Attawapiskat: The Politics of Emergency

by

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the politics of representation of Indigenous peoples in Canadian media. Using a case study of the 2011 housing crisis at Attawapiskat First Nation, I argue that emergency on reserve is constructed as Indigenous failure in mainstream print media and that these discourses work to construct a racialized national imaginary. Canadians are produced as benevolent through learning about Indigenous failure, and through their own capacity to assist and care for them. I have argued that this is a nation building practice of settler colonialism; it is inextricably linked to reclaiming ownership of land, and manufacturing legitimacy for the Canadian nation. This thesis traces these constructions through both mainstream, and alternative and independent media, and follows how these discourses invite white Settlers into a position of racial superiority. Examining ideas of goodness and innocence that condition Canadian identity, I offer strategies and limitations for anti-colonial engagement with Indigenous emergency.
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Introduction

On November 21, 2011 an article entitled, “What if you declared an emergency and no one came?” was posted on the Huffington Post Canada, a popular blog and online news aggregator website. The article, written by the Member of Parliament for Timmins – James Bay, Charlie Angus, described the growing housing emergency at Attawapiskat First Nation. Angus described the critical lack of housing in the remote northern community that had compelled Attawapiskat Chief, Theresa Spence, to declare a State of Emergency three weeks before. Despite the official call for help, both provincial and federal governments had failed to respond. With temperatures in the northern community expected to drop below twenty degrees Celsius, many in the community who were sheltered in only tents and sheds were at risk of freezing to death. At the time Angus’ article was published, the emergency received very little media coverage. Two local newspapers, The Sault Star and The Timmins Daily News, had reported on the crisis soon after Chief Spence’s call for support and the Canadian Press and Toronto Star had published a single article on a press conference held at Queens Park by Chief Spence three days before. Angus’ article included a video of the shocking conditions in the community; displaying overcrowded tents and poorly insulated sheds, people using buckets as makeshift latrines, mold infested homes and children with burns and rashes caused by the unsafe housing conditions (Angus, 2011). The article was widely shared on social media (Huffington Post, 2011), and quickly went viral, catching the attention of Canada’s mainstream news outlets. Within a day all major national and regional newspapers began to cover the crisis in depth. In the weeks and months that followed, the emergency became a leading news story, was taken up by opposition parties in parliament, and became the subject of dozens of columns and editorials, capturing the nation’s attention.
Over a thousand articles were published on the crisis, and it was this volume and interest in the situation that struck me as unusual. It is well known that many reserves in Canada have experienced similar emergency situations, boil water advisories (Polaris, 2008), E Coli outbreaks (Murdocca, 2010) and mass suicide attempts by youth (Clibbon, 2013). These emergencies all received a day’s or occasionally a week’s worth of media coverage, but nowhere near the level of sustained attention Attawapiskat received during the first few months of their crisis. The media reacted with an unprecedented amount of coverage; opinion columns, special features and several front-page stories were produced in response. In some ways this unique response can be attributed to the community’s strategic use of Mr. Angus’ celebrity as a popular politician to draw attention to the issue and advocate to the federal government to provide much needed support. Yet, this strategy aside, I argue that the crisis became so readily consumed because of what it offered Canadians.

It quickly became clear that the unique coverage also became an opportunity to tell a story about Canada. Through the reports of the emergency, questions emerged about Canadian identity: what kind of people Canadians are, what kind of country Canada is, and what the treatment of “our” First Nations said about us as a nation. The suffering of the community seemed to become a moment to reflect on ourselves as Canadians. Reading this left me with a deep discomfort. Though the attention and sentiments mobilized were helpful for achieving immediate support for the community, I felt as though Canadians were congratulating themselves for caring about the crisis and that the performance of this concern inoculated them from asking the more difficult questions about the larger context that created the crisis in the first place. Through the crisis I found myself identifying with the language being used to decry the emergency. The suffering was unjust, and something that should not happen in a country ‘as rich and just as Canada’ (Angus, 2011). However in these statements I also felt that I was being
invited to participate, as a white Settler\textsuperscript{1}, in a Canadian nationalism that reassured me of my innocence and my goodness. Indeed, the spectacle that followed seemed to reaffirm at every turn a story of Canadian benevolence, rescue and virtue. This thesis investigates this reaction; how emergency became a means to bring Canadians into being. This thesis traces how the crisis in Attawapiskat emerged as national emergency, and questions how this event was consumed, understood and responded to. Placing this investigation within the context of historical narratives and practices of Canadian settler colonialism, I seek to further understand how symbolic representations of Indigenous emergency work to produce a racialized national imaginary.

