cynicism shows that Indigenous communities felt they still held an inferior position in Canada’s society, as they were not given enough funding or attention. Especially since none of the 440 detailed recommendations outlined in the RCAP 1996 *Report* were implemented. The attention for the Indigenous communities quickly evaporated, and apart from the healing fund, nothing had changed for Indigenous peoples. What made the fund so remarkable was the eleven-year mandate it was given to reach its goals, which were mostly aimed at providing care for former residential school students. Giving a fund that provides much needed care for traumas that have been inflicted on a community with the consent of the government a mandate seems

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<sup>66</sup> Howard Schneider, “Canada Apologizes for Mistreatment,” *Washington Post*, January 8, 2008, <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/inatl/longterm/canada/stories/apology010898.htm> (accessed April 14, 2017), par. 10.

<sup>67</sup> See for example: <http://publications.gc.ca/site/archivee-archived.html?url=http://publications.gc.ca/collections/Collection/R32-192-2000E.pdf> (accessed April 16, 2017).

<sup>68</sup> Schneider, par. 4.

<sup>69</sup> Schneider incorrectly stated that the budget for the healing fund was \$250 million dollars, while it was \$350 million dollars. This can be found both in Stewart’s Statement and in the *Gathering Strength* report of 2000. The \$250 million budget was intended to restore and improve impoverished reserves. It does, however, not change the comparison made by Daniels.

<sup>70</sup> Schneider, par. 16.

contradictory. The government says to regret past actions which have caused great damage to its people, but also wants to decide how long it takes for that group to come to terms with their traumas.<sup>71</sup>

The theme of abuse at residential schools became the focal point in the following years and ultimately led to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), the largest class action settlement in Canadian history. It marked the first official collaboration between representatives of former students, the federal government, the involved churches and numerous Indigenous organizations. John Milloy, who worked as a special advisor for the TRC, sees former Prime Minister Martin (2003-2006) as the key political figure in the establishment of the IRSSA, as he and Fontaine started discussing the problems facing Indigenous peoples in 2005.<sup>72</sup> Martin's "real interest in Aboriginal affairs" not only laid the groundwork for the IRSSA, but also for his charity, the Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative, which was founded in 2008.<sup>73</sup> He was succeeded by the Conservative Harper in 2006, who became PM when the final discussions for the Agreement were ongoing and the IRSSA was finally signed on 19 September 2007. The five main elements of the IRSSA, including the multi-billion budgets, have all been celebrated, but analyses show a different side to the noble objectives of the IRSSA. One of the components of the IRSSA was the Common Experience Payment (CEP), through which survivors were to receive \$10,000 for the first year of attendance plus \$3,000 for each consecutive year. However, victims were required to show evidence for the time they claimed to have attended such schools. Milloy found out that Indian Affairs files, including reports that certified attendance, were destroyed during the Second World War and this has resulted in survivors not getting their full compensations.<sup>74</sup> Furthermore, since the schools had been closed long before the claims could be submitted, it even happened that no proof for a school's existence could be found, resulting in undermining the legitimacy of a claimant.<sup>75</sup>

Survivors who had endured physical or sexual abuse at schools could qualify for the Individual Assessment Program (IAP), but there was no monetary compensation for the loss

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<sup>71</sup> The Healing Foundation received \$125 million dollars under the IRSSA in 2007, which extended its lifespan until September 2014, according to the website of the Healing Foundation. See: <http://www.ahf.ca/faqs> (accessed April 13, 2017).

<sup>72</sup> John Milloy, "Doing Public History in Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *The Public Historian*, 35, no. 4 (November 2013): 13.

<sup>73</sup> The charity bears the name the Martin Family Initiative since 2016. See: <http://www.themfi.ca/> (accessed April 23, 2017).

<sup>74</sup> Milloy, 12.

<sup>75</sup> Jennifer Henderson, "The Camp, the School, and the Child: Discursive Exchanges and (Neo)Liberal Axioms," in: *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, ed. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 68.

of language and culture. Dale Turner, a Teme-Augama Anishnabai and associate professor at Dartmouth College, says that it is striking that a government which has a “ ‘sincere’ commitment to heal past acts of violence against Aboriginal children” used formulas to decide individual cash settlements.<sup>76</sup> It appears the Canadian government provides settlement programs, but does not effectively motivate victims to access them, which gives the impression that the government only wants to quickly resolve the issue, rather than reconcile with the Indigenous communities. This is supported by Turner, who says that in the process of victims sharing their traumatic stories, the “government wipes the moral slate clean by compensating survivors”.<sup>77</sup> This idea of ‘buying a clean conscience’ is reaffirmed by the refusal of the Harper-Government to express regret for the abuse of children at residential schools, while having just agreed on a settlement package of \$1.9 billion dollars for the cause. At the Union of British Colombian Indian Chiefs, the Indigenous community said that they were “extremely disappointed that the current government does not understand the significant role an apology would have in the healing and reconciliation process.”<sup>78</sup>

That apology, the pivotal moment in the Indigenous-State relationship, came in 2008 and is arguably the culmination of the patronizing attitude of the government towards their Indigenous peoples. Although Harper recognizes the need of an apology, and understands that the absence of one has been an “impediment in healing and reconciliation”,<sup>79</sup> he fails to adequately address the problems that should have been at the heart of this apology. The first disappointment is that he never refers to the wrongdoings at the residential schools and its lasting impact as (cultural) genocide, but merely as “wrong”.<sup>80</sup> The second disappointment was that Harper initially did not allow representatives of the Indigenous communities to respond to the prime minister’s statement. Only moments before the apology was read, the representatives were informed they could indeed address the PM afterwards. This says something about the intentions the Government had with this apology. The gesture of this apology “demonstrates how the past is secured *as* past through such proposed acts of public

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<sup>76</sup> Dale Turner, “On the Idea of Reconciliation in Contemporary Aboriginal Politics,” in: *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, ed. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 110.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

<sup>78</sup> Blatz, Schumann and Ross, 233.

<sup>79</sup> Canada, “House of Commons Debates, 39<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session,” *Edited Hansard* 142. 10 (June 11, 2008), <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=3568890&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=39&Ses=2> par. 7 (accessed January 12, 2017).

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.



mourning.”<sup>81</sup> Instead of wanting to hear from the addressed party whether the apology was accepted by the suffering party, the Government assumed the matter was resolved once the apology was read. That is why the representatives were initially not permitted to address Harper in Parliament. Eva Mackey, who has extensively analyzed the impact of this apology, argues that the apology “may be mobilized to contribute to Canada’s global mythology as benevolent multicultural nation which treats its Native people well.”<sup>82</sup> As discussed in chapter one, the 2008 apology has helped establishing the international profile of Canada as a tolerant country that is not afraid to make amends for its colonial past.

Mackey also remarked that some words, which she considers essential to describe the roots of the troubled relationship between Indigenous communities and the federal Government, were missing. She gives the example of words such as ‘land,’ ‘territory,’ or ‘treaty,’ which were not said by Harper.<sup>83</sup> This way, the traumas of the residential schools are not put into a larger, centuries-long context of trauma and mistreatment. An apology that was part of an ambitious program to inform non-Indigenous Canadians about the history of Indigenous peoples, could have set the example. Mackey also warns for another consequence of not mentioning these essential words: “If these detrimental cultural effects are presented *without* the accompanying story of land and material relations, they may end up constructing Aboriginal families and communities as essentially problem-ridden and deviant based on psychological criteria and problematization.”<sup>84</sup> The trauma of the residential schools seems to be a standalone issue in the apology, rather than the result of centuries of Government and settler oppression and violence. The link between the lasting impact of the residential schools on Indigenous people and the fact that their communities face more social problems, is also lost.<sup>85</sup>

Furthermore, those traumas still affect Indigenous people, such as Alma Scott, a survivor who still sees the impact of the schools in her life, as she says that “as a direct result of those residential schools [...] I was a dysfunctional mother.... I spent over twenty years of my life stuck in a bottle in an addiction where I didn’t want to feel any emotions so I numbed out with drugs and with alcohol.... That’s how I raised my children, that’s what my children

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<sup>81</sup> Amber Dean, “Public Mourning and the Culture of Redress,” in: *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, ed. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 190. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>82</sup> Eva Mackey, “The Apologizers’ Apology,” in: *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, ed. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 49.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>85</sup> See for example: Canadian Human Rights Commission, *Report on Equality Rights of Aboriginal People*, <https://www.chrc-ccdp.ca/eng/content/report-equality-rights-aboriginal-people> (accessed April 14, 2017), 3.

saw, and that's what I saw."<sup>86</sup> Although Harper touches upon the issue by stating that the legacy of these schools "has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today," he did not apologize for that aspect of the trauma, nor did he acknowledge the potency of these issues.<sup>87</sup> This again gives the impression that the Government wanted to see the issue of the residential schools as a closed chapter once the apology was read.

The apology recognized that Indigenous people were "powerless" to protect their children from suffering the same experiences and states that the Government's objective was to "remove and isolate children" from the influence of their families and communities. However, Harper did not mention the ways this objective was carried out and the traumatizing and lasting effect this has had on the entire Indigenous community. During the 1960s, the Government placed many Indigenous children into Western families, which has become to be known as the 'Sixties Scoop'. This resulted in statistically fewer Indigenous peoples, as those children lost their Indian status. Generations of Indigenous peoples were unable to raise their own children and to pass on cultural knowledge, languages, values and traditions as part of their upbringing. Those children who did remain with their families were forced to attend the residential schools, where physical and sexual abuse, rotten or a shortage of food, bullying and forced assimilation were experienced by many. As one former student summarizes: "Everything that intertwines in my life, the main fibre is the residential school, where I can go back to find the source. But it's always the residential school. I had no other experience. That's it. I never had no experience except the residential school in my forming years."<sup>88</sup> This reflection shows the everlasting influence of those schools on its survivors and an apology, despite its sincerity, can never be expected to heal those wounds.

The five representatives who were allowed to address the PM after the apology all made a remark about the atrocities children had to endure there. Some of them were survivors themselves, like Beverly Jacobs, President of the Native Women's Association of Canada (NWAC). She gave the PM credit for finally standing up and thanked him for the apology, but she expressed her concern for the future of Indigenous peoples, when asking what the Government will provide to help those communities.<sup>89</sup> Although Jacobs seemed to accept the

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<sup>86</sup> Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring*, 136.

<sup>87</sup> Government of Canada, "House of Commons Debates," par. 5.

<sup>88</sup> Elizabeth Graham, *The Mush Hole, Life at Two Indian Residential Schools* (Waterloo, Ont.: Heffle Publishing, 1997), 379.

<sup>89</sup> Beverly Jacobs, "House of Commons Debates, 39<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session," *Edited Hansard* 142. 10 (June 11, 2008),

apology, she was hesitant to believe the statement would actually bring change to Indigenous peoples, as Harper had previously been unwilling to address them. Her doubts towards the Harper-government turned out to be well-founded only a year later, when Harper's sincerity became the point of discussion when he proudly remarked that "we also have no history of colonialism."<sup>90</sup> This statement challenged the meaning and sincerity of Harper's apology, and caused critics to conclude that the apology was not merely used as an instrument to reconcile with the Indigenous communities, but also as a powerful political tool to uplift Canada's (international) profile. Unfortunately, statements like these prove that Fontaine's public response was premature when he said that "brave survivors, through telling their stories, have stripped white supremacy of its legitimacy."<sup>91</sup> Harper's apology and the Government's programs installed to reconcile with the Indigenous communities, can, sadly, not only be heedlessly celebrated. In order to determine the value of the Government's public statements, the actions that followed the apology must be critically analyzed.

The apology was part of the Settlement Agreement, and the final element of it that will be analyzed here is the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), which experienced a tumultuous onset. All three commissioners resigned within the first year, due to "insurmountable challenges and government interference."<sup>92</sup> Again, like the Healing Foundation, a program installed to help the Indigenous peoples had to work with a limited budget and a mandate. The TRC was given five years and a budget of \$60 million dollars, which was "picked out of the air."<sup>93</sup> This shows that the government had no idea what such a commission would cost and this signifies a lack of interest in the project. Milloy concludes that "a persistent, historic lack of adequate public funding for aboriginal peoples" made it increasingly difficult for researchers at the TRC to do their job and plans and projects had to be abandoned.<sup>94</sup> The Commission also could not rely on the Government and its Department of Indian Affairs to hand over all reports concerning residential schools, but had to prove each

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<http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=3568890&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=39&Ses=2> (accessed January 12, 2017) par. 7.

<sup>90</sup> David Ljuggren, "Every G20 Nation Wants to Be Canada, Insists PM," *Reuters*, September 25, 2009, <http://www.reuters.com/article/columns-us-g20-canada-advantages-idUSTRE58P05Z20090926> (accessed April 28, 2017).

<sup>91</sup> Phil Fontaine, "House of Commons Debates, 39<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session," *Edited Hansard* 142. 10 (June 11, 2008), <http://www2.parl.gc.ca/HousePublications/Publication.aspx?DocId=3568890&Language=E&Mode=1&Parl=39&Ses=2> (accessed January 12, 2017) par. 7.

<sup>92</sup> Ry Moran, "Truth and Reconciliation Commission," *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, September 21, 2015, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/truth-and-reconciliation-commission/> (accessed February 12, 2017).

<sup>93</sup> Milloy, 13.

<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, 15.

files' relevance and even then, files were secretly held back.<sup>95</sup> Combined, all these factors demonstrate there were limits to the interest the Government showed in this organization and its results.

The TRC investigated the Government's involvement in the schools and the abuse that occurred. The investigation located about 5,300 alleged abusers, of which slightly more than 700 took part in hearings. The shocking conclusion, however, is that by February 2016, only about 50 people had been prosecuted and convicted for their crimes at residential schools.<sup>96</sup> It is a combination of factors, for example the limited reports of abuse known to the police, the lack of evidence so many years later and the fact that many alleged abusers have died, that have thwarted possible prosecutions.

Despite the difficult onset and limited budget, which caused a yearlong delay for the Commission to start investigating, the TRC has over the years succeeded in organizing events that commemorate the traumas of the residential schools and which celebrate Indigenous peoples. These events highlighted the hope of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada, and at one of the events, an Indigenous youngster directly addressed that matter, when saying that "We have re-examined our thoughts and beliefs around colonialism, and have made a commitment to unpack our own baggage, and to enter into a new relationship with each other, using this momentum, to move our country forward, in light of the 150th anniversary of the Confederation of Canada in 2017. [...] Our hope is that, one day, we will live together, as recognized nations, within a country we can all be proud of."<sup>97</sup> This shows that younger generations, who grew up in times when Indigenous people became increasingly visible in both the Canadian society and the international press, are still hopeful of attaining a renewed relationship with the federal government.

A total of seven national events and countless community events were organized and came to a culminating point during a week of closing ceremonies, of which the creation of a Garden of Hearts was the final event. Harper attended the ceremony of 2 June 2015 at Rideau Hall in Ottawa, where survivors were asked to share their stories to help remind Canadians of the atrocities of the residential schools. This time, Harper did not publicly address the Indigenous people, but instead spoke to TRC Chair Justice Murray Sinclair privately. The TRC was scheduled to release a report with 94 recommendations for the government to

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

<sup>96</sup> Martha Troian, "Indian Residential Schools: 5,300 Alleged Abusers Located by Ottawa," *CBC News*, February 2, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/residential-school-alleged-abusers-iap-1.3422770> (accessed April 28, 2017).