To investigate the discourses that circulated in response to the crisis, I undertake a critical discourse analysis of newspaper coverage of the crisis. I understand discourse in the sense developed by Michel Foucault. Foucault describes discourse as “ways of constituting knowledge, together with the social practices, forms of subjectivity and power relations which are inherent in such knowledges and relations between them. Discourses are more than ways of thinking and producing meaning. They constitute the ‘nature’ of the body, unconscious and conscious mind and emotional life of the subjects they seek to govern” (Foucault, in Weedon, 1987, 108). Derek Hook describes discourse as a practice “both which constrains and enables writing, speaking, thinking” (2001, 532). Discursive practices work in both inhibiting and productive ways, and are rooted in materiality and relations of power. Discourse is created from and in the realm of

\textsuperscript{1} In this thesis I use the term Settler to refer to non-Indigenous people who live in present day Canada. Though many Settlers are not white (see Footnote 3), the Canadian project of building a white settler society is built on a racial hierarchy that structures and rewards white privilege. These practices, and the genocide of Indigenous peoples have resulted in white people being the majority race in Canada, and also the ‘Canadian National’ subject. As this thesis focuses on the racial imagination of Canada being white, the discourses and responses I trace are ones that invite Canadians into a project of white supremacy, and white identity. The relationship between white Settlers, arrivants/or Settler of Colour and Indigenous peoples is complex and not a simple hierarchy of first, second and last. I use Andrea Smith’s (2012) definition of white supremacy in Chapter 1 to contextualize how settler colonialism and Canadian citizenship are raced, and the ways that this structures race and belonging.
possibility in a particular time and location. Foucault names these ‘truth conditions’ or conditions of possibility, that sustain and order what can be known as truth, what can be said, and what is considered to be in the realm of the rational or reasonable (Foucault, 2003; Hook, 2001).

Furthermore, Hook, employing Foucault’s work, describes discourse as “an active ‘occurring’, as something that implements power and action, and also is power and action” (2011, 532). Hook explains this as a both instrument and result of power, and argues that a discursive analysis that takes this into account must pay attention to the material, and to power. Hook writes,

Discourse facilitates and endorses the emergence of certain relations of material power, just as it justifies these effects after the fact. Similarly, material arrangements of power enable certain speaking rights and privileges, just as they lend material substantiation to what is spoken in discourse (Hook, 2011, 540).

Paying attention to both functions of discourse, I seek to place news discourses within the material relations of power that they are both created and resulted from. The relations of power I explore in this analysis are those of Canadian settler colonialism and how it continues to organize present day life and power relations in Canada. For many Canadians, it remains impossible and entirely unreasonable to name colonialism as an ongoing present practice. Scholars have discussed the forgetting at the heart of Canadian nationalism (Razack, 2000, 2011, 2012; Mackey, 1999; Thobani, 2007; Bannerji, 2000). This silence in naming a colonial present can be seen as another function of ‘discursive rules’ that inhibit what can be said or be understood to be true in this particular time and place. This silence is also productive; ideas such as Indigenous failure and emergency are an understandable possibility, but colonialism is not.

Emergency is a situation that privileges action above all else. Craig Calhoun (2011) has argued that the qualities of emergency are “impartiality and neutrality” (33), which flourish as an ethical response that simultaneously works to obscure or forget the historical, political, and economic factors that contributed to these situations. That emergency can be used to rush past
complicity and responsibility, makes it an important tendency to study. Adi Ophir (2010) has argued that in spaces of chronic disaster and suffering, crisis can occur on a regular basis without being understood as exception and in need of an intervention or special response. He argues that only when the conditions are problematized and applied to a distinct population can it become an exceptional “discursive crisis” (Ophir, 2010, 68). The discursive crisis is how objective conditions of crisis become an emergency (using Calhoun’s definition). Emergency and the discourse that constitutes it and describes it, becomes both an ethical response of innocence, and moment that produces Canadians by teaching them their relationship to Indigenous peoples as superior.

The discourse of emergency that surrounded Attawapiskat offers an opportunity to explore the contemporary relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canadian society. Furthermore it is an important site to understand how knowledge production in our society remains deeply colonized. Specifically, how did the discursive crisis of emergency produce a racial national imaginary that constituted the Indigenous community as failed, backward and incompetent, while non-Indigenous Canadians came to be seen as benevolent, responsible caretakers of “our First Nations” (Razack, 2012, 2011; Mackey, 2012; Thobani, 2007; Mawani, 2009). I argue that this discourse invites Canadians into a position of racial superiority that manifests itself in many different ways. Whether Canadians responded in humanitarian gestures of charity and concern for the community, or with anger and accusations of band corruption, I argue that these sentiments are rooted in the racial construction of Canada as a white settler society. I trace how this racial imaginary builds the nation on stolen land, and obscures historical and ongoing contemporary relationships of dispossession and violence that contradict national mythologies of Canadian goodness, peacefulness and racial tolerance. This thesis argues that
through the construction of Indigenous emergency, a racialized national imaginary is created, sustaining exploitation of resources and dispossession of land.

**Methodology:**

Why Newspapers?

The significance of news discourse is made clear by many media theorists who point to the symbolic function of print news as a “ubiquitous agent of popular education” (Anderson & Robertson, 2011, 3). The accessibility and authority of printed news (van Dijk, 1988) makes it an important site of disseminating knowledge and perceived truth (Kelly, 2011). A 2012 study by the Newspaper Audience Databank (Newspaper Audience Databank Inc., 2012) found that 50% of Canadians over the age of 18 interact with newspaper content every day, and 78% read a daily newspaper or visit an online news website at least once a week. The reach of printed news, being accessed in both traditional and online forms, remains significant, making its content and the consequences of that content an important site for study. Kelly argues that the news teaches the public crucial lessons about what society’s problems are, what the range of solutions to these problems are, and who can be seen as a legitimate actor to address these problems (2011, 186). In this way, the media sets the agenda for (i.e. inhibits and produces) what the public thinks about (Cohen, 1963; Cui & Kelly, 2013). Furthermore, Teun van Dijk has argued news coverage constitutes its own distinctive type of discourse that forms a type of sociocultural practice (1988, 9). In seeking to understand how power is maintained through this practice, van Dijk has made a significant contribution to the development of an approach to the analysis of discourse referred to as Critical Discourse Analysis. I will adopt this approach in this thesis.

What is Critical Discourse Analysis?
Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) investigates “the way social power abuse, dominance, and inequality are enacted, reproduced, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context” (van Dijk, 2001, 352). CDA has many theories and methods, but I draw specifically from Teun van Dijk’s work on news discourse and racism. CDA is rooted in the idea that language is produced from the context it is situated within and is used to expose naturalized beliefs and ideas that are a part of the dominant hegemony (Hall, 1990, 14; Wodak & Mayer, 2009, 3).

van Dijk’s methodology has been frequently employed by scholars who have studied racism in Canadian news discourse (Furniss, 2001; Harding, 2006, 2009). This methodology pays particular attention to what van Dijk calls “news-specific schematas” (1993, 251) that structure how news discourse is organized. This consists of several categories, including Headlines and Lead Paragraphs, which form a summary category (ibid.). Another important category in this methodology and for this thesis is that of quotations (van Dijk, 1993, 252). van Dijk demonstrates that those who figure prominently in news reports as sources or who are quoted at length, are those who are a part of a “shared socio-cognitive system of a group, culture or society” (1991, 36).

Elizabeth Furniss, drawing from van Dijk’s work, describes how this methodology is applied to newspaper coverage of Indigenous issues. She outlines various ways to analyze news discourse, including how headlines are framed and the lived conditions of power and materiality that the news comes out of. Furniss iterates the importance of using multiple strategies,

[P]aying attention not only to textual features, or what is written - such as choice of words in the headlines and article body - but also to how the message is conveyed, such as the choice of content in the lead sentence; the selection and relative positioning of official sources quoted; the relative prominence of the article’s placement in the overall newspaper; and the framing devices employed to contextualize and define the significance of the story (2001, 3).
Placing the text into, as Derek Hook describes, the “extratextual factors (history, materiality, conditions of possibility)” (2001, 543) provide the context and examination of power relations that circulate and are maintained through news discourse. Edward Said has called this, moving in and out of the text (Said, as cited in Hook, 2001, 543). Similarly, Elizabeth Furniss, in her examination of representations of Indigenous-Canadian relationships in newspaper coverage, argues that, “The discourse analysis approach becomes particularly powerful when coupled with a case-study analysis of the development of one news story” (2001, 33, Footnote 18). I use a similar approach, placing the methodology outlined by van Dijk for analyzing the text and format of the newspaper coverage, within the context of the historical, material and power relations between Attawapiskat First Nation and the Canadian state. Placing this inquiry in the framework of Treaty 9, and the Canadian state’s obligations as signatories to this agreement for the land they now profit from, I am able to take a view of history that complicates Canadian complicity in the crisis. Furthermore, I trace how the crisis developed into a news story of emergency that was heard, understood and taken up by a white Settler audience.

In this thesis, I analyze news stories, editorials and opinion columns. I leave letters to the editor unexamined due to the limits of length, scope and the time constraints of this project. I examine newspaper articles during the period of November 19, 2011 to December 17, 2011. This timeframe represents the height of media coverage of the crisis, while limiting the scale of articles examined (which continued on into the spring of 2012) for the scope of this thesis. A search of all Canadian newspapers (using the Factiva database) for “Attawapiskat” and “crisis” found 1,281 articles. For this project, I focus my analysis on three newspapers: The Globe and Mail, The National Post and The Toronto Star. I have selected these newspapers for their nationwide focus, and large national readership. However, it is important to note the extent of the coverage was far beyond these larger newspapers. Nearly every local and regional newspaper in
the country published news of the crisis, reaching Canadians in all parts of the country. Looking at 90 headlines and a dozen specific articles that feature important discourses and produce colonial knowledges in prominent ways, I move “both in and out of the text” (Hook paraphrasing Said, as cited in 2001, 543, emphasis in original) by analyzing which knowledges, narratives and sentiments are invoked in order to sustain the idea that the community’s suffering constituted an emergency. To establish this context, I outline the history of the community’s relationship with Canada through Treaty 9, and the series of events that lead to the critical housing shortage in 2011. By placing news text within the context of history, power and materiality I seek to highlight ways that news discourse both produces and inhibits, tracing what stories are told, which ones ‘cannot be said’ (Hook, 2001, 527) and the role these stories play in producing subjects and constructing the Canadian national imaginary as a white nation.