<sup>97</sup> TRC, *Honouring*, 268.

reconcile with the Indigenous peoples, called *Calls for Action*. One of those *Calls* was the adoption of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Aboriginal People (UNDRIP), a document that “emphasizes the rights of indigenous peoples to maintain and strengthen their own institutions, cultures and traditions and to pursue their development in keeping with their own needs and aspirations.”<sup>98</sup> UNDRIP was adopted in 2006 by 30 countries, but Canada was among the four who rejected it. One of the reasons Harper gave was that “Aboriginal treaty rights are fully recognized in our Constitution.”<sup>99</sup> While Sinclair had just concluded in his speech that “words are not enough” for the Canadian government to address the “cultural genocide” of the residential schools, Harper did not want to discuss the possibility of implementing UNDRIP.<sup>100</sup> Sinclair’s statement signals that the Indigenous representatives were unsatisfied with the attempts of the government to reconcile with the Indigenous communities, of which they were hopeful directly after the apology in 2008. When Harper was asked about the 94 recommendations in Parliament later that day, he said he did not want to implement any until he had read the final report, which was now scheduled to be released after the election. The leader of the Liberal Party, Justin Trudeau, said he offered “unwavering support” for the TRC’s recommendations.<sup>101</sup> Later that day, Harper was reprimanded for his passive attitude towards Indigenous people by Tom Mulcair, leader of the New Democratic Party, who said that “Intentions are not enough. An apology is only meaningful if it is accompanied by real action. [...] Does the prime minister agree with Justice Sinclair and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that the residential school program was nothing short of cultural genocide?”<sup>102</sup> Harper’s answer was a reference to his 2008 apology, to which he had nothing to add. The PM’s diplomatic phrasing and his unwillingness to implement the recommendations, was yet another setback in the Indigenous-State relationship.

Another disappointment to Indigenous peoples, but especially to residential school survivors, was ironically on the seventh anniversary of Harper’s apology, when he did not avail the opportunity to urge Pope Francis to apologize for the Catholic Church’s involvement

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<sup>98</sup> “Frequently Asked Questions: Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples United Nations Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues”, *United Nations*, n.d.

<http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/FAQsindigenousdeclaration.pdf> (accessed April 30, 2017).

<sup>99</sup> “PM Harper Won’t Implement TRC Recommendation on UN declaration on Indigenous peoples,” *APTN National News*, June 2, 2015, <http://aptnnews.ca/2015/06/02/pm-harper-wont-implement-trc-recommendation-un-declaration-indigenous-peoples/> (accessed April 21, 2017), par. 7.

<sup>100</sup> Chloe Fedio, “Truth and Reconciliation Report Brings Calls for Action, Not Words,” *CBC News*, June 2, 2015, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/truth-and-reconciliation-report-brings-calls-for-action-not-words-1.3096863> (accessed April 28, 2017), par. 1.

<sup>101</sup> Fedio, par. 2.

<sup>102</sup> “PM Harper Won’t Implement,” par. 9.

in the residential schools.<sup>103</sup> On his visit to the Vatican, he only showed a letter written by the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs about the TRC Report, but he did not present the Pope the 94 *Calls to Action*. As the events took place only nine days after Harper had been given the TRC Report, people responded surprised to Harper's refusal to discuss those with the Pope. An apology from the Catholic church is said to help find residential school survivors find healing and closure.<sup>104</sup> By refusing to address the Pope, Harper deprived the victims of this chance. Liberal MP Bennett said that Harper is "failing to show leadership," and that he had "squandered" a unique opportunity to use the meeting as a first step towards reconciliation. "The prime minister stands on the wrong side of history – again."<sup>105</sup> This harsh conclusion from the now leading party, hints at a different strategy in achieving reconciliation from the current government.

The Harper-government will be remembered for the apology and the Settlement Agreement, both of which seemed promising steps in the reconciliation process. It was the first government that adequately addressed the Indigenous peoples, but a thorough examination of these concepts shows the government had much to gain by a renewed relationship with the Indigenous communities. Throughout the years, the government fell short in providing budgets needed to reach the goals set by organizations such as the TRC. As such a commission was part of the Settlement Agreement, signed by the government, it is at least striking that the government took so little responsibility when budgets needed to be realized. The government has also negatively affected those organizations, which even led to yearlong delays and abandoned tasks. Although it was the government as a whole that failed the Indigenous communities and the organizations aimed at helping them, the Prime Minister played a significant role in the ambiguous stance the government held towards its Indigenous peoples. Though he offered an apology that recognized the traumatic government policies that had affected Indigenous peoples for centuries, only a year later, he proudly declared Canada did not have a colonial history. The fact that he had not publicly addressed Indigenous affairs since the 2008 apology, has greatly affected the confidence Indigenous peoples had in a better relationship with the federal government. That hope is given a new impulse with PM Trudeau, who has started a federal investigation into the missing and murdered Indigenous women,

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<sup>103</sup> "Harper's Refusal to Seek an Apology from the Pope for Residential Schools is 'Deeply Disappointing'," *Ottawa Citizen*, June 11, 2015, <http://ottawacitizen.com/storyline/harpers-refusal-to-seek-residential-schools-apology-from-pope-deeply-disappointing> (accessed April 29, 2017).

<sup>104</sup> Ibid. The quote is from Romeo Saganash, a Member of Parliament who has represented the citizens of Abitibi-Baie-James-Nunavik-Eeyou since 2011.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid.

which will be further analyzed in chapter three. The investigation was originally part of the Settlement Agreement, but was never carried out by PM Harper.

The Harper-administrations received a fair amount of criticism for their inability to reconcile with the Indigenous communities in Canada, and when the new Liberal government was installed, hope was Trudeau could change the damaged relationship. His government promised to implement UNDRIP and serious action was taken in May 2016, when the Indigenous Affairs Minister Carolyn Bennett said: "We intend nothing less than to adopt and implement the declaration in accordance with the Canadian Constitution."<sup>106</sup> Canada removed its objection against UNDRIP and this act signifies that the Canadian government officially supports the Declaration. However, only two months later, the government said that "adopting the United Nations declaration as being Canadian law [is] unworkable."<sup>107</sup> Those words were uttered by the Minister of Justice and Attorney General Jody Wilson-Raybould, whose appointment marked the end of the invisibility of Indigenous women in the political landscape. The daughter of politician and theorist Chief Bill Wilson became the first Indigenous cabinet member and the third woman to head that department, which has greatly affected Indigenous peoples throughout history.<sup>108</sup> In a statement she issued after her appointment, she wrote that her new post was not a personal accomplishment, but "rather a response to how far we have come as country. [...] It was not all that long ago that a person like me could not even vote, let alone run for office or aspire to be appointed to such high office."<sup>109</sup> The minister's failure to implement UNDRIP meant that the Indian Act - the nineteenth-century document which had to be amended time and again for its racist and discriminating sections - remained the primary set of rules and regulations for Indigenous peoples instead of an internationally recognized document.

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<sup>106</sup> Tim Fontaine, "Canada Officially Adopts UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous Peoples," *CBC News*, May 10, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/canada-adopting-implementing-un-rights-declaration-1.3575272> (accessed April 30, 2017), par. 3.

<sup>107</sup> Kelly McParland, "Kelly McParland: Trudeau's first broken promise to First Nations people is a whopper, but won't be the last," *National Post*, July 18, 2016, <http://news.nationalpost.com/full-comment/kelly-mcparland-trudeaus-first-broken-promise-to-natives-is-a-whopper-but-wont-be-the-last> (accessed April 30, 2017), par. 7. Professor Ken Coates explained the government's incapability to implement the declaration, when he concluded that "the requirements in the declaration interfered with and overlapped with a bunch of Canadian laws and regulations, including things like modern land-claims treaties." See: Kim Mackrael, "Federal government wary of UN indigenous rights declaration," *Globe and Mail*, June 5, 2016, <http://www.theglobeandmail.com/news/politics/federal-government-wary-of-un-indigenous-rights-declaration/article24833549/> (accessed April 30, 2017), par. 6.

<sup>108</sup> Chief Bill Wilson is also referred to as Hemas Kla-Lee-Lee-Kla and gained fame in 1990 when he said at a conference about the residential school system: "Maybe we should have killed you all," when referring to atrocities Indigenous peoples had endured. See: Sellars, *They Called Me Number One*, 172.

<sup>109</sup> Joanna Smith, "Wilson-Raybould takes on big file as first aboriginal cabinet member," *Hamilton Spectator*, October 23, 2016, <http://www.thespec.com/news-story/6926062-wilson-raybould-takes-on-big-file-as-first-aboriginal-cabinet-member/> (accessed May 22, 2017), par. 3-4.

It is still too early to draw any conclusions about Trudeau's success in reconciling the government with the Indigenous communities, but in the less than two years he has been in office, he has repeatedly advocated for 'real change', which was part of his election campaign.<sup>110</sup> Trudeau genuinely seems to be invested in Indigenous Affairs and the appointment of an Indigenous female as cabinet member and his stance towards Indigenous peoples in general could hint at the start of a renewed relationship between the government and the Indigenous communities that is not only based on promising words. The difference between Trudeau and his predecessor could, in that context, not be clearer. The expectation, or at least the hope, is that Indigenous peoples will not again be disappointed by the federal government, like they were directly after the apology in 2008. This proved to be more effective for Canada's international profile, than actually a means to improve the damaged relationship between the government and the Indigenous communities. Yet, as the broken promise of the implementation of the UN declaration has demonstrated, the Trudeau-government does not simply change the constitutional regulations that have formed the basis of governing Indigenous peoples. As Sinclair said at the one-year anniversary of the TRC report, "there has been movement on a number of fronts that we need to acknowledge — but whether it's adequate or not, that remains to be seen."<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Trudeau's performance as Prime Minister is recorded on the non-partisan, citizen run website *Trudeaumetre.ca*. This website keeps score of the kept and broken promises of the election campaign, as well as the ones that are still in progress. See: <https://trudeaumetre.polimeter.org/> (accessed May 2, 2017).

<sup>111</sup> "Truth And Reconciliation Report: 1 Year After, Change Is Still Elusive, Sinclair Says," *Huffington Post Canada*, June 2, 2016, [http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2016/06/02/1-year-after-truth-and-reconciliation-report-not-seeing-change-yet\\_n\\_10255766.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2016/06/02/1-year-after-truth-and-reconciliation-report-not-seeing-change-yet_n_10255766.html) (accessed April 24, 2017).



## Chapter 3

### Contemporary Literature as Healing Mechanism

The previous chapters have demonstrated how the settler government, and later the Canadian government, installed policies that aimed to diminish the number of Indigenous peoples in Canada. Since the late 1990s, the Canadian government has started initiatives to reconcile with the people affected by these harmful policies and these included statements, apologies and monetary compensations. The former Director of Research for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and Indigenous studies scholar, Paulette Regan, argues in her book *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*, that reconciliation can only be attained if non-Indigenous Canadians gain new insights into their own settler history.<sup>112</sup> “Deconstructing our identity and history necessitates a rethinking of what constitutes violence as well as a closer investigation of its more nuanced forms.”<sup>113</sup> Non-Indigenous Canadians have to reconsider their own history, but this is difficult as “teachers, staff, and various officials chose to ignore, vigorously enforce, comply with, or resist residential school policies and practices in various times and places.”<sup>114</sup> As established before, most non-Indigenous Canadians know very little about the residential school history or other policies of the Indian Act that have endangered the existence of Indigenous peoples in Canada. This lack of information leads many Canadians to believe that the problems Indigenous communities currently suffer from, such as economic disadvantage, domestic violence, addictions and poor health and education outcomes, are rooted in their Indigenous culture and societies. Regan acknowledges that it is very easy “to judge the apparent inability of Native people to rise above such conditions, thus pathologizing the victims of our well-intended actions. It is equally easy to think what is best for them – hence our persistence in trying to solve the Indian problem.”<sup>115</sup> This statement refers to the prejudices and negative outlook non-Indigenous Canadians have on Indigenous peoples, which is an example of the violence in more nuanced forms Regan mentioned before. Racism and discrimination are, often unconsciously, deeply rooted in the minds of many Canadians who have never been in contact with Indigenous peoples and this still endangers the possibility of reconciliation, which seems to be high on the agenda of the current

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<sup>112</sup> Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010).

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

Canadian government. Regan sees the ongoing problems in the relationship between Indigenous peoples and other Canadians as a vicious circle as “This singular focus on the Other blinds us from seeing how settler history, myth, and identity have shaped and continue to shape our attitudes in highly problematic ways. It prevents us from acknowledging our own need to decolonize.”<sup>116</sup> She speaks from the perspective of a non-Indigenous person and admits it has been difficult to come to terms with the settler history, as non-Indigenous Canadians are responsible for the way that particular history is remembered. The perspectives and stories that would provide alternative views of the settler history, those coming from Indigenous peoples, are still not part of the collective memory of all Canadians. Regan argues that this does not only add to the historical awareness of Canadians, but it would also prevent practices such as the residential school system to ever happen again. Referring to the 2008 apology and Harper’s claim that “there is no place in Canada for attitudes that inspired the Indian residential school system,” Regan says that as long people still believe in the settler myth and continue to deny or erase the violent part of that history, nothing will change in the attitude of non-Indigenous Canadians towards Indigenous peoples.<sup>117</sup> This means that people will allow history to repeat itself, as they will not have learned how to break the pattern of “violence that is woven into the fabric of Canadian history.”<sup>118</sup> One of the ways to do so, claims Regan in her introduction, is to “‘restory’ the dominant-culture version of history; that is, we must make decolonizing space for Indigenous history [...] as told by Indigenous peoples themselves.”<sup>119</sup> This method is repeated by Kanien’kehaka professor at the University of Victoria, Taiaiake Alfred, who wrote the foreword to Regan’s study. He is skeptical of the government’s vision on reconciliation, which mostly entails monetary compensations. He claims that most Canadians believe that such a compensation will automatically lead to a better relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples and that there will be no further mention of trauma, guilt or forgiveness. What he proposes is similar to Regan as he says that only “ethical truth telling” can pave the way for “genuine reconciliation.”<sup>120</sup>

One way of getting acquainted with the Indigenous perspective is by reading their literature. Storytelling is hugely important to Indigenous cultures and while oral storytelling used to be the primary form, written literature has become perhaps equally important as a way

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>117</sup> Harper qtd. in Regan, 6.

<sup>118</sup> Ibid.

<sup>119</sup> Ibid.