Historical context, material arrangements of power, and ongoing social and political struggles condition, as Derek Hook argues, “which statements come to count as true or false” (Hook, 2001, 542). This CDA method is an important way to approach the study of discourse because it facilitates a more complete look at how truths are produced, and subsequently, how knowledge, events, and crises are shaped. Michel Foucault (2003) argues that several institutions, discourses, practices, processes and struggles are constituent of truth conditions. Foucault writes,

Truth is a thing of this world: it is produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint. And it induces regular effects of power. Each society has its regime of truth, its “general politics” of truth – that is, the types of discourses it accepts and makes function as true; the mechanisms and instances that enable one to distinguish true and false statements; the means by which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures accorded value in the acquisition of truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true” (Foucault, 2003, 316).

Foucault goes on to describe several processes these regimes of truth are subject to; scientific discourse and institutions that produce this knowledge, political/economic contexts and struggles
or debates, processes of circulating through educational apparatuses as well as political and economic ones (2003, 316). The series of truth conditions that were at work as Attawapiskat came into visibility were deeply influenced, as elaborated above, through settler colonialism. Canada’s long history of colonialism, violence, land theft and assimilative practices is both the historical and current social contexts for the crisis. Discourses of science and psychology that have pathologized the effects of colonialism and residential schools for survivors (Chrisjohn et al., 2006), the prominent political debates that call into question treaty rights and legitimacy of land claims (Flanagan, 2000, 2008, Blatchford, 2010) and discourses that view resistance to colonialism as irrational or tribal violence intrinsic to Indigenous people (Grenier, 1994) are all examples of how certain knowledges and discourses about Indigenous people are limited and induced by what counts as truth and common sense. The examples are prevalent, laws passed to “enhance financial accountability and transparency of First Nations” (First Nations Financial Transparency Act, 2012), discussions on Indigenous “governance issues” (Levant, 2012), and initiatives on “aboriginal education” (Martin Aboriginal Education Initiative, 2012). All of these practices place Indigenous peoples as the object of study, intervention, legislation and improvement. These practices highlight certain problems, (i.e. Band Council corruption) but ignore others (i.e. 600 missing and murdered indigenous women, or hundreds of ‘boil water advisories’ on reserves) that construct the “problem” in ways that highlight Indigenous inferiority. To understand how these practices and regimes of truth conditioned how Attawapiskat was produced as a emergency, I will provide historical context on how the conditions in Attawapiskat developed, and from there discuss the strategies employed to articulate the emergency of the crisis.

**Organization of Chapters**
In Chapter 1: Making a People We Can Steal From, I trace how discursive representations of Indigenous people in print media have historically been, and remain, an important tool for constructing Indigenous difference. I elaborate on how creating difference is a practice of settler colonialism and white supremacy. Rooting my analysis in this context I show how practices of ‘racing’ Indigenous peoples have built the nation, and secured the Canadian identity and land base.

In Chapter 2: The Making of the Attawapiskat Housing Crisis: Exceptionality and Indigenous Emergency in Canada, I provide the context for how the 2011 housing crisis in Attawapiskat developed, including an overview of the media coverage on the crisis. Tracing these media discourses, I examine newspaper articles during the period of November 19, 2011 to December 17, 2012. Utilizing methods of critical discourse analysis for reading news discourses (van Dijk, 1988; 1991; Hook, 2001) I undertake an analysis of three features of the media discourse: headlines, lead paragraphs and sources quoted. From this analysis, I locate the discourses that were used to constitute the crisis as an emergency. Finally, I map out how this construction of emergency built a racial hierarchy that invited Canadians to participate in the rescue of the community in different ways.

In Chapter 3: Spaces of Anti-Colonial Media: Frameworks for Settler Engagement, I examine articles that offered a position of solidarity. Exploring these responses I seek to understand what steps could be taken in creating pedagogies for unlearning racial superiority and colonial identities. I contrast the work of these authors to critical Indigenous scholars and interrogate the possibilities for anti-colonial media coverage and analysis in dominant spaces like the newspaper. Investigating the implications these responses and the subject positions they produce, I conclude with a discussion on the challenges this pedagogy faces in also creating a fantasy to assure Settlers of their innocence.
Conclusion

The newspaper remains an important site for teaching Canadians about our relationship with Indigenous people in ways that often preserve Canadian dominance, power and control of land. Through a close reading of newspaper coverage of the housing crisis I trace how the representations of Indigenous emergency activated certain interventions and responses (legal and social) while foreclosing others. In the creation of a discourse that constructed the community as failed, and dependent on the state for survival (while obscuring the historical context of Treaty 9 and the state’s obligations the treaty conditions and the benefits received from land possession), became the means to enact Third Party Management on the community, and place them as an object of aid in the nation’s imagination. Print media remains an important site of reproducing colonial subjectivities for non-Indigenous Canadians, and I argue Indigenous emergency is an important moment when this process takes place.
Chapter 1:  
Land and Nation: Creating a people we can steal from