<sup>120</sup> Ibid, x-xi.

to capture the experiences of Indigenous peoples. In a way, this also demonstrates how Indigenous communities and their traditional customs were all affected by colonialism, as it was not until the settlers came to Canada that the Indigenous peoples became literate “in the way that Europeans privilege.”<sup>121</sup> Nevertheless, “stories are wondrous things” as Thomas King once said.<sup>122</sup> Meaning, stories, and in this thesis also poetry collections, have the unique ability to reflect on events in a variety of layers, such as plot, character development, themes, motifs and use of language. This has been exemplified by the likes of Tomson Highway (Cree, 1951) and Basil H. Johnston (Anishinabe, 1929-2015), who have brought the male experience at Indian residential schools and the effects it had on the lives of former students to the attention. Johnston’s *Indian School Days* (1988) was one of the first literary tales about neglect at these schools, while Highway’s *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (1998) threw light on the sexual abuse to which children were subjected and the destructive effects those memories had throughout their lives.<sup>123</sup> These books were published long before the federal apology and monetary compensations and they can be seen as examples how Indigenous peoples wanted to bring the practices of the residential schools and other policies of the Indian Act to the attention.

Within the Indigenous societies of Canada, females traditionally play a vital role, which has been endangered since the introduction of the Indian Act.<sup>124</sup> Until recently, the female perspective was limited to life on the reserves and the difficulties Indigenous women face, such as discrimination, domestic abuse and sexual assault. The likes of Lee Maracle (Stó:lo, 1950), Dawn Dumont (Cree, no date available) and Eden Robinson (Haisla, 1968), have influenced Canadian feminism and have contributed to making (Indigenous) women’s issues visible through novels and poetry. However, they remained silent on the topic of residential schools, the Sixties scoop and what it is that makes the female experience so distinguished. This thesis argues that women were to a greater extent victimized because of discriminatory policies of the Indian Act, some of which, as the NWAC claims, still exist today.<sup>125</sup> The regulations made the position of women particularly vulnerable and powerless.

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<sup>121</sup> Métis scholar and professor of English literature Jo-Ann Episknew refers to the difference between what we know in the Western world as literacy and the land-based literacy that enables Indigenous peoples to ‘read’ the land. See: Jo-Ann Episknew, *Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, Public Policy and Healing*, (Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press, 2009), 2 and 195.

<sup>122</sup> Thomas King, *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative* (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2003), 10.

<sup>123</sup> Basil H. Johnston, *Indian School Days* (Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press, 1988). And: Tomson Highway, *Kiss of the Fur Queen* (Norman, Ok: University of Oklahoma Press, 1998).

<sup>124</sup> The Aboriginal Justice Commission, “Chapter 13- Aboriginal Women,” *The Justice System and Aboriginal People*, <http://www.ajic.mb.ca/volumel/chapter13.html#2> (accessed April 22, 2017).

<sup>125</sup> Native Women’s Association of Canada, “About Us,” n.d. <https://www.nwac.ca/home/about-nwac/about-us/> (accessed May 2, 2017).

In order to understand how the authors selected in this thesis reply to some of the policies that affected the female position in their literature, a brief analysis of those policies will now follow.

Women were specifically targeted in a number of ways, namely through marriage and the assumption that Indigenous women were incapable of raising a child alone. First Nation people are entitled to the right to live on a reservation and to benefit from a wide range of programs and services offered by federal agencies and provincial governments when they have Indian status.<sup>126</sup> From 1869 to 1985, the controversial Bill C-31 made a discriminatory distinction between men and women as the latter would lose their status when they married a man without Indian status. This not only meant that part of their identity was erased from their identity in federal papers, but they were also denied the right to live on a reservation. The effects this had on the Indigenous community on a reservation is discussed in Bev Sellars's memoir, which will later be part of the literary analysis in the chapter. She says of two sisters, Doreen and Lena, who married non-status men that "Everyone saw that their skin hadn't become lighter, and they did not otherwise appear different, but by virtue of the Indian Act, they were no longer 'Indian.' [...] Even though they were born and raised at Soda Creek, Doreen and Lena were breaking the law by visiting their mom."<sup>127</sup> That final sentence poignantly describes the devastating effects of that Bill to a close-knit community and by specifically referring to not being able to visit a mother, Sellars implies that such a regulation would never apply to non-Indigenous communities.

In 1985, the amendment of the Bill allowed for the reinstatement of the status of those who had lost it or to whom it had previously been denied, such as the children of women who had lost their status through marriage.<sup>128</sup> An estimated 117,000 people have successfully

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<sup>126</sup> Canada, Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, "Indian Status," (Ottawa, Ont.: Government of Canada Publications, July 28, 2017) <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100032374/1100100032378> (accessed August 1, 2017).

<sup>127</sup> Bev Sellars, "Notes on Chapter 8: Home Sweet Home," in *They Called Me Number One*, 205-207.

<sup>128</sup> Amendments of the Bill in 2011 as part of the Gender Equity in Indian Registration Act have not yet been successful in granting Indian status to children born to a mother whose mother married a non-Native person before the amendment of 1985. Thus, the grandchildren of a woman born with Indian status are still not officially recognized as Indians. One of the best-known cases that went to the Superior Court over this is the Descheneux-case, which exemplifies the difficulties Indigenous peoples face through federal legislation. In 2011, Stéphane Descheneaux, Susan Yantha and Tammy Yantha, brought forward their case in the Superior Court of Quebec, stating that the Indian Act was unconstitutional as it includes discriminatory attitudes towards women when it comes to granting Indian status to women and their descendants. For more information on this case, see: Canada, Department of Indigenous and Northern Affairs, "The Government of Canada's Response to the Descheneux Decision," (Ottawa, Ont.: Government of Canada Publications, April 12, 2017) <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1467227680166/1467227697623> (accessed May 13, 2017).

requested to be reinstated between 1985 and 2007.<sup>129</sup> Although the female authors discussed in this thesis do not explicitly refer to these numbers, they do refer to the position females have in present-day Indigenous societies. This position is inextricably linked to a complex and discriminatory recent history.

The goal of the Indian Act was to assimilate Indigenous peoples to the dominant culture and although denying women status was a measure that decreased the number of registered Indigenous peoples, this was not enough. As we saw in previous chapters, the Indian residential school program aimed to remove the traditional values, language and customs children had been taught at the reserves by forcing them to speak English, pray to a God they had possibly never heard of and by changing the children's appearance. Chapter one showed that the number of schools had begun to decline since the Second World War, and while the number of students enrolled at such schools initially increased until 1957, an irreversible decline followed in the number of children attending residential schools during the 1960s. Researcher Patrick Johnston, who first coined the term 'Sixties Scoop' in his 1983 study *Native Children and the Welfare System*, says that "Gradually, as education ceased to function as the institutional agent of colonization, the child welfare system took its place. It could continue to remove Native children from their parents, devalue Native custom and traditions in the process, but still act 'in the best interests of the child.' Those who hold to this view argue that the Sixties Scoop was not coincidental; it was a consequence of fewer Indian children being sent to residential school and of the child welfare system emerging as the new method of colonization."<sup>130</sup> This thesis shares the view of Johnston that this adoptive system was indeed a method of colonization.

It was in Manitoba in 1966 that "the federal government and the government of Manitoba entered into an agreement that provided for the existing Children's Aid Societies of Central, Eastern and Western Manitoba to deliver child welfare services to 14 bands in southern Manitoba."<sup>131</sup> This meant that child care services, which had been unavailable to

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<sup>129</sup> Nandita Sharma, "Postcolonial Sovereignty," in *Native Studies Keywords*, ed. Stephanie Nohelani Teves, Andrea Smith and Michelle H. Raheja (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2015), 56.

<sup>130</sup> Patrick Johnston, *Native Children and the Child Welfare System* (Toronto: James Lorimer, 1983), 24. Johnston came up with the term after he had interviewed a retired social worker from British Columbia, who said that she and her colleagues "'scooped' children from reserves 'almost as a matter of course.'" See: Patrick Johnston, "Revisiting the 'Sixties Scoop,'" *Policy Options*, July 26, 2016 <http://policyoptions.irpp.org/fr/magazines/juillet-2016/revisiting-the-sixties-scoop-of-indigenous-children/> (accessed August 2, 2017).

<sup>131</sup> The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, *Report of the Aboriginal Justice Inquiry of Manitoba*, Vol. 1, Chapter 14, "The 'Sixties Scoop'" via <http://www.ajic.mb.ca/volumel/chapter14.html#6> (accessed August 3, 2017).

Indigenous peoples until 1966, now had absolute control over the Indigenous inhabitants in that area. Johnston investigated the all-encompassing impact this had to Indigenous communities: “In 1955, there were 3,433 children in the care of B.C.’s child welfare branch. Of that number, it was estimated that 29 children, or less than 1 percent of the total, were of Indian ancestry. By 1964, however, 1,446 children in care in B.C. were of Indian extraction. That number represented 34.2 percent of all children in care. Within ten years, in other words, the representation of Native children in B.C.’s child welfare system had jumped from almost nil to a third. It was a pattern being repeated in other parts of Canada as well.”<sup>132</sup>

The child care services would thus take away children from their families and sent them to families that could raise the child according to western tradition. This way, the apprehension of children did the same as the residential school program in terms of removing children from their families and placing them in a wholly different environment to grow up in. Johnston already concluded in 1981 that the “culturally inappropriate services” of the child welfare system formed the major problem to the then-existing policies.<sup>133</sup> Instead of providing counselling for Indigenous parents struggling with parenthood or providing care for children in need, almost 80% of the children who were put up for adoption were adopted by non-Indigenous families.<sup>134</sup> This often led to the result that these children grew up without any knowledge of their heritage and never learned the first language of their biological parents.

According to Johnston, over 3,400 children were placed in other families between 1971 and 1981.<sup>135</sup> Official statistics of the Department of Indian Affairs indicates a total of 11,132 children that were forcefully taken away from their parents between 1960 and 1990, but other data suggests the total is more likely to be around 20,000 removed children.<sup>136</sup>

Although the Sixties Scoop refers to the decade in which the practice started, this adoption procedure slowly came to an end after the Canadian Council on Social Development compiled statistics on the representation of Indigenous children in the welfare system in 1983. It was Johnston who was the director of the project responsible for this data.

The Sixties Scoop gained relatively little attention in Canada, which is also what Anthony Wood, a resident from Gods River, Manitoba, said at the Public Inquiry into the Administration of Justice and Aboriginal People in 1988: “There was no publicity for years

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<sup>132</sup>Johnston, *Native Children*, 23.

<sup>133</sup> Patrick Johnston, “Indigenous Children at Risk,” *Policy Options* (November-December 1981):b 49.

<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 48.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 57.

<sup>136</sup> Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair and Sharon Dainard, “Sixties Scoop,” *Canadian Encyclopedia*, June 21, 2016, <http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/sixties-scoop/> (accessed May 8, 2017), par. 2.

and years about the brutalization of our families and children by the larger Canadian society. Kidnapping was called placement in foster homes. Exporting Aboriginal children to the U.S. was called preparing Indian children for the future. Parents who were heartbroken by the destruction of their families were written off as incompetent people.”<sup>137</sup> Johnston has identified a few factors that might have helped to increase the attention for this topic. One of them was the *Calls for Action*, published by the TRC in 2015. The first five all instructed how the child welfare systems should be improved in order to prevent such adoptive practices to ever happen again. Another reason is a series of class action lawsuits, which have helped to bring this history to the surface and thus to the attention of non- Indigenous Canadians. This is also achieved by the courageous people speaking out about their often-traumatic experiences as a child in the welfare system or as an adopted child. Carol Daniels, whose novel *Bearskin Diary* (2015) will be discussed in the analysis at the core of this chapter, portrays such a person. The protagonist, Sandy, was taken away from her parents as an infant and placed into a white Canadian family of Ukrainian descent. Through her novel, Daniels portrays the difficulties adopted Indigenous children encounter when put into an environment that has a racist attitude towards them. Although Sandy is loved by her adopted family, and is encouraged by her adopted grandmother to do research into her heritage, she is confronted with racist remarks both at schools and at work. Moreover, because Sandy has never met any of her biological family members, she has no idea what her native culture is like. She only knows about the concept of Indigenous peoples and reserves through the media available in her western environment. Naturally, this does not compare to actual life at the reserves or the reality for Indigenous peoples living in the cities, which is what Sandy finds out at a later stage in life. Prior to the amendment of the Indian Act of 1978, children would be removed without written proof of their heritage, including the names of the parents, which meant they could not reunite with their families if they wanted to. Not only did these children lose their birth families, but also part of their identity was taken away with the government’s consent. According to Chief Marcia Martel, a substantial portion of now grown up adoptees face “cultural and identity confusion” and this is worsened by the difficulties they experience in their search for their birth family.<sup>138</sup> Examples of an identity crisis can be found in Daniels’ novel.

The forced adoptions were the topic of a research project as early as 1972, when

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<sup>137</sup> The Aboriginal Justice Implementation Commission, “The ‘Sixties Scoop.’”

<sup>138</sup> Chief Marcia Martel, “The 60’s Scoop,” *Origins Canada*, March 2, 2017, <http://www.originscanada.org/aboriginal-resources/the-stolen-generation/> (accessed May 28, 2017).

Fanshel interviewed 392 sets of non-Indigenous parents who had adopted Indigenous children. He concluded that “even if the adjustment of the children proves to be somewhat more problematic as they get older [...] the overall prospect for their futures can be termed ‘guardedly optimistic.’ [...] One has to take the position that adoption has saved many of these children from lives of utter ruination.”<sup>139</sup> A standpoint as this made it possible for one group to be specifically targeted. Kathryn Blaze Carlson of *The National Post* wrote an article dedicated to unmarried mothers who were forced to put their children up for adoption during the Sixties Scoop. One of them was Sarah Penderson, who was 20 years old in 1964 when she signed the adoption papers “but not before social workers held a pen in her hand and threatened to call the police because she was screaming and throwing furniture in protest.”<sup>140</sup>

The article includes numerous heart-wrenching stories of women manipulated and threatened into giving their children up for adoption. Generations of Indigenous mothers were deprived of the chance to raise their children according to the traditions and values of their Indigenous society, leaving both mothers and children traumatized. One can only imagine the lasting effects this will have had on the lives of both mother and child. Daniels’ biological mother was also a victim belonging to this category, of which Daniels says: “she was not married and so that gave them a reason [to take her child away] in their minds.”<sup>141</sup> The fact that these stories have until recently been unknown to non-Indigenous Canadians is why this thesis not only focuses on the traumas resulted from years at a residential school, but also on the lingering effects of the Sixties Scoop and the search for identity. While the two procedures may seem very different on the surface, the traumas that stem from them and the impact they have had on both the Indigenous communities and the individuals show similarities. This becomes clear when analyzing the works of literature selected for this thesis, which includes a memoir, a novel, a short story collection and two poetry collections. The various authors use their literary and poetic voices to make this history part of the Canadian consciousness. Some relive the experiences and recount the harsh realities at a residential school, while others imagine what it must have been like for children as they have no experience with either the residential schools or the Sixties Scoop. The authors do not steer away from criticizing the

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<sup>139</sup> David Fanshel, *Far from the Reservation: The Transracial adoption of American Indian Children* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 1972), 339.

<sup>140</sup> Kathryn Blaze Carlson, “Curtain Lifts on Decades of Forced Adoptions for Unwed Mothers in Canada,” *The National Post*, March 9, 2012 <http://nationalpost.com/news/canada/curtain-lifts-on-decades-of-forced-adoptions-for-unwed-mothers-in-canada/wcm/b3be3f05-2707-4196-bf9d-c9de31efca5e> (accessed July 29, 2017).

<sup>141</sup> Anna Dimoff, “Author Carol Daniels Blends Fiction with Canada’s Indigenous History in *Bearskin Diary*,” *CBC News*, August 15, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bearskin-diary-carol-daniels-1.3720537> (accessed June 20, 2017) par. 8.



Canadian government and very explicit examples can be found where Prime Minister Harper's apology is attacked. This way, the authors eloquently articulate how the legacy of the former Indian Act policies still lives on. By approaching the themes in a variety of ways and styles, the authors all try to attain a form of healing for this insurmountable tragedy. As Métis scholar and professor of English literature Jo-Ann Episkenew argues, "not only does Indigenous literature respond to and critique the policies of the Government of Canada; it also functions as 'medicine' to help cure the colonial contagion by healing the communities these policies have injured."<sup>142</sup> This requires a leap in the imagination of non-Indigenous readers, as Indigenous peoples "have believed in the healing power of language and stories since time immemorial."<sup>143</sup> She explains how this is achieved, saying that Indigenous literature challenges the 'master narrative', which is a term used to describe Canada's national myth which "sometimes misrepresents and more often excludes Indigenous peoples."<sup>144</sup> This resembles Paulette Regan's call to non-Indigenous Canadians to educate themselves about their country's history. Regan urges those people to read stories from Indigenous peoples, as they give insight into their perspective of the settler history. The importance of healing literature to Indigenous authors is best summarized by Joseph Gold, who says that "What novelists do is to order and organize these [traumatic] experiences and thoughts so that they can get control over them. They do this by, and while, writing them into a story, a novel. Then other people can join the experience of their reading the novel to the experience of their lives...it makes you feel less alone and more 'normal.' When you see that someone else can have known about how you feel, you are being recognized, understood and known."<sup>145</sup> What Gold says is that Indigenous authors achieve a sense of healing when their stories and experiences, whether fictional or not, are recognized by other people.

How the five female authors use literature and poetry to make this history part of the Canadian consciousness and how they achieve a form of healing in doing so forms the essential question of this analysis.

Bev Sellars' *They Called Me Number One: Secrets and Survival at an Indian Residential School* (2013) opens with a foreword written by her partner, Bill Wilson.<sup>146</sup> He was, due to his wealthy family, lucky enough to escape the fate of going to a residential

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<sup>142</sup> Episkenew, 2.

<sup>143</sup> Ibid, 11.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> Joseph Gold, *Read for Your Life: Literature as a Life Support System* (Markham, Ont.: Fitzhenry & Whiteside, 1990), 63. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>146</sup> Officially known as Hemas Kla-Lee-Lee-Kla, who was also mentioned in chapter two, where he was introduced as the father of Attorney General Jody Wilson-Raybould.

school, which is why he is “ashamed to admit that I knew little or nothing about Canada’s Brown Holocaust until I was an adult. [...] My personal ignorance of ‘the schools’ made it difficult for me to understand the reaction of even the strongest Indian leaders. [...] nearly every Indian my age or older expressed shyness, nervousness, and a subservient attitude; I wondered where it came from.”<sup>147</sup> By including this confession as the foreword of her book, Sellars rejects the idea that only non-Indigenous Canadians are ignorant and uninformed about this history. This statement by Wilson shows that all Canadians should seize the opportunity of learning about this, as there is no shame in not being educated about it. This is not the only feature that makes the book accessible to a large audience: Sellars also included a map of the region she grew up in which shows numerous reserves and the St. Joseph’s Mission Residential School she attended from age seven to twelve and a genealogy that shows six generations of people affected by the policies of the Indian Act. In her Preface, Sellars dedicates a small paragraph to her suicide attempt at age seventeen. She says to have been driven to this act of despair after years of unspecified abuse and feelings of worthlessness, which all stem from the government’s attitude to Indigenous peoples. This made her decide to write down her story, for which she was criticized by other former students. “One of [the former students] said to me, ‘What pain have you suffered that qualifies you to speak on the schools?’” to which she did not have an answer.<sup>148</sup> More than twenty years after she was asked the question, she published her book in which she defends her choice to come forward with her experiences: “The residential school and non-Aboriginal institutions had a drastic effect on me, and I am *eminently qualified* to speak on that.”<sup>149</sup> It is striking that the former students feel ambivalent towards each other’s sufferings and their motivation to share their stories with an audience.

The memoir then follows a chronological setting, which starts with a brief history of her grandmother’s descendants and how they arrived in the Williams Lake, B.C. region where Sellars was eventually born in 1955. She is related to various tribes, but identifies most with the Secwepemc tribe into which her grandmother married in 1914. Her grandmother, ‘Gram’, was the most important adult influence Sellars had when growing up. Her mother had a difficult and violent relationship with her husband, and Sellars later reveals she is the product of a night in which her mother sought comfort in the presence of a kind stranger. Sellars uses this chapter to describe the rich cultural background of her family, the languages they spoke

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<sup>147</sup> Sellars, ix-x.

<sup>148</sup> Ibid, xv.

<sup>149</sup> Ibid, xvi, emphasis in the original.

and the relative carefree years she had there. This forms a contrast to the next chapter, in which Sellars says she was separated from her family when she was only five years old because she was hospitalized for tuberculosis. She had to stay there for two years and this is where she has the earliest memories of feeling inferior and feeling different. Those feelings became worse when she was required to attend residential school, and the chapters that deal with the experiences there are divided in themes such as the similarities between the school and prison, religion, abuse and bullying. These chapters form the basis of the textual analysis of the memoir, as it is where the author portrays the traumatic events that still haunt her. In these chapters, Sellars found the words to describe the daily humiliation with which she was confronted as an Indigenous child. She presents the experiences in a matter-of-factly manner, as if she distances herself from her childhood self. The supposed neutrality with which she describes how she was beaten and served rotten food reveals this was common practice to her. She did not know differently and being a child, she was unable to fully comprehend the absurdity of life at the residential school. To prevent the memoir from becoming too difficult to stomach for a wide audience, Sellars provides a counter narrative in which she describes the good memories she has of the place. However, these happy memories all have to do with a child's resilience and adaptability, and not with the kindness of the staff or the level of education at the institution.

Sellars was only allowed to leave the school and visit her family during the Christmas and Summer breaks and in the Summer of 1967, the attendance law was changed, which made it possible for Indigenous children to attend day schools. This meant that Sellars was for the first time in a classroom with non-Indigenous children, of whom she was instructed they were superior to her. It was to her surprise that she often found out to be much smarter than her white fellow pupils, but she quickly learned this would make no difference to her future. She started to rebel against her grandmother and eventually moved in with her mother. This is when she discovered the numbing features of alcohol, which would relieve her of the pain she felt for being an Indigenous woman. The three chapters after the ones about the residential school essentially show the lasting impact the teachings of the school had on her when becoming an adult. She eventually left school without graduating aged sixteen and met the man who would later become her husband, Dayton Mack. A year later she tried to commit suicide, which closes the story started in the Preface. What made her find the strength to attain a positive outlook on life was motherhood. She gave birth to a daughter in 1974, and she recalls how she was still in hospital when a nurse came up to her with the request to sign papers she had given the young mother: "I asked her what they were, and she said, 'Adoption

papers.’ I thought they were going to make me sign the papers. I panicked and got very upset. Only then did she back away, ‘Okay, okay. We just thought you might want to give the baby up.’ *At no time* had I indicated to anyone that I was thinking of giving up my baby. It makes me wonder how many other Aboriginal girls lost their babies this way.”<sup>150</sup> This excerpt clearly shows how the adoption policies known as the Sixties Scoop affected the lives of Indigenous peoples and especially young mothers. It is only now that Sellars understands how women were tricked into giving up their child for adoption. Even though her children were born in a time in which most residential schools were already closed, she still had to make sure they were not affected by other assimilation policies. A second baby was born to Sellars and Mack in 1975 and in 1982, they adopted Sellars’ nephew, whose parents were for reasons unknown unable to raise their son.

Although motherhood was a bliss to Sellars, she felt remorse for not finishing high school, which is why she attended classes in order to get a diploma. She also got into college in Kamloops to receive a degree in bookkeeping, and became the first post-secondary graduate in her community in 1986. Being able to earn money made her financially independent from Mack, whom she divorced around that time. She moved back to Soda Creek and started working as an administrator for her community. In April 1987, she ran for the position of Chief in Soda Creek, and won the election. She helped organizing the first National Conference on Residential Schools in Vancouver in 1991. This was a year after she had met Chief Bill Wilson, who was a respected activist for the rights of Indigenous peoples.

The position of Chief gave Sellars new insights into herself and showed her she was capable of being a leading figure, despite have been taught different. When the opportunity came for her to run for a second term, she decided not to do it and pursue her lifelong dream of attending university. At the age of thirty-eight, she was accepted into the University of Victoria and studied History. She says this gave her many insights into the world and her place she held. These studies made her very critical of non-Indigenous scholars who present themselves as experts on Indigenous peoples after having lived in their company for a couple of years.<sup>151</sup> She used this attitude in her second term as Chief as she had to work together with the Department of Indian Affairs. It was at the same time that she received a second university degree, namely a bachelor of law.

She concludes her memoir on the note that she is, unlike some other Indigenous peoples around her, incapable of forgiving the Canadian government for its mistreatment of

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 186.

Indigenous peoples. She applauds several Indigenous peoples who have entered the political arena and who help make Indigenous peoples visible to non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. Writing down her memories in a chronological order made her see how events are related, which was not only important in understanding herself, but also in empathizing with people around her. She finally understood that she was not the only former student whose traumas continued to haunt her in later life. To some people, she noticed, the traumas had a devastating effect which often resulted in violent outbursts. This was also the case with her ex-husband Dayton. With her memoir, she asks Indigenous peoples to reconsider their judgement of other people, as their behavior will often have been inspired by a traumatic childhood. Of her non-Indigenous readers, she asks to support Indigenous peoples “instead of responding to us with the knee-jerking reaction that Aboriginal people get everything for nothing.”<sup>152</sup> In her final remarks, she is thankful for not having ended up as “one of the terrible statistics of Aboriginal people.”<sup>153</sup> She has finally found peace with herself and writing her memoir has definitely helped her reach that. Thus, it can be concluded that being able to help others with her accounts has given Sellars a sense of healing in the same manner as was described by Gold.

In a memoir, it is relatively easy to see what strategies are employed to make use of the healing function literature can have. In a novel, although slightly more hidden, such strategies can also be identified. Carol Daniels, who is a member of the Cree First Nation, Saskatchewan, published her debut novel in 2015.<sup>154</sup> In the novel, Sandy is adopted by a loving white Canadian family of Ukrainian descent. She only knows about her heritage through books, but these are all written by non-Indigenous Canadians. The metaphor used to describe this is of a house she enters which features a reprint of Van Gogh’s *Sunflowers*. Sandy then remarks: ““Someday I want to be able to buy original art instead of prints. The colours and textures are so much more vibrant. But for now I can only afford prints, so there you go.””<sup>155</sup> It is as if Sandy is used to be satisfied with a reprint - an interpretation of the original – until she can afford it, literally but also mentally cope with the implications this will have. It foreshadows that Sandy will one day become more acquainted with her cultural background.

The novel, set in the 1980s, is structured in an unchronological fashion, and begins

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 191.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid.

<sup>154</sup> Daniels has succeeded in shielding her date of birth from the internet, and in her e-mail correspondence she stated that the fear of identity theft was the reason for doing so.

<sup>155</sup> Daniels, 19.

when Sandy meets Blue, a mysterious officer she quickly falls in love with. Although they never get involved in a serious relationship, because Blue is already in a relationship, he remains a reappearing figure throughout her life. From her conversations with Blue she has as a twenty-something, she learns a different attitude to being an Indigenous person. Sandy has always felt as if she had to prove she was worthy and she greatly suffered from feelings of inferiority and insecurity due to her skin colour. This led her, aged five, to hurt herself in the bathtub with a rough scrub brush. “The little girl scrubbed, scrubbed, scrubbed her skin, so hard her forearms turned raw and started to bleed. But there was no crying. Sandy’s physical pain was nothing compared to the emotional trauma of being so different. There was only one solution: scrub, scrub, scrub away the brown.”<sup>156</sup> The image evoked is so powerful and vivid that it could be recognized by readers who might in their childhood have felt different and excluded. Blue, on the other hand, grew up on the reservation with his alcoholic mother. It is for her that Blue becomes a police officer so make sure he can support her, whilst moving out of the reservation himself. He wants to fight crime and prove that not all Indigenous peoples choose the wrong path. He seems to be less troubled than Sandy, but he is in a difficult and mysterious romantic relationship with a woman. His attitude to life is that it just happens and you have to move along with it. This is widely different from Sandy’s perspective, who always tries to improve matters and secure a higher position in life. Sandy is a career-driven woman who works in the media. She is the only Indigenous person working there and this results in a lot of racist remarks from colleagues.

The events are constantly interrupted by fragments of Sandy’s childhood memories. These will often come when she is with Blue, who shows her that her ideas of Indigenous peoples do not match with the reality he grew up in. Sandy recounts how she once had a sister, who was – like her – coerced from her biological parents and placed in the caring hands of her adoption family. Without Sandy knowing why, her sister Betsy was taken away by child care services and never returned. Sandy later learned Betsy had had a difficult childhood in various foster homes and eventually disappeared from the state’s radar. It shows how the arbitrariness of the adoption system and how it did little for the wellbeing of the child.

While Sandy was initially confronted with racism at work, she becomes a respected reporter with a good reputation. She befriends Kyle, a white man who is very interested in the traditions and values of Indigenous peoples. Upon asking Sandy what she knows about her heritage, “it saddens [him] to realize that he probably knows more about Sandy’s Aboriginal

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<sup>156</sup> Ibid, 28-29.

culture than she does.”<sup>157</sup> Through him, Sandy learns the appropriate way to talk about Indigenous peoples and she becomes aware of her own inherent racism. Around the same time, she learns she has extended family and meets her biological family. To become more acquainted with the Indigenous culture in Saskatchewan, she starts visiting a tribe and learns that, despite her skin colour, she is not by everyone readily accepted as an Indigenous woman. While working on her knowledge of Indigenous culture, she also becomes more successful as a reporter.

In search of a good story, Sandy wants to raise awareness of vulnerable women, particularly street workers, who are abused by police officers. Together with her colleague and friend Kyle she turns herself into a possible victim by posing on the street at night, dressed up so nobody will recognize her. She is picked up by two officers and they want to drive her to a spot they admit having taken multiple women to. Once the police car is seen driving in another direction than ordered, an officer asks the two men if everything is fine. That officer is Blue, but he does not recognize the woman in the back of the car and, although he is suspicious of the story his colleagues tell him, he lets the men drive off. Sandy is deeply saddened that an Indigenous police officer, who has probably heard of the stories of officers abusing Indigenous women, would let something like this happen. Luckily, one of the members of the tribe, who knows about the infamous spot, is there to rescue her just in time before the officers could try to do her harm.