Canadians have, in part, been taught their superiority to Indigenous peoples through enduring colonial narratives in print media. A growing body of literature has identified and investigated the persistence of colonial narratives such as these in contemporary Canadian print journalism. These studies have argued that the features of a ‘Canadian colonial discourse’ include: a reliance on stereotypical representations of indigenous people (Anderson & Robertson, 2011), framing of headlines and narratives that focus on indigenous conflict or violence with the Canadian state (Grenier, 1994), and a concentration of government or other official sources (at the exclusion of Indigenous voices) (Anderson & Robertson, 2011; Harding, 2006; Grenier, 1994). In comparative studies of print media from the mid 19th century to contemporary newspaper coverage, scholars have found the same tropes of Indigenous people emerge over and over again. Robert Harding has concluded that, “the broader features of news discourse about aboriginal people have remained constant over the last century and a half” (2006, 207). Furthermore, this presentation of Indigenous people, as Anderson and Robertson have illustrated, “[have] long identified and championed Native inferiority on many levels” (2011, 274). Through constant repetition of common tropes such as “the alleged drunkenness, criminality, whorishness, deviousness, [and] lassitude” (ibid.), Indigenous people and their communities have been constituted as a ‘problem’ community, culturally inferior to ‘Canadian society’ (Furniss, 2011; Fleras & Kunz, 2001; Krebs, 2011; Razack, 2012).

Through the erasure of structural violence, and historical causes that contextualize current crises, emergency on reserve is depicted as a consequence of Indigenous failure. Failure is often depicted, as Anderson and Robertson have identified, “[through] three essentialized sets of characteristics – depravity, innate inferiority and a stubborn resistance to progress” (2011, 6).
Examples of how this is articulated can be found in everyday media coverage of Indigenous issues, seen in accusations of financial incompetency (Krebs, 2011), Indigenous peoples proclivity for violence (Grenier, 1994) or cultural backwardness (St. Denis, 2011; Dempsey et al, 2011).

Making Canadians: Invoking Belonging Through News Discourse

It is now widely accepted that though the media cannot determine what their audiences think, they are very successful in influencing what their audiences think about; this “agenda setting” quality of media can shape what problems are deemed important and subject to intervention (Cohen, 1963; Cui & Kelly, 2011). It is also well studied that newsreaders are not a passive audience, they actively engage with the material with their own tools for analysis (van Dijk, 1988, 9). Interpretation and meaning creation are produced by audiences through how they see the world from their own position in it (Hall, 1990; van Dijk, 1988; Jiwani, 2009). In this way, Stuart Hall has argued that media ends up “speak[ing] through” the ideologies of our society, in order for information and knowledge to make sense to its audience (Hall, 1990, 9). Hall argues,

Ideologies ‘work’ by constructing for their subjects (individual and collective) positions of identification and knowledge, which allow them to ‘utter’ ideological truths as if they were their authentic authors. This is not because they emanate from our innermost, authentic and unified experience, but because we find ourselves mirrored in the positions at the centre of the discourses from which the statements we formulate ‘make sense’ (1990, 9).

News must then speak within frames of intelligibility that its audience will understand and identify with. The context that frames this understanding draws from assumed knowledge of past events, conflicts, narratives, as well as the power relations, material conditions and ideologies that circulate in a particular culture, in a specific location and time (van Dijk, 1988, 14). As such, news in Canada is also a product of this context, of shared knowledge and history that creates a type of “common sense” as Hall as has described it (1990, 9). So, the daily news is both a
product of social and material relationships as well as creator of it. Yasmin Jiwani (2009) has argued that news serves the project of nationalism, working to build Canadians the sense of an imagined community. She writes, “News, at both the national and local levels, thus constructs a symbolic universe—a “socially constructed reality” which affirms national identity and the latter’s relations with and location in the world at large” (2009, 2).

This symbolic universe is deeply linked to the material one, as both a reflection of it and means to recreate it. Many scholars have traced how representations of Indigenous peoples (and their relationships with white Settlers) changed as the settlement of the prairies and British Colombia increased in the 19th century and the demand for Indigenous land grew (Carter, 1997; Harris, 2004). Sarah Carter (1997) outlines specifically how representations of Indigenous women shifted as the government dealt with the North West Rebellion, and the early victory of Métis people at Duck Lake, Saskatchewan. The crisis in authority that followed saw a dramatic change in representations of Indigenous women in both newsprint and in other cultural texts. Carter writes,

They were cast as instigating violence, both by participating in aggressive acts and by inciting the men. Earlier dominant non-Aboriginal images of Aboriginal women as passive and abused slaves to men in their own society were replaced by these projections of them as instigators of dreadful atrocities… In the years following the 1885 crisis, assiduous efforts were made to cast Aboriginal women as dangerous and immoral, as a threat to the emerging non-Aboriginal community (1997, 8-9).