This experience is traumatic for Sandy and leaves her heartbroken. She almost falls victim to her own demons trying to destroy the confidence she has gained over the years. Eventually, it is this thought that helps her fight her depression: “She’s finally admitted that she’s been living too long in a place of profound sadness, having been conditioned to turn away and despise what is most precious. What she’s been seeking? An identity. She found it at that powwow, and the feeling was strengthened even further in getting to know Joe.”<sup>158</sup> Joe is her contact at the tribe and the man who rescued her. Kyle and he took Sandy to a powwow to show her one of her culture’s most important traditions.

In a chapter called “Gathering Strength,” she is once more confronted with her trauma, with which the author seems to be wanting to make a point of showing traumas are not easily resolved, but can continue to haunt people for the rest of their lives. Her friends lift her spirits, but she cannot rest until she has come to terms with her trauma. Meanwhile, one of the officers that tried to assault her is confronted with the tapes Sandy has made of the event and

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<sup>157</sup> Ibid, 170.

<sup>158</sup> Ibid, 191.

commits suicide. This triggers Sandy to get on with her life and once she listens to the tapes, she is able to pick up her life as a -now TV- reporter. She finds peace with what happened to her when she is adopted by Joe in a name-giving ceremony and she is now also part of an Indigenous tribe. The epilogue, which is set in 2015, shows her on the reservation on the day she receives a Lifetime Achievement Award for her extraordinary work in television and later film. “Instead of just reporting on what other people were saying and doing, she found that by producing films she could speak up too. She found her own way of telling her people’s stories properly and fully: with reverence and without stereotype.”<sup>159</sup> Sandy has clearly found healing through her career and she is portrayed as a woman who is content with her life and what she has achieved, despite her roaring twenties. Like Sellars, Sandy has returned to the reservation after having been taken away from it in infancy. This signals that the reservation is by both Sellars and Daniels, through Sandy, seen as home. Sandy and Sellars have both found a home and it is there that they have learned to accept themselves and come to peace with their traumas. Sandy also learns of Blue’s fate, who became an alcoholic and who has driven time and again to the reservation where Sandy lives, only to return before he had spoken to her, too afraid of what she would say. He finally lost control over the steering wheel one time when he was again on his return from the reservation and died. While he was once the one with a promising career with which he tried to defy stereotypes, he lost himself in alcohol and guilt that troubled him and eventually led to his downfall.

The story of Sandy resembles that of Carol Daniels in a number of ways. Both were forcefully put up for adoption and both grew up in a loving family. Daniels still works as a journalist and she became Canada’s first Indigenous woman to anchor a national newscast in 1989. She was so successful that she eventually won the same award given to Sandy in the epilogue. As stated before, Daniels is a very private person and rarely gives interviews in which she reveals something about her personal life. Instead, she has published poetry, short story collections and now this novel to speak for her.

Both Sellars and Daniels belong to the generation of Indigenous people that were directly affected by the discriminatory policies of the Indian Act. This thesis argues that similarities can be found in the literary representation of trauma of Jewish survivors of the Second World War and Indigenous peoples who have suffered from policies of the Indian Act.

In Native Studies, a development can be seen since the late 1980s where scholars draw

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<sup>159</sup> Ibid, 250.



comparisons between the Nazi Holocaust and the unrecognized genocide to which the Indigenous peoples throughout the Americas had for long been subjected. One of the first scholars to do so was Russell Thornton, who published his study *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History Since 1492* in 1987.<sup>160</sup> Later studies by scholars such as David E. Stannard (1992) and Ward Churchill (1997) explicitly use the term Holocaust to refer to the violence and injustice inflicted upon Indigenous peoples since the settler's arrival.<sup>161</sup> The usage of the term could also be seen in the Foreword to Sellars' memoir written by Chief Bill Wilson, who referred to it as the "Brown Holocaust."<sup>162</sup> In the theory of writing about the (Nazi) Holocaust, memory, the representation of the atrocities and writing about the 'unspeakable' all form a crucial part of the analysis. A distinction is made between the generations that write about the Holocaust and their representation of it. Geoffrey Hartman argues that the first generation of victims, also known as the eyewitness generation, returns to the traumatic events in their literature, despite their sufferings.<sup>163</sup> Jessica Lang says about this that "In effect, survivors call up events that they experienced first-hand, events to which they have a direct relation and which retain the power of direct experience for them and their readers."<sup>164</sup> Thus, it can be said that the first generation can be recognized by a return to the trauma and they use their literary voice to ensure this history cannot be forgotten. Although Sellars described her traumas in later life in a matter-of-factly manner, she recreates the actual events in a vivid way that resembles Daniels' portrayal of Sandy scraping off her brown skin. Both authors return to the state of humiliation, shame and self-loathing, which they poignantly portray in their literature. Knowing that these authors belong to the eyewitness generation, such excerpts cannot easily be forgotten. This is also the challenge of the first generation, as they rely on their memory, and there might be some time between the experience and the written account of it. What then becomes clear is the "utter inadequacy of memory" to convey an experience exactly as it happened.<sup>165</sup> Time is not the only disadvantage in the representation of memory; the recollection of the experiences might have been severely

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<sup>160</sup> Russel Thornton, *American Indian Holocaust and Survival: A Population History Since 1492* (Norman, Ok.: 1987).

<sup>161</sup> David E. Stannard, *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Ward Churchill, *A Little Matter of Genocide: Holocaust and Denial in the Americas 1492 to the Present* (San Francisco: City Light Books, 1997).

<sup>162</sup> Sellars, ix.

<sup>163</sup> Geoffrey Hartman, ed., *Holocaust Remembrance: The Shapes of Memory* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1994), 18.

<sup>164</sup> Jessica Lang, "The History of Love, the Contemporary Reader, and the Transmission of Holocaust Memory," *Journal of Modern Literature* 33, no. 1 (Fall 2009): 45.

<sup>165</sup> Lang, 49.

affected by the traumatic impact they will have had, especially if these events happened in the authors' childhood.

This thesis has also selected authors who did not experience the Sixties Scoop, nor did they attend a residential school. This generation is referred to as the second-generation, who are situated at a "further temporal and spatial remove from the decimated world of their parents."<sup>166</sup> They have not lived through the Holocaust like their parents, but they are still burdened by the weight of its legacy. The second generation grew up in a life in which the remnants of the traumatic experiences were still very tangible, as their lives will have been affected by their traumatized parents. The second-generation writers do not have their own memories to rely on, but instead have to recreate and re-imagine those experiences, and Hirsch describes this 'postmemory', memories created after the events have happened, as an "imaginative investment and creation."<sup>167</sup> Their representation of the traumas will have been influenced by accounts of the first-generation survivors, but a literary recreation of these accounts will always reveal a void between the two versions. The difficult task for the second generation is to confront the Holocaust with a temporal and spatial distance to the event. Alan Berger, who has researched the themes that occur in American second-generation Holocaust survivors, discovered that this generation often writes about theodicy and suicide.<sup>168</sup> While the theme of theodicy is, for evident reasons, not present in the literature of second-generation Indigenous Holocaust survivors, examples of suicide can certainly be found in their literature. Death also appeared in the works of Daniels and Sellars, but even if it could be assumed that suicide was the cause of death, details were never given.<sup>169</sup>

The remaining literature, two poetry collections and a short-story collection, will now briefly be introduced, before the textual analysis will follow. It is in that final section that further examples that clarify the distinction between the two generations will be uncovered.

The first poetry collection, *Burning in this Midnight Dream* (2016), is from Louise Bernice Halfe (1953).<sup>170</sup> She is an established Cree poet who was raised on the Saddle Lake Indian Reserve in Alberta. Halfe also publishes under her Cree name, Sky Dancer. She attended the Blue Quills Residential School in St. Paul, Alberta from the age of seven. Like Sellars, the attendance regulations changed when she was still there, which enabled her to

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<sup>166</sup> Marianne Hirsch, "Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile," *Poetics Today* 17, no. 4 (1996): 659.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Alan L. Berger, *Children of Job: American Second-Generation Witnesses to the Holocaust* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1997), 184.

<sup>169</sup> Sellars recalls her brother's suicide, and hints at the possibility of Dayton having taken his own life. See: Sellars, 98 and 160.

<sup>170</sup> Louise Bernice Halfe, *Burning in this Midnight Dream* (Regina: Coteau Books, 2016).

attend a public school in St. Paul as a teenager. She left her family and the reservation when she was sixteen and started writing down her experiences at the residential school. She has a Bachelor degree of the University of Regina and lives in Saskatoon.<sup>171</sup> Her latest poetry collection deals with the legacy of colonial violence and the residential school experience, and she elaborates on her motive to do so in the Preamble. “Now we seek to define reconciliation. We must first know the deeper truth however. Celebrate the survivors and the lost. Understand the way forward. At the least get out of the way. We will survive as a people. Rise up and be proud.”<sup>172</sup> This excerpt, which comes after a paragraph that describes the horrors that are “courtesy of the Canadian Government [and of the] Canadian public,” clarifies her motive to publish this collection. The collection will remember those who have suffered from the policies and will give strength so that Indigenous peoples can reclaim their land. Halfe will have had to return to her trauma in order to write it down and share it with others, who will hopefully be strengthened after having read it. Halfe has explicitly stated she wanted her poetry collection to be a healing mechanism to readers: “In order to go forward in a healing way, we need to go into that darkness and rip it out and give it legs to walk away from us once it's been told.”<sup>173</sup> She thus says that she needs to confront her traumas in order to move forward and achieve a sense of healing. This could also explain why most of the poems are written from the perspective of a first-person narrator. This removes the distance between the narrator and the reader and intensifies the reading experience as the reader is drawn into the trauma.

The second poetry collection is from Lisa Bird-Wilson (date unknown), a Cree-Métis artist from Saskatchewan. *The Red Files* (2016) is her debut collection which reflects on the legacy of the residential schools.<sup>174</sup> Although her date of birth is shielded from the internet, she is young enough not to have attended a residential school. Bird-Wilson did extensive research in archives on the matter of the residential schools, which inspired her to write about them. Traces of this research can be found in her poetry, which includes references to previously hidden documents, some of which still protect the names of abusers through black bars.

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<sup>171</sup> Selina Boan, “Louise Bernice Halfe,” *Nineteen Questions*, June 21, 2017, <https://nineteenquestions.com/2017/06/21/louise-bernice-halfe/> (accessed June 30, 2017).

<sup>172</sup> Halfe, ix.

<sup>173</sup> Shelagh Rogers, “Louise Bernice Halfe on Reconnecting with her Cree Heritage through Poetry,” *CBC The Next Chapter*, April 4, 2016, <http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thenextchapter/a-classic-canadian-jazz-story-and-bucking-canlit-stereotypes-1.3512624/louise-bernice-halfe-on-reconnecting-with-her-cree-heritage-through-poetry-1.3512659> (accessed May 29, 2017), par. 2.

<sup>174</sup> Lisa Bird-Wilson, *The Red Files* (Gibsons, BC: Nightwood Editions, 2016).

Unlike Halfe's collection, Bird-Wilson chose to divide the poems into three nameless categories. However, the first group of poems describes life at a residential school, usually seen from the perspective of an omniscient narrator. This creates the opposite effect of Halfe's poetry, and is another sign of Bird-Wilson being a second-generation survivor. In the second group of poems, life after the residential school and the traumas that people bear with them are portrayed. This group also includes poems that deal with court cases and the reports that could be found in the archives. The third group opens with a poem called "The Apology", in which Steven Harper's 2008 apology is criticized for its inability to actually bring change to the lives of Indigenous peoples. The message of this poem corresponds to what Eva Mackey claims about Harper's motive to issue the apology, which we have seen in chapter two.

The collection opens with a quote from Justice Murray Sinclair: "The road we travel is equal in importance to the destination we seek. There are no shortcuts. When it comes to truth and reconciliation, we are all forced to go the distance."<sup>175</sup> He spoke these words to the Canadian Senate Standing Committee on Aboriginal Peoples on September 28, 2010. It shows that, although Bird-Wilson belongs to another generation than Halfe, she also wants to reveal the 'truth' in through her poetry collection. What she means by that is that she wants to remove the unknown stories from the archives and give them the (inter)national attention they deserve. It could be said that by delving into her past and uncover the history that will have troubled her ancestors, she produces a healing mechanism for herself. She can come to terms with her inability to completely comprehend the traumas that influenced the generation before her. The form of healing she tries to achieve is one where she can lift some of that burden and remove some of the second-generation survivors' guilt.

In a thesis that highlights a variety of literary genres and styles, a short-story collection could not be overlooked, as short-story collections hold a prominent position in Canadian literature. Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (date unknown), presents herself as a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer and artist.<sup>176</sup> She is a member of the Alderville First Nation in Ontario and holds a PhD from the University of Manitoba. She is specialized in the meaning and importance of land to Indigenous peoples and has taught the subject for over a decade until her promotion. She has written and edited seven books and short-story collections and also works as a musician in which she combines poetry, rhythm, storytelling and song writing. The collection that forms part of this thesis is *Islands of Decolonial Love* (2013), which

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<sup>175</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>176</sup> This description comes from her own website. See: "About," *Leanne Simpson.ca*, n.d. <https://www.leannesimpson.ca/about/> (accessed May 12, 2017).

includes a nine-track album.<sup>177</sup> The album is accessible on her website and is a collaboration between Simpson and Indigenous musicians and together they perform nine chapters, which could certainly be seen as poems.

Simpson is definitely interested in the esthetics of writing. She does not capitalize words and her sentences often read like a train of thought. Her style is very different from the other authors and she presents a variety of perspectives and narrators. In general, it can be said that the collection focuses on the contemporary life of Indigenous peoples in Canada and the challenges they face as outcasts. Her stories are situated both on the reserve and in small towns and cities outside the reserves. Throughout her collection, she seems eager to show there is not one image that perfectly captures an Indigenous person. She tackles stereotypes, only to confirm them later. She includes narrators who are critical of the government policies, but also voices that have been taught to expect nothing of the federal government. Simpson thus presents an array of themes, but colonial violence is an often-recurring one. It also appears in a quote by Junot Díaz, which forms one of the three epigraphs: “the kind of love that i was interested in, that my characters long for intuitively, is the only kind of love that could liberate them from that horrible legacy of colonial violence. i am speaking about decolonial love...is it possible to love one’s broken-by-the-coloniality-of-power self in another broken-by-the-coloniality-of-power prison?”<sup>178</sup> What this excerpt shows is that his characters always long for love, decolonial love in his words. Love is in this case the healing mechanism and is needed to confront their reality of living in a colonial prison. Simpson evokes this prison in one of her stories, “buffalo on,” in which it is made clear that mothers today raise their children “to survive a war that the other side invests millions in convincing people it doesn’t exist.”<sup>179</sup> This is the metaphorical prison of Díaz and signifies how, in Simpson’s case, Indigenous people still face challenges that are not recognized by the Canadian government.

Simpson has so many observations and comments on so many injustices with which Indigenous peoples are faced today, that only a small selection of stories is really relevant to this thesis. Nevertheless, a thesis that explores healing mechanisms and the representation of trauma in contemporary Canadian literature written by Indigenous female authors, can only benefit from such a critical voice.

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<sup>177</sup> Leanne Simpson, *Islands of Decolonial Love* (Winnipeg: ARP Books, 2013).

<sup>178</sup> Junot Díaz, interview by Paula M. L. Moya, *Boston Review*, June 27, 2012

[http://bostonreview.net/archives/BR37.4/junot\\_diaz\\_paula\\_moya\\_2\\_oscar\\_wao\\_monstro\\_race.php](http://bostonreview.net/archives/BR37.4/junot_diaz_paula_moya_2_oscar_wao_monstro_race.php) (accessed August 4, 2017).

<sup>179</sup> Simpson, “buffalo on,” in: *Islands of Decolonial Love*, 87.

The themes that will now be subject to the textual analysis are life at a residential school, abuse and adoption. Striking examples of how the themes are portrayed by the authors will be given and analyzed in order to deduce how a form of healing is achieved.

### **3.1: *I will not Speak Indian Anymore: Life at a Residential School***

The residential schools appear both in a memorized and imagined form, as both the first and second generation use them as the setting for the poems and memoir. Sellars argues in her memoir that these schools were a “breeding ground for destruction,” which have affected all the decisions she made later in life as “the experience resulted in a restricted world view.”<sup>180</sup> Throughout her childhood at the residential school, she was given such a profoundly negative image of Indigenous peoples that it took her years to find peace with her Indigenous heritage.

One of the first things Sellars remembers from the St. Joseph’s Mission was that all the boys and girls were assigned a number upon arrival, in her case number One, which is why she gave her memoir this title.<sup>181</sup> The schools took away part of her identity by no longer calling her by her name, but by reducing her to a number. This was a traumatic experience, which stayed with people long after they had left the residential school. Sellars gives the example of her grandmother, who, ninety years after having left the school, still remembered the number she was given.<sup>182</sup> The use of numbers also comes back in Bird-Wilson’s poem “Miss Atwater’s Class.”<sup>183</sup> This poem describes how ‘the Indian’ was silenced in a child, that quickly became

straight-faced,  
never smiling, never  
frowning, unreadable  
as if she willed her young self long  
ago to stop scenting the trap line,<sup>184</sup>

The new presence was created to ‘hide a vivid memory, pushed / aside: dense sage /’ and to ease the transition into a western girl.<sup>185</sup> Memory, which functions differently in both generations of survivors, is what is suppressed here. By creating a new appearance for the

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<sup>180</sup> Sellars, 112 and xiv.

<sup>181</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>182</sup> Ibid. The number was twenty-seven.

<sup>183</sup> Bird-Wilson, “Miss Atwater’s Class,” in: *The Red Files*, 17.

<sup>184</sup> Ibid.

<sup>185</sup> Ibid.

pupils, the residential school staff tried to remove the memories children had of their appearance at the reservation. Bird-Wilson ‘remembers’ this, or rather uncovers this as she has no personal memories of such an event, which makes this detail in the history of the residential school practices part of the collective memory of Canadians.

On the first day of school, all personal belongings were taken away and hair was cut and treated with the heavy pesticide DDT.<sup>186</sup> Hair is a significant theme in Indigenous literature, as was also demonstrated by Tomson Highway, and is strongly associated with traditionalism and “symbols of cultural identity.”<sup>187</sup> The cutting of hair is seen as an attempt to reduce individuality, while it also signifies that Indigenous children had become subordinate. Although Daniels does not set her novel at a school, she describes a nightmare Sally has, in which her hair is chopped and coloured. Sandy dreams she is only allowed on television with a different haircut, because it is deemed “too ethnic” and “unprofessional” to appear with her own hair. “She awakens [...] in a panic, but not for the worry that her hair is short. She finds herself sobbing, knowing that in her dream her long black hair began to change colour- from black to blonde.”<sup>188</sup> The idea that Indigenous people are more respected when they adopt a Euro-Canadian style of dress is what is stressed here. The residential schools did essentially the same by giving the children a western haircut and new clothes. The humiliation of implying children were dirty upon their arrival enhances the feeling of inferiority. By styling the children in the same fashion, their sense of individuality was also taken away, which is clearly illustrated in the poem “Girl with the Short Hair” by Bird-Wilson:

if I wanted to describe the girl to you in a poem I might say the short-  
haired one but they’ve all got short hair and she’s more than that any-  
way<sup>189</sup>

The narrator sees differences between the girl the narrator wants to describe and the other girls, but the narrator cannot find the words to pinpoint these differences. The narrator may see differences in skin tone, features and posture, but the narrator is aware that these small differences in an old photo are not enough to make an individual stand out. The children have all been made to look the same and this poem highlights the loss of individualism. She

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<sup>186</sup> Sellars, 32. Sellars also mentions that DDT was banned in Canada in the early 1970s, because it was proven harmful to animals. The fact that it had been used on children for decades was not mentioned as a reason to ban it.

<sup>187</sup> Mark Shackleton, “Tomson Highway: Colonizing Christianity Versus Native Myth – From Cultural Conflict to Reconciliation,” in *Missions of Interdependence: a Literary Directory*, ed. Gerhard Stilz (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2002), 45.

<sup>188</sup> Daniels, 149.

<sup>189</sup> Bird-Wilson, “Girl with the Short Hair,” in: *The Red Files*, 16.

dedicated another poem, “Mourning Day,” to the loss of hair, and the following quotation poignantly exemplifies how this affected girls:

“fat braids remember  
cry like useless ropes on the floor  
the girls long, at least  
to step over them  
in quiet ceremony  
woman-power mimicry  
to mark the passage  
a final regret”

Bird-Wilson remarks how the older girls, used to this practice, quickly act as if the loss of hair does not alter their sense of womanhood, while the young girls are a “trembling clump of girlflesh,” who “mourn the loss of their hair.”<sup>190</sup> Memory again returns and this time it is the hair that is given the power to remember. This emphasizes the importance of hair to Indigenous peoples and the idea that even though the hair was cut off, it was still meaningful. The loss of hair is presented as a traditional ceremony and the solemn phrase “step over them in quiet ceremony” is a powerful depiction of what it was like to lose such an important feature. The “stepping over” the braids indicates healing, as if the children are past a state of mourning.

To Halfe, the long hair was, beside their language and parental love, one of many things that children had lost when they returned home.<sup>191</sup> Children were forbidden to speak any other language than English and Sellars says that none of her grandparents’ descendants could speak their native languages.<sup>192</sup> Those who had learnt the languages were soon taught to forget them. Bird-Wilson, who researched this topic, has written in “This Day”:

“the Cree child, kâ-nêwonâskatêw’s grandson, works  
at perfecting his one hard line  
on the board: *I will not speak Indian anymore*  
one hundred times”<sup>193</sup>

The teachers at the residential schools were given instructions to assimilate the children and one of the first measures was to force them to unlearn their native language. This means that a

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<sup>190</sup> Bird-Wilson, “Mourning Day,” in: *The Red Files*, 11.

<sup>191</sup> Halfe, “Con Game,” in: *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 24.

<sup>192</sup> Sellars, 44.

<sup>193</sup> Bird-Wilson, “This Day,” in: *The Red Files*, 21.



variety of languages is nowadays endangered, as generations were forbidden from speaking those languages. A similar thing happened with traditional ceremonies, such as the potlatch, which were banned from 1885 to 1951. For decades, Indigenous peoples were prohibited from celebrating their culture in a traditional fashion, which has had, and according to some Indigenous women still has, a drastic impact on the role of women within Indigenous communities.<sup>194</sup>

Another thing children were deprived of was nutritious food. The quality of the food provided was so poor, that it not only physically, but also mentally affected children. This is illustrated by Halfe: “The fenced residential school. / I was famished, *wīhtikow* clawed inside / the turtle I had become. /”<sup>195</sup> This excerpt shows how children created a defense mechanism in order to survive the hunger they suffered. Children are described as “turtles”, as if they were capable of shielding themselves from the reality of food deprivation. Like a turtle that protects itself from danger by hiding in its shell. Sellars recalls how people were given the same unwholesome food day after day for years. Children were forced to eat rotten food, of which the leftovers were mixed with soup the next couple of days. If children refused to, or were simply unable to eat the food, they would be punished and famished.<sup>196</sup> That this led to starvation, is what Halfe portrays in her poem “His Name was Boy”:

When we were going without food and water,  
lamenting in the forest  
the sugar chewed both his legs  
ate his kidneys and took his breath.<sup>197</sup>

The images created by Halfe are very vivid and are clear examples of how first-generation survivors return to the trauma in order to achieve healing. It is as if Halfe, years after this has happened, is still not quite capable of comprehending what really happened at the institutions. She needs to write it down in order to believe it and this way, this sad chapter of the residential schools will not merely be part of her memory, but will find its place in the collective memory of the residential school history.

The authors have reflected upon the life-threatening circumstances at the institutions. Simpson describes in “buffalo on” how mothers raise their children nowadays “to survive a

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<sup>194</sup> Lenard Monkman, “Historical Ban on Potlatch Ceremony Has Lingering Effects for Indigenous Women, Author Says,” *CBC NEWS*, March 25, 2017, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/indigenous/historical-ban-spirituality-felt-indigenous-women-today-1.4036528> (accessed June 1, 2017).

<sup>195</sup> Halfe, “*wīisikan*- a bitter taste,” in: *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 25. According to the author’s note, *wīhtikow* means ‘cannibalistic spirit.’

<sup>196</sup> Sellars, 56-61.

<sup>197</sup> Halfe, “His Name was Boy,” in: *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 23.

war that the other side invests millions in convincing people it doesn't exist."<sup>198</sup> This implies that children need to learn to defend themselves, because they still risk being treated differently. However, according to the narrator, today's situation is nothing like it was before as she says that "it was way worse for the kids locked in the basement of that residential school with no food and no water for days on end. it was way worse for those kids when those priests invented their own makeshift electric chair. remember that. [...] you don't even know how lucky you are."<sup>199</sup> Simpson's short story implies that even today, Indigenous people put their sufferings into perspective by relating it to the atrocities of the residential schools. She also draws a connection between the sufferings at the schools and today's circumstances, with which she means that the traumas that were inflicted upon children at the residential schools cannot be forgotten. Indigenous peoples, but also non-Indigenous Canadians, share this history and by memorizing it, they can prevent something like that to ever happen again. Memory thus functions as a healing mechanism, because it is the only tool that can help people understand each other. In Simpson's short story, the traumas that stem from years of colonial violence and mistreatment have a destructive effect on Indigenous peoples today as they are inherited by every new generation. Children grow up with a sense of inferiority and misunderstanding, as they are taught to fight battles which are seemingly absent in the dominant society. Bird-Wilson has another approach to help people remember the pain, by clearly depicting the hunger at the institutions: "under her dress her ribs rub / raw against the hungry inside / of her belly /."<sup>200</sup> This is again a very powerful image, but it should be noted that Bird-Wilson uses the third-person perspective to describe the pain. She, but also her narrator, is more distant to the sufferings of the little girl.

In the introduction of this chapter, it was said that Indigenous peoples wanted to create a counternarrative for the existing one that often excludes them. Sellars provides a counternarrative for the stereotype of the indifferent, mean, abusive staff that worked at the residential schools. Thus, she gives a counternarrative to the counternarrative, which shows that even though she had been taught to see people of her own heritage as one homogenous, inferior race, she could see differences between the white staff as a child. She gives the example of Pat Joyce, a cook who refused to follow the separate meal policy that ensured priests, nuns and the rest of the staff of better food. He sympathized with the children, who

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<sup>198</sup> Simpson, "buffalo on," in: *Islands of Decolonial Love*, 87.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid, 86.

<sup>200</sup> Bird-Wilson, "Black-Eyed Susan," in: *The Red Files*, 35.

were forced to eat “garbage” while watching the others enjoy their food. His controversial move brought change to this custom at the St. Joseph’s Mission in 1966.<sup>201</sup>

When speaking about the findings of the TRC, Commissioner Marie Wilson said that children attended schools which had cemeteries, but sometimes no playgrounds.<sup>202</sup> This heart-wrenching image appears most significantly in Bird-Wilson’s poem “Beside a Residential School.” Many of such schools were close to reservations and when the schools closed and the land became accessible again, the people living nearby could find the remains of children, who were buried in unmarked graves and often without the knowledge of the parents.<sup>203</sup>

“while grandmothers search out  
lost children,  
nearby, the Elders  
lightly drum  
singing the spirits home  
a handful of buttons and bone”<sup>204</sup>

The poem shows that the oldest generation made it their mission to find the unmarked graves of children who were “sent to slumber without a goodbye.” It also explains how Indigenous communities bring life and death together through music and traditions and the traditional ceremony is represented as a way of healing, because the children can finally get a burial in a traditional way. This will give healing to the older generation of survivors, who will have been very aware of the dangers they would expose children to when they were forced to send the children to the residential school. Simpson also seems to aim for a wider public, because she provides translations for every native word.

### **3.2: Speaking about the Unspeakable: Stories of Abuse**

Despite no longer being subjected to corporal punishment at the residential schools, Indigenous peoples are currently three times more likely to risk violence than non-Indigenous

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<sup>201</sup> Sellars, 60-61.

<sup>202</sup> Marie Wilson, “Truth and Reconciliation Northern Voices: Commissioner Marie Wilson,” *Northern Public Affairs* 3, no. 3 (August 2015): 8.

<sup>203</sup> The TRC concluded that of the 3,201 recorded deaths, 1,161 were unnamed. These were the children that were reported missing. It was one of the mandates of the TRC to find out who the anonymously buried had been. See: Truth and Reconciliation Commission, *Canada’s Residential Schools: Missing Children and Unmarked Burials. The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, (Montreal: McGill-Queens University Press, 2015), 4: 15.

<sup>204</sup> Bird-Wilson, “Beside a Residential School,” in: *The Red Files*, 30.

Canadians.<sup>205</sup> In the literature discussed in this thesis, violence to which Indigenous peoples are nowadays exposed is often linked to the traumas that stem from the abuse inflicted upon them since the settlers arrived. The first-generation writers have different approaches to sharing that experience with younger generations. Sellars openly describes how she was forced to kneel and pray for a god she was unfamiliar with. If she somehow misbehaved, for example by sitting on her heels, she would be punished. She remembers that even as a child “if I was given the choice between getting the strap and kneeling as a punishment, I would pick the strap. The strap is over within a few minutes and the pain is not as prolonged as with kneeling.”<sup>206</sup> The strap was also used to punish children who had wetted their bed, which often happened as children were scared, homesick and were forbidden to go to the lavatories as they pleased. Of the experience of getting beaten, Sellars says that it “became our morning ritual and [...] it became less of a shock [and] I knew to expect it.”<sup>207</sup> Halfe, on the other hand, is reluctant to share the experiences with others, both with the younger generations of Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous peoples. She gives examples of several forms of abuse in “Carry On”:

some were stripped, whipped  
handcuffed and electrocuted,  
bedwet sheets were gowns  
paraded up and down the dormitory.  
Others were forced to kneel for hours  
in front of the urinals.<sup>208</sup>

This image is so provokingly vivid and painful. Halfe returns to the traumas of physical abuse of being whipped and the humiliation of having to ‘parade’ with their dirty sheets. This is such a heartbreaking image and it shows courage of Halfe to include this traumatizing memory in her poetry collection, even if it were not based on a personal memory. Because she belongs to the eyewitness generation, she is capable of presenting such events in a way that closely resembles how they will have happened. Later generations will always be further removed from the experiences and thus from the traumatic impact it will have had on the first generation of survivors.