It became strategic to symbolically construct Indigenous bodies as degenerate and immoral, to discursively discredit Indigenous women in order, “to establish a society that was not founded on any mingling of European and Aboriginal people and culture” (1997, 5). This creation of

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2 The ‘national imaginary’ references what Benedict Anderson has called “modern imaginings of the nation” (1991, 6-7). The nation is an “imagined political community” because the modern nation is too large for its members to know each other individually. The character, and idea of the nation, who its nationals are, and their relation to others in the world, constitutes this idea of the ‘imagined community’ that constitutes nationalism, and forms of national belonging.
inferior difference was crucial to negating Indigenous claims to land and nationhood in order “to annihilate native identity and traditions either through law, genocide or assimilation” (Jiwani, 2009, 3).

Another theme found in news discourse is what Robert Harding refers to as the “specter of violence” (2006, 221) produced in many news reports on Indigenous subject matter. The focus of news producers to report on and discuss Indigenous conflict, and violence has been widely studied. Following the 1990 Oka crisis, many researchers investigated news coverage of the standoff, concluding that newspapers were “literally obsessed with conflict-based Native-Indian issues” (Grenier, 1994, 320). Peaceful forms of Indigenous protest are typically excluded and ignored from mainstream news coverage (Grenier, 1994, 321), but any situations that involve more assertive protest, land claim activity, or conflict between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous governments will attract a great deal of scrutiny and coverage from the press (Harding, 2006). Furthermore, these news reports depict Indigenous people as unreasonably aggressive and ultimately as disruptive to society (Harding, 2006). Precisely because these clashes with the state could result in a transfer of economic resources, land, or the devolution of power, the issues are framed in ways that are especially negative and favor the state/police/justice system (Harding, 2006, 2009; Furniss, 2001; Winter, 1992).

The effect of this coverage associates Indigenous people with violence and criminality, which Harding points out is an “argumentative ploy that has been used historically to discredit aboriginal people and causes in news discourse” (2009, 2). The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) concluded this as well, stating that this method of presenting Indigenous peoples news stories has the effect of maintaining “old and deeply imbedded notions of “Indians” as alien, unknowable and ultimately a threat to civil order” (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, 1996, 5).
Overall, this body of scholarship has argued that negative reportage and presentations of Indigenous people in print news are a result of the dominance of mainstream Canadian ideology, and the Canadian desire to build a nation on stolen land (Jiwani, 2009, 2006; Harris, 2004; Anderson & Robertson, 2011). However, Fleras and Kunz (2001) have illustrated, anti-Indigenous racism has transformed into more careful terms in recent years; responding to political correctness and multiculturalism’s “celebration of diversity” that have become much-lauded components of Canadian identity (Howard Hassman, 1999; Mackey, 1999). Furthermore, this aspect of Canadian nationalism, that Canada is a good, diverse and peaceful nation, makes critical engagement with issues of ongoing settler colonialism difficult. If Canadians know themselves to be a good nation, then the conditions seen in Attawapiskat are an anomaly, or a product of aberrational incompetence, instead of the outcome of neglected treaty promises and dispossession of lands.

Multiculturalism, as both state policy and an idea that has been taken up as a national ideology, acts to produce the myth of Canadian tolerance and goodness. Eva Mackey describes this idea as one that has become fully integrated into the creation of ‘Canadian identity’. Mackey writes, “Through making the ‘cultural mosaic’ (as opposed to the melting pot of the USA) an official policy, it provides a tangible symbol of that difference from the USA, thereby reinforcing the construction of a differentiated Canadian identity” (1999, 65). She goes on to position contemporary discourses of nationhood in a history of British colonialism and constructions of racial superiority, “The construction of tolerance as a national characteristic is on a continuum with earlier forms of British/Canadian identity, for example, the nationalist image of the gentle and tolerant Mounties (being kind to Native People) as a symbol of Britain’s superior form of justice” (ibid.).
Several scholars have argued that the creation of multiculturalism serviced the maintenance of a white nation (Thobani, 2007; Mackey, 1999; Berger, 1966; Razack, 1998). That is, the policy worked to manage racial and cultural difference as Canada’s immigration policies shifted during the 1960s, while upholding ideas of a core (white) Canadian identity (Mackey, 1999; Thobani, 2007). As Thobani outlines, multiculturalism “facilitated a more fashionable and politically acceptable form of white supremacy, which has had greater currency within a neocolonial, neoliberal global order” (2007, 148). Through celebrating the “diversity” of immigrants that are not white, the Canadian National constructs itself as the legitimate “Canadian subject” who is also benevolent and tolerant enough to grant status to the Other, reproducing the superiority of the white subject’s compassion. That multiculturalism, and the myth of a tolerant Canadian society, free from the racism that afflicts the United States, is so identified with by its citizens complicates how we can critique issues of Indigenous-Canadian relationships. Exposing the nation as a ‘white settler society’ exposes people who see themselves as good, benevolent people to the present day racism, violence and dispossession that they are complicit in. Carol Schick (1998) has outlined how being confronted with this paradox leads to such a contradiction for the individuals self-understanding that it often must be resisted or denied (130). I see the exposure of the conditions experienced in Attawapiskat as one such moment of contradiction.