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<sup>205</sup> Canada, Department of Justice, “Aboriginal Victimization in Canada: A Summary of the Literature,” (Ottawa, Ont.: Government of Canada Publications, March 7, 2016) <http://www.justice.gc.ca/eng/rp-pr/cj-jp/victim/rd3-rr3/p3.html> (accessed May 28) par. 1.

<sup>206</sup> Sellars, 43.

<sup>207</sup> Sellars, 33.

<sup>208</sup> Halfe, “Carry On,” in: *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 58.

In the other poems, Halfe alludes to the intensity of the violence and traumas by denying others to hear about it:

“Now others ask me to turn my  
skin inside out.

They want to know how I survived this hot-coal trail.

I prefer to keep silence as my guest.

I want to keep my dead

from spilling. I don’t want to deal

with their writhing wounds.”<sup>209</sup>

The narrator’s inability to yet talk about the traumas signifies that it is too painful or difficult to find the words to describe what happened there. In “akawata – to long for,” Halfe gives another reason to keep the details private, as she is afraid they will become “a winter’s tale.”<sup>210</sup> She is thus afraid these personal, traumatizing memories will be reduced to good stories to tell on a cozy winter’s night to a room full of people. Instead, she wants to keep her stories private and protect them from losing their significance.

While Sellars aims to inform Canadians, “who are unaware of what happened in a country that proudly boasts of being one of the best places in the world to live,” Halfe shows that no matter how well-informed people are, they will never fully understand the impact those schools have had on their attendees.<sup>211</sup> The *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* investigated the violence inflicted upon children in residential schools and concluded that “The basic premise of resocialization, of the great transformation from ‘savage’ to ‘civilized,’ was violent. [...] In the vision of residential school education, discipline was the curriculum and punishment an essential pedagogical technique.”<sup>212</sup> Violence is here clearly linked to the residential schools and is not seen as a product of its time. This is also what Sellars remarks when she says that: “There is no reason why anyone, no matter how old, should have gotten that kind of treatment. People defending the churches try to justify giving the kids the strap because it was common in those days for school and parents to use corporal punishment. I am sure the kids in public school did not go home

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<sup>209</sup> Halfe, “nimihtaten – I grieve,” in: *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 6.

<sup>210</sup> Halfe, “akawata – to long for,” in *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 16.

<sup>211</sup> Sellars, xv.

<sup>212</sup> Canada, *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*, vol. 1, *Looking Forward, Looking Back* (Ottawa, Minister of Supply and Services Canada, 1996), pt. 2, “False Assumptions and a Failed Relationship,” chap. 10, “Residential Schools,” available via <http://caid.ca/RepRoyCommAborigPple.html> (accessed May 23, 2017), 349.

beaten black and blue from the strap.”<sup>213</sup> Sellars clarifies that children in residential schools were exposed to more extreme violence and the underlying thought is that this happened because the essence of the child, the Indigenous upbringing, was to be forcefully removed.

Although Sellars wants to inform non-Indigenous Canadians, she has also published her memoir to make the younger generations of Indigenous peoples understand their parents and grandparents. In her conclusion, she writes how her nephew came to her after having read the book: ““Maybe now I can forgive my dad for some of the things he did.”” Sellars says that is the reaction she wanted, because Indigenous peoples are still recovering from the teachings and practices of the residential schools and this has generated multiple social problems such as domestic violence, alcoholism and trust issues from which Indigenous communities currently suffer.<sup>214</sup> Bird-Wilson poignantly describes the damage the schools have done to their survivors in “Painter” in which a man has

paint so thick with childhood memories  
his wife has to scrape them away  
with a pallet knife  
before they harden hurtful  
and unproductive<sup>215</sup>

Bird-Wilson uses this poem to show how the schools have affected the mental health of students, which could have extremely devastating results. Such events, Bird-Wilson indirectly suggests, are the result of years of being abused by a system that was supported by the government. Bird-Wilson makes clear that the federal government is responsible for the social problems that continue to affect Indigenous individuals and communities today. In one of Halfe’s poems, it is indisputably the residential schools that have caused these traumas as she titled her most violent poem “Residential School Alumni.” It tells the story of the narrator’s uncle who shot almost his entire family dead. There is no explanation given for this gruesome act, other than the title.<sup>216</sup> Sellars acknowledges that the schools did irreparable damage to their pupils and she confesses that she was “emotionally crippled” when she tried to find her place in society.<sup>217</sup> She had never learnt to take care of herself, which is also mentioned by Halfe, whose narrator says:

“I didn’t know how to behave

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<sup>213</sup> Sellars, 86.

<sup>214</sup> Ibid, 190-91.

<sup>215</sup> Bird-Wilson, “Painter,” in: *The Red Files*, 49.

<sup>216</sup> Halfe, “Residential School Alumni,” in; *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 11.

<sup>217</sup> Sellars, 112.

didn't know what was expected

[...]

Silence and humiliation wove my umbilical cord

in this new womb.”<sup>218</sup>

Like Halfe's narrator, Sellars felt humiliated by the experiences of the school and it was the memory of the sexual abuse that invoked the suicide attempt when she was seventeen.<sup>219</sup> It was then that she fully realized she had been abused by one of the Brothers at the school when she was much younger and it took her even longer to realize one of her brothers had also been abused. One of her brothers died at the age of eighteen, and the circumstances of his death were so ambiguous that it was never established whether he had committed suicide or not. Sellars says he had become a mean and physically abusive man with whom she had had a difficult relationship during their teenage years. It took until the 1990s, when her tribal council studied the impact of the residential schools, that Sellars found out her brother had been abused: “Everything made sense then. I realized that, because he didn't know how to vent his anger, humiliation, fear and whatever other emotions he was feeling towards the real cause, he took out his rage on the easiest target, which usually happened to be me. [...] The demons that tortured him were very visible when he died.”<sup>220</sup> Thus, Sellars provides an explanation for the violent behavior that characterized many male survivors.

It is noteworthy that, unlike the other authors discussed, Bird-Wilson only writes about sexual abuse in a male context. In three poems, which can be read as a trilogy, she shows how the assault affected a boy's life. In the first poem, “The Finest in the Dominion,” a boy (“to name him is the challenge, when his has only been a number”) is offered the chance to drive the school bus by taking place on the headmaster's lap. Although he is too young to understand what he has just agreed to, the other children in the bus know what will happen to him, as it is said that they started calling him names.<sup>221</sup> The second poem tells the story of

one boy

who is many in a repeating shell game,

the boy whose prayers all reach

for home

his moshum and tobacco lake

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<sup>218</sup> Halfe, “*masakon – stripped*,” in: *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 5.

<sup>219</sup> Sellars, xiiv and 137.

<sup>220</sup> Sellars, 98-99.

<sup>221</sup> Bird-Wilson, “The Finest in the Dominion,” in: *The Red Files*, 26-27.

instead shakes the memory  
from his skin  
of hands  
unwelcome  
when he was ten and drew the attention  
of his teacher; now  
the only way he knows how  
to remove that touch,  
he hangs  
himself<sup>222</sup>

It invokes images of sexual abuse, which is why this second poem can be understood as the sequel to the first poem. The second poem shows what will happen to the unnamed boy who has been abused for years by people who were supposed to educate him. Bird-Wilson used the archives to prove these were not just incidents. This poem supports Berger's claim that second-generation Holocaust survivors are drawn to the theme of suicide. The third poem "Hundreds of Boys- A Response," is introduced with a note that informs the reader of "one of the worst known cases of abuse" by a "notorious administrator" who had admitted having abused "hundreds of boys."<sup>223</sup> This is the story of principal William Starr ("the stink of Starr in the air"), who pleaded guilty to sexually assaulting ten boys in 1993, but who claimed in 2000 that this number was much higher. He admitted to having abused hundreds of boys across Canada between 1950 and 1986. Remarkably, none of his victims said Starr forced them into abuse, but they recall how he "seduced them with treats and favours such as letting 10-year-olds steer a school bus."<sup>224</sup> As mentioned before, this notion was reimagined by Bird-Wilson in the poem "The Finest in the Dominion." In that poem, Bird-Wilson described how the headmaster tricked a boy into sitting on his lap, by promising him to steer a school bus. The same was promised to the boys in the case of William Starr, but they were all subjected to sexual abuse after having taken place on his lap.

Simpson demonstrates that suicide is not just an issue related to the residential schools. Even today Indigenous peoples have difficulty finding their place in society and accept themselves, which she illustrates in "it takes an ocean not to break." The narrator's child tried

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<sup>222</sup> Bird-Wilson, "Within the Circle of Civilized Conditions," in: *The Red Files*, 29.

<sup>223</sup> Bird-Wilson, "Hundreds of Boys – A Response," in: *The Red Files*,

<sup>224</sup> CBC News, "Residential School Principal Admits Assaulting Hundreds of Kids," *CBC News*, November 21, 2000, <http://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/residential-school-principal-admits-assaulting-hundreds-of-kids-1.245762> (accessed June 2,, 2017) par. 10.



to commit suicide, which took the narrator by surprise as she was “in love with the idea that finally we had given birth to a generation that didn’t have to spend their adult lives recovering from their childhoods.”<sup>225</sup> The narrator thus draws attention to the current generation that has not suffered from the direct effects of the residential schools, but is still greatly affected by their traumas. The narrator visits a therapist, a white woman who cries about the “‘aboriginal’ themed” traumas, which to the narrator are daily proceedings.<sup>226</sup> Even without stating it explicitly, Simpson makes it clear that therapy is not a common healing practice for Indigenous peoples.<sup>227</sup> As has been established before, Indigenous peoples find healing in stories and the practice of storytelling. The narrator in “it takes an ocean not to break” is advised to “lay out all of your indian shit” to see whether the therapist can provide the care needed specifically for Indigenous peoples.<sup>228</sup> Simpson points out that the Euro-Canadian society is not yet ready to help Indigenous peoples, because they cannot comprehend and understand what they still endure. Even though the residential school traumas have become part of conversation in parliament, there are still many traumas and instances which are not spoken of.

With the introduction of the National Inquiry, attention is given to thousands of possibly abused or victimized women. Through her poetry, Halfe gives those women a face. She also refers to Bill-31 and implies that Indigenous men were partly responsible for this act, as they refused to accept the mixed-raced children, the products of sexual abuse by non-Indigenous Canadians, into their communities.<sup>229</sup> Women were thus also discriminated from within their societies. Halfe’s poetry seems to suggest the position of women has not much improved as she describes how women were given the promise of power, for example because Bill-35 was repealed, but in effect are “still imprisoned”:

I see it too often thirty-year old mothers hurtled into hell eight children lost to them  
overwhelmed  
fathers absent. Men with empty wallets arms filled with needle tracks  
who still nestle in their duress?<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>225</sup> Simpson, “it takes an ocean not to break,” in: *Islands of Decolonial Love*, 79

<sup>226</sup> Ibid, 80.

<sup>227</sup> Simpson is not the only one who associates therapy with western healing practices: Halfe says therapy is too reminiscent of a confession in the Catholic sense of the word. As a former student, this will be an uncomfortable connection to Halfe and thus for many other survivors. See: Halfe, “*kisewatisiwin* – compassion,” in: *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 71.

<sup>228</sup> Simpson, “it takes an ocean not to break,” in: *Islands of Decolonial Love*, 80

<sup>229</sup> Halfe, “*ospwakan* – the pipe,” in: *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 66-67.

<sup>230</sup> Halfe, “*nipewin* – the bed,” in: *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 44.

The only poem Halfe has written about the sexual abuse of women, “*nipewin – the bed*,” takes a stance towards the phenomenon of victim shaming on social media. The narrator recalls how she was abused by her brother, by someone in a bar and by “the one who claimed he had the right to tear my limbs.” Like so many other women, she almost fell victim to “*wihtikow’s icy will*” and was traumatized by the things that were written about her on social media: “The victim is blamed. Me, I won’t wait for my skeleton to be found.”<sup>231</sup> Halfe criticizes society for not helping these women, even though the numbers of abuse and victimization have become public knowledge. Daniels points out that Indigenous men also have to take their responsibility in this, by introducing the Indigenous character Blue, who is a police officer and a love interest of Sandy’s. When investigating the alleged abuse of Indigenous women by police officers, Sandy goes undercover and is picked up by two white officers. Blue, who notices that his colleagues are taking a detour, asks them about it. Although he suspects the officers will harm the woman in the back of the car, who he does not know is Sandy, he does not act. Sandy is devastated and traumatized by the attempt of abuse and the inability of Blue to look out for women of his community.<sup>232</sup> Like Halfe, Daniels portrays how Indigenous women suffer from both the Indigenous and non-Indigenous societies.

### **3.3. The Sixties Scoop and the Question of Identity**

So far it has been established that generations of Indigenous peoples were left traumatized after having attended a residential school. This has sometimes resulted in outbursts of extreme violence and has had a tremendous impact on the self-image of both the first and second generation of survivors. However, the schools were not only traumatic to the attendees, but also for the parents, who were themselves often survivors and knew therefore about the practices. Sellars explains that her grandmother, who still had nightmares of the schools, was forced to send Sellars to St. Joseph’s Mission or she would be imprisoned. Sellars concludes these feelings of guilt and powerlessness must have been the reason people sought to ease their pain with drugs and alcohol.<sup>233</sup> Although the Mission had closed before her children were born, Sellars, as we saw above, only barely escaped having to give her children up for adoption. This experience made her wonder “how many other Aboriginal girls had lost their babies this way.”<sup>234</sup>

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<sup>231</sup> Halfe, “Unpacking the Knapsack,” in *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 54.

<sup>232</sup> Daniels, 203-05.

<sup>233</sup> Sellars, 31.

<sup>234</sup> *Ibid*, 147.

Most children, over 20,000 according to Daniels, were adopted during the Sixties Scoop and all the selected authors have written about the destructive and lasting effects this has had.<sup>235</sup> Daniels's protagonist Sandy was adopted by a Ukrainian family and grew up in a neighbourhood where she was the only brown-skinned child.<sup>236</sup> Throughout her life, she experienced a lot of racism and the most painful example is from her childhood years, when she was suspected of having stolen something on the basis of her skin colour: "She kept hearing the voices she'd overheard from the school office. *Indians steal. They can't be trusted.* It's what everyone in her white community thought in general."<sup>237</sup> She recalls how she had badly hurt herself at the age of five when she had tried to "scrub, scrub, scrub away the brown" with a rough brush.<sup>238</sup> When growing up, Sandy had a very low self-esteem due to her skin colour, but Sandy says that what affected her most were the unanswered questions: "*What are my roots? Where is that I truly belong?*"<sup>239</sup> Sandy even experienced this when she became successful at her job: "Just because you work here now, don't *ever* consider yourself one of us. You will always be inferior. It's the way you were born."<sup>240</sup> Even though one of her colleagues introduced her to a Cree community, not everyone accepts her, because they see her as a western, Euro-Canadian woman instead of a fellow Indigenous person. Sandy finds it difficult to unlearn the things she has been taught about Indigenous people, such as calling their clothing "costumes" and making fun of their accent.<sup>241</sup> Simpson connects this to authenticity, when her characters argue about whether or not to speak with an accent that is closely associated with Indigenous peoples.<sup>242</sup> Daniels shows with Sandy that through adoption, she has been conditioned to think of Indigenous peoples in a certain manner, and similar experiences can be seen in Sellars's memoir. She says her grandmother was "brainwashed into thinking Indians were inferior to White people" and she relayed that message on to the next generations.<sup>243</sup>

There are more references to the governmentally orchestrated adoptions in the selected literature. Bird-Wilson describes how an Indigenous child in a white family notices she is different: "secret sisters, lost siblings, twins – one baby kidnapped and sold by baby traders

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<sup>235</sup> Daniels, 29.