Canadians’ understanding of themselves as tolerant and benevolent was challenged by the poor conditions revealed on the reserve. The news discourses and responses in print media are a site where their resistance to this contradiction took place. As I will trace in Chapter 2, the construction of corrupt, incapable behavior on the part of Indigenous leaders emerged as one possible reason the community could descend into such distress. Placing the blame on the
community’s leadership, constructing Indigenous failure as the cause was one way to alleviate
the discomfort that the crisis caused Canadians.

Several scholars have traced a shift from articulations of race using biological essentialism
into race described in behavioural and cultural terms (Razack, 1998; Fleras & Kunz; Anderson &
Robertson, 2011). Razack describes this as “culturalization”, whereby “Culture becomes the
framework used by white society to pre-empt both racism and sexism (1998, 60). As a
replacement for race, cultural difference is only something that the Other can have, as St. Denis
argues,

The politics of this articulation of culture as a concept associated with the Other,
and the nation as a concept associated with the civilized person, has a long history,
not only in anthropology but, in Western and European thinking in general. It is not
common for those in a position of racial dominance to risk relativizing their own
way of life by describing it as a ‘culture’: as Eagleton puts it, ‘One’s own way of
life is simply human; it is other people who are ethnic, idiosyncratic, culturally
peculiar (as cited in St. Denis, 2011, 183).

Razack argues that cultural difference is how modern racism is articulated, obscuring how we are
responsible for racism and the ways, we as white Canadians benefit from people of colour and
Indigenous oppression (1998, 60). Furthermore, culture serves the idea of democratic pluralism.
Razack writes, “Cultural differences are used to explain oppression; if these differences could
somehow be taken into account, oppression would disappear…In effect, minorities are invited to
keep their culture but enjoy no greater access to power and resources (Razack, 1998, 60- 61).
Culture becomes a way to deny racism and obscure genocide. Tracing how ‘culturalization’
functions in Canadian courtrooms, Razack describes Justice Allan MacEachern’s rejection of the
land claim of the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en nations of British Columbia. MacEachern
“concluded that the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en could hardly be described as having culture and
that 'the Indians' lack of cultural preparation for the new regime [of settler colonialism] was
indeed the probable cause of the debilitating dependence from which few Indians in North
America have yet escaped” (as cited in Razack, 1998, 62). As Razack explains, by arguing that
the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en are “Culturally inferior, [they] have only themselves to blame for
the current land distribution where all of their previous lands are now owned by whites” (1998,
62). As a discourse of cultural difference replaces racism, genocide and colonialism as possible
causes of Indigenous suffering, Settler society is able to see their culture as progressive and
progressing; freezing Indigenous cultures and subsequently their rights (as this understanding has
been incorporated in Supreme Court rulings) in time before contact (Borrows, 1997a, 39). If
Indigenous culture is understood to be frozen as a pre-contact, pre-modern relic, the culture and
behaviour ascribed by that culture are also be represented as backward and hopeless (instead of
pointing to biological roots for Indigenous failure). Instead of Canadians knowing themselves to
be more biological evolved than Indigenous peoples, we now know our culture to be more
evolved. Either way Indigeneity is maintained as inferior, and as the object of assistance,
assimilation and elimination.

Anderson and Robertson (2011) have described this type of cultural racism as a regular
tactic of newspaper coverage of Indigenous people. They have termed it a part of the ‘genre’ in
print news coverage that describes Indigenous people in negative ways, without describing
negative traits as biological or innate. They argue, “[The] genre conventions are the words used
to describe Natives – that is, their espied behaviour, then it matters little whether you are called a
savage or merely described as behaving like one” (2011, 270, emphasis mine). Though they
argue that news narrative is less likely to be obviously racist, they are careful to point out that
colonial stereotypes no longer need to be blatant because the audience is so familiar with what
they call “the genre conventions of colonial discourse” (2011, 267). Because they are being
interpellated by this familiar discourse, Canadians can read specific words and translate them
into descriptions of Indigenous people as racially inferior.
The translation takes place not only with certain behaviours as Flera & Kunz explain, but also many other words and spaces that are coded with Indigenous inferiority and failure. Spaces like Regina’s Stroll (Razack, 2002) or Vancouver’s Downtown East Side (Razack, 2011) are understood to be places of violence, poverty and aboriginality. In other contexts, words like “warrior,” depict savage terrorism (Grenier, 1994; Anderson & Robertson, 2011), or “sex trade worker” (Jiwani & Young, 2006; Jiwani, 2009) reinforces Indigenous women’s culpability for violence they experience (Jiwani, 2009). These phrases and descriptions show us how familiar we are with colonial discourses in our news media. Anderson and Robertson argue, “To be able to translate is to be able to speak Canadian” (2011, 268). The ease with which we recognize the conventions of the genre is the degree to which these negative ideas about Indigenous peoples have been adopted as a kind of “common sense” (Hall, 1990; Anderson & Robertson, 2011) of Canadian culture.