<sup>236</sup> Ibid, 28.

<sup>237</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid, 28. Halfe mirrors that image, but even more brutally in "*ahkameyimowin – determination,*" and "*wisakan – a bitter taste,*" both in: *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 17 and 25.

<sup>239</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>240</sup> Daniels, 47.

<sup>241</sup> Sellars 173 and 233-235.

<sup>242</sup> Simpson, "gezhihwazh," in: *Islands of Decolonial Love*, 105.

<sup>243</sup> Ibid, 83.

passed from hand to hand like a baton in a relay race [...] one of us is only a pretender: adopted.”<sup>244</sup> While Simpson claims “brown mamas [...] weren’t afforded the luxury of holding their babies,” Bird-Wilson alludes to the reason why so many children were adopted in “Sweep”, in which a father is often away for work, which makes it look as if the mother is single-handedly raising the children.<sup>245</sup> Just before the father would return home

“the welfare lady came to claim  
my mother’s babies  
[....]  
that’s the first time my mother  
twirled away in a kind of madness  
went on to birth more than one daughter,  
spare parts, she gifted each the same name  
so certain she’d never see any of them again”

This poem gives insight into the idea that the government deemed single mothers unfit to raise their children and sent foster care over to take away the children, who could be “saved” by having them grow up with Euro-Canadian families. By publishing this poem, this previous attitude of the federal government will not be forgotten. Bird-Wilson ensures that this history will not vanish from the minds of Indigenous peoples and hopes, by making her poetry accessible to a non-Indigenous readership, that it will enter the minds and memory of non-Indigenous peoples. Not only does writing down this history ensure it will not be forgotten, it will also help prevent such an attitude to ever become normal again.

A final note to this theme is that simply because the adopted children grew up with such families, did not mean they were saved the experience of sexual abuse:

“I boarded with a family whose opa  
tried  
to slip into my bed.”<sup>246</sup>

With this poem, Halfe reinforces the idea that not only residential schools left Indigenous peoples traumatized.

### **3.4. The “Much- Ballyhooded” Apology: Alternative Responses**

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<sup>244</sup> Bird-Wilson, “Cloud Naming,” in: *The Red Files*, 63.

<sup>245</sup> Simpson, “buffalo on,” in *Islands of Decolonial Love*, 86 and Bird-Wilson, “Sweep,” in: *The Red Files*, 74-75.

<sup>246</sup> Halfe, “On Board,” in: *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 18.

As we have seen above, the women authors in this selection have referred to a variety of themes that describe the pain Indigenous peoples have had to endure for centuries, but these authors do not only draw attention to the sufferings. They also use their voice to express how disappointed they are with the current relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government. Sellars writes in her concluding chapter about the possibility of reconciliation. She argues she is incapable of forgiving the Canadian government, because “Forgiveness allows the perpetrators to get away with not being accountable for their actions,” and “there can be no forgiveness for racism.”<sup>247</sup> It is important to Sellars that Euro-Canadians are taught about this particular history and that Indigenous peoples are granted control over their own lives. Only then can Canada move forward as an inclusive country to all. Simpson sees some other problems, as she describes that Indigenous peoples have always worked together with the Euro-Canadians, but have received nothing in return.<sup>248</sup> She also has one of her characters say that the Canadian flag does not represent Indigenous peoples.<sup>249</sup> They are thus still invisible to the Canadian government, even in the post-apology era. That apology is referred to in several ways. There is Sellars’s partner, Chief Bill Wilson, who writes in the foreword that the “much-ballyhooed” apology did not inform people of the connection between the church and state and their shared goal to reduce the number of Indigenous peoples in Canada. He uses the terms genocide and Brown Holocaust when introducing the topic of the residential schools, and thus Wilson criticizes the government’s decision not to acknowledge this history as a genocide. He is not the only one to question the intentions of the apology, as Bird-Wilson says:

“no, ticklish man, *we are sorry*  
 doesn’t drive a stake through the heart  
 of the monster with the bloody smile as you  
 pat your lips dry  
 with the bloom at your breast  
     *extraordinary resilience and courage*  
 doesn’t close  
 a sucking wound”<sup>250</sup>

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<sup>247</sup> Sellars, 189.

<sup>248</sup> Simpson, “nogojiwanong – *she asked them for help*,” in: *Islands of Decolonial Love*, 123.

<sup>249</sup> Simpson, “a love song,” in: *Islands of Decolonial Love*, 133.

<sup>250</sup> Bird-Wilson, “The Apology,” in: *The Red Files*, 56-57.

Bird-Wilson's poem is reminiscent of Eva Mackey's essay, in which she argued the government only wanted to apologize in order to have a clear conscience and thus an unblemished international profile.<sup>251</sup> Like Sellars, Bird-Wilson wants all the citizens of Canada to know what pain has been inflicted upon Indigenous peoples, but the latter are simply unable to gain more knowledge about certain subjects, because these are shielded from the public eye. This is illustrated in "The [black bar]'s Situation," which is based on a report about some obscure circumstances at one of the residential schools.<sup>252</sup> All the information necessary to deduce what happened and who were responsible is blackened out. It is only exemplary of the difficulties researchers and (relatives of) survivors encounter in their quest for the truth. Making the truth accessible for a larger audience seems to be the main goals for Daniels and Halfe, who have not included a message to the government. The events they describe and the time their work was published signifies their discontentment. Instead of addressing the government, Halfe uses the opportunity to highlight the strength of Indigenous peoples, who, despite the centuries of mistreatment, have never given up hope. Halfe states that

“we are like ants  
gathering crumbs  
dropped negligently by those  
knowledge keepers  
But  
we haven't deserted all the way.”<sup>253</sup>

This is the message all five authors want to convey. Their literature is a testimony of the sufferings of Indigenous children and women, but more importantly it is proof of their existence and resilience. The ability of Indigenous peoples to endure was once described by Basil Johnston and Louise Bernice Halfe used this quote as the title of one of her poems: “When you fall, you don't wallow in self-pity. You get up.”<sup>254</sup> However dark the images painted in the literature are, the authors retain hope of a future in which Canada is a more

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<sup>251</sup> Eva Mackey, “The Apologizer's Apology,” in: *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress*, ed. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013), 47-62.

<sup>252</sup> Bird-Wilson, “The [black bar]'s Situation,” in: *The Red Files*, 46-47. Although the author has not included information on the school, it is understood to be Brandon Industrial Institute (1895-1972).

<sup>253</sup> Halfe, “Lateral Practices,” in: *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 63.

<sup>254</sup> Halfe, “When You Fall, You Don't Wallow in Self-Pity. You Get Up,” in: *Burning in this Midnight Dream*, 62. Johnston originally spoke the words: “When you're felled, you don't wallow in self-pity. You get up.” He spoke these words during an interview with Sam McKegney of Queens University on December 4, 2007.

inclusive country. Memory and the representation of traumatic events is crucial in ensuring the policies, which until recently were carried out in the name of the Canadian government, will not be forgotten. The different generations of survivors all have their strategies to evoke the images and to make sure they become part of the collective memory of all Canadians. This will not only help to create a more complete and inclusive picture of the settler history of Canada, but will eventually also help to prevent such attitudes towards Indigenous peoples to ever become normalized again.

## Conclusion

Canada firmly wants to believe in its global reputation as a pluralistic and multicultural country, which was once so effectively affirmed with the introduction of the Multiculturalism Act during the Pierre Trudeau administration. With the election of his son Justin Trudeau in October 2015, many have claimed that this signifies a return to those traditional values.<sup>255</sup> In the year in which the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Confederation of Canada is celebrated, it is important to look beyond the idea or ‘myth’ that the country embraces its minorities and the exemplary position Canada has in the field of human rights and peacekeeping. A milestone such as this year’s anniversary also gives room for reflection and remorse and one of the focal points of the celebrations is the attention for Canada’s relationship with the Indigenous inhabitants. That this relationship has suffered greatly from the government’s attitude towards this minority is only an understatement and has come to the attention of non-Indigenous Canadians since the 1990s. It was Phil Fontaine who was among the first to raise awareness of the atrocities that happened at the residential schools when he spoke publicly about the abuse that was inflicted upon him. This led to initiatives from various groups to research the past circumstances and claims of abuse at such schools in a time when the schools were still in operation. It was not until 1998 that the government first responded, but the Statement of Reconciliation was received with skepticism and criticism for the solutions the Department of Indian Affairs had come up with to reconcile with the Indigenous peoples. It was the Settlement Agreement of 2006 that signified a breakthrough in the relationship between the Canadian federal government and the Indigenous peoples, as the humiliating and distressing experiences of the former students were finally recognized and people could apply for a monetary compensation for the harm that the schools caused. The long-term effects of the schools, but also other regulations of the Indian Act, were addressed in the official apology of the government, read by prime minister Stephen Harper in 2008. The apology has over the years received much criticism both from scholars in Canada and prominent members of Indigenous communities, however, in Europe it is still seen as a unique example of how a western country comes to terms with its colonial past. The responses to the apology in Europe exemplify the differences between Canada’s international profile and the dialogue in the

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<sup>255</sup> Richard Nimijejan of the Carleton University argued in his lecture “Cool Canada? Justin Trudeau and the Politics of National Brand Construction” that the differences between Trudeau and his conservative predecessor are much more nuanced than is portrayed by the international press. He presented his paper during the Canada Conference at the Radboud University on 15 June 2017.



country itself and with the popularity of Canada's prime minister, the discrepancies have only become bigger.

To be aware of the differences between the Canada that has a respected reputation in Europe and how the Indigenous peoples in Canada regard their government formed the first task in a European thesis that wanted to examine the ways in which traumas caused by the Indian Act are described in contemporary literature published by Indigenous authors. Chapter One revealed how the Canadian government uses the 'myth' of Canadian tolerance to hide its colonial past, which still affects Indigenous peoples on a daily basis. Indigenous peoples suffer severely from discrimination, poverty, social problems, they are underrepresented in governmental institutions, and many of the challenges they face stem from traumas caused by the Indian Act. The chronology of the legislation of that Act in Chapter One helped to identify the topics and themes the Indigenous authors selected for this thesis wrote about.

With a renewed perspective on Canada's reputation, Chapter Two focused specifically on the government's apology and how this failed to repair the damaged relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government. Other governmentally funded initiatives that also aimed for reconciliation, such as the Settlement Agreement and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, were also analyzed in this chapter and it was concluded that the Conservative Harper administration's promises did not correspond to the actions taken. The TRC had a very limited budget for the tasks it was given and the government did not grant Commission leaders access to documents they needed for their research. Although his governments supported numerous projects financially, prime minister Harper gave the impression he showed little interest in the Indigenous cause, and was throughout his decade in office fiercely criticized for ignorant statements ("we do not have a history of colonialism") and his refusal to take action when the opportunity was there. The pinnacle came months before the election of 2015, when the TRC came with a precursor of the *Final Report*, a summary which included 94 recommendations for the Canadian government to achieve a renewed relationship with Indigenous peoples from which they could both benefit. Harper was willing to discuss the occasion with the Commission's Chair, Justice Murray Sinclair, but refused to make a statement about the possibility of implementing any of the so-called *Calls for Action*. When the *Final Report* was presented in December 2015, the new prime minister, Trudeau, not only held an emotional speech in which he addressed the hardships Indigenous peoples have had to face as a result of government policies, but also reaffirmed his election promise to implement the recommendations of the TRC. Since this thesis wanted to steer clear of contributing to the 'Trudeaumania' seen in British newspapers, Chapter Two included a

paragraph that made a point of showing that Trudeau, despite his promises and seemingly genuine interest, does not simply change the constitution to improve matters for Indigenous peoples. Trudeau does, however, differ greatly from his predecessor in his willingness to respond adequately to the requests of Indigenous peoples, such as the wish for a national inquiry into the issue of murdered and missing Indigenous women. This formed the bridge between Chapter Two and Chapter Three, as it focused on women's issues which has a prominent place on the national agenda in the Canadian government today.

With the detailed contextual information on Canadian legislation, and particularly the residential schools, the question central to this thesis could finally be answered in Chapter Three. Five works of art written by Indigenous females demonstrated how the events that have affected Indigenous people are remembered, reimagined or commented on. The women linked past traumas to the current situation for Indigenous peoples in Canada and did not hesitate to address and criticize the government. Some even specifically stated that it was the Canadian government that minimized their position of power within the Indigenous societies and was responsible for the introduction of the patriarchy in those communities. Others give proof for the presumption in this thesis that women were targeted by the Indian Act on multiple emotional and physical levels. The authors approach the themes in a way that is accessible and understandable to readers who are not acquainted with the history or languages of Indigenous peoples in Canada. This shows that the authors all go beyond the intention of writing healing literature, but rather aim to start a dialogue. Much like large-scale initiatives such as the TRC, the authors want to inform all Canadians about the abuse and mistreatment that was inflicted upon generations of Indigenous peoples with the permission of the government. The TRC did so by inserting quotes from survivors, but the few lines they were given do not do justice to the complexity and the impact of the traumas, as is shown by Sellars's autobiography which gives a detailed account of multiple generations of Indigenous women who went to the same school. Sellars's memoir may seem less political than a report and this makes it easier for readers to see a link between past experiences and current situations. Daniels's novel does the same by focusing on a topic that many Canadians belonging to the dominant society know little about. Instead of confronting them with their colonial settler history, she gives readers an insight into this particular history.

Most Canadians will not feel responsible for the colonial history as they were raised in a society that deals with Indigenous peoples in a certain manner. When these Canadians are confronted with the brutalities of the system they grew up in, they will be asked to question the fundamentals of that system. Such an analysis can only be attained if they have a deeper

understanding of their own history and an eye-witness account, whether re-imagined or not, can help to achieve that. The works of Daniels, Sellars and Halfe all lean to a certain extent on the personal experiences of the authors, while Bird-Wilson and Simpson show that by going to the archives one could learn about a past that does not appear in the textbooks used at school. The authors thus encourage readers to educate themselves on the themes discussed and to feel empathy for the Indigenous citizens. After a federal apology, monetary compensations and representatives in the political arena, recognition from their fellow Canadians would be the final step towards reconciliation for Indigenous peoples after a tumultuous 150 years.

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