These conventions of colonial discourse, all work to create difference. I argue that the function of this is more than just marginalizing Indigenous people through negative stereotypes. The creation of difference is inextricably tied to practices of settler colonialism and white supremacy; as several scholars have argued, stereotypes are productive (Barsh, 2005; Mackey, 1999, 2012; Krebs, 2011; Razack, 1998, 2000). Many critical Indigenous scholars have argued that the construction of Indigenous peoples as inferior has long justified land settlement and control over indigenous populations (Doxtator as quoted in Cannon & Sunseri, 2011, 34). Below, I define settler colonialism and white supremacy, and illustrate how symbolic constructions of both Indigenous peoples, and the Canadian nation work to constitute and reproduce these ideologies and practices in our society.

Creating Difference: Defining Settler Colonialism and White Supremacy
The racism that creates Indigenous peoples as different, also seeks to erase their nationhood and their claims to land and treaty rights. It is a part of the ideology of white supremacy that seeks elimination of Indigenous people from the land in order to control the land and its resources (Smith, 2006); difference facilitates this elimination. Sherene Razack (2011) and Mark Rifkin (2009) have argued that Indigenous bodies and lands constitute a space of exception in democratic, liberal societies. These spaces of exception are where the laws of society authorize its own suspension when applied to the Indigenous body (Razack, 2011; 2012, Rifkin, 2009). Constructing Indigenous difference and inferiority is necessary because the Indigenous body calls into question the legitimacy of the nation; the living proof that the land was stolen, and violence was done. As explained by Rifkin (2009), the national space is dependent on coding Indigenous peoples and land as an exception; legitimacy can be reconciled through producing Indigenous people as special, peculiar or bodies in need of protection (2009, 95-96). This becomes a national project when as Sherene Razack (2011) suggests; we consider the implications for who is deemed ‘fit’ to own the land. Razack argues,

Settler societies, like all imperial and colonial formations, depend upon specific racial narratives to install Europeans as the rightful owners of the land. The story of Aboriginal dysfunction, for example, confirms that Aboriginal people are not yet fit to enter modernity, and cannot then be entrusted with ownership of the land” (2011, 89).

The process of constructing Indigenous bodies as unfit relies on viewing Indigenous peoples as backward or premodern, trapped by their culture and unable to function in our modern nation (Razack, 1998, 60; 2012). Additionally, through interaction with the premodern Other, through physical encounters (Krebs, 2010; Razack, 1998; 2011; 2012), media representations (Furniss, 2001; Anderson & Robertson, 2011) or through ‘helping’ the Other (Schick & St. Denis, 2005), the Settler can become the modern Canadian subject. Through these interactions the Settler subject confirms his or her own position as a capable, responsible and caring subject. We come
to know ourselves as the helper and not the helped (Schick & St. Denis, 2005) and through this knowledge, as the legitimate caretaker of the land. Razack explains,

Settler entitlement rests on a conviction of one’s capacity to be a modern subject and the corresponding incapacity of an Aboriginal person to enter modern life, a relationship that must be confirmed through multiple interactions. It is for this reason that the colonial state and settlers have a compelling interest in dying Aboriginal bodies. As Andrea Smith observes, the genocidal logic of colonialism “holds that indigenous peoples must disappear. In fact, they must always be disappearing in order to allow non-indigenous peoples their rightful claim over the land” (Smith 2006, 68) as cited in (Razack, 2012, 20).

Ownership of the land is a crucial concept of settler colonialism. Settler colonialism is unique to other forms of colonialism in that, as Patrick Wolfe explains, “settler colonizers come to stay: invasion is a structure not an event” (2006, 388). Building a new society on top of another requires land, and eliminating the people who are already on that land. Wolfe argues that elimination is a central organizing principle of settler colonial society (ibid.). Racism fills an important role in creating the idea of a people so degenerate, dysfunctional and backward that we can only believe that they must be eliminated, or improved. Indeed, colonialism has always been propelled by impulses to civilize and improve. As Gillian Cowlishaw suggests, writing on settler colonialism in the Australian context, ‘worry’ about Indigenous peoples is caught up in ideas of improvement (2003, 105). Cowlishaw suggests that this focus on Indigenous welfare has a “formative power… in the relationship between the nation and Indigenous people” (2003, 104). Through worry and interventions within the Indigenous population, Australians can “display a sense of authority and moral duty” (2003, 105) to the object of their concern. Cowlishaw argues, “There is a common willingness to proclaim knowledge of causes and solutions, but even more pervasive is the display of a sense of virtuous responsibility toward this depressed minority” (ibid.). This expression of virtue and responsibility works to construct Australian identities and
build the nation through ‘progress’ on ‘the Aboriginal issue’. Cowlishaw describes this concern as

a widespread narcissistic desire, often muted and pressed into unconsciousness, to improve the Indigenous population. This desire entails solicitous assistance and advice to governments and comprises a substantial bureaucracy, but it is above all preoccupied with fantasies of Indigeneity (2003, 108).

As a result, the “Concerned debate… centers on how to rescue Aboriginal communities from violence rather than on how to recognize land rights, heritage, and culture” (2003, 104). Rescue, improvement and ‘assistance into modernity’ function to also assimilate Indigenous bodies into Canadian society. While these ideas and interactions are a very productive and necessary practice for Settler identity formation and nation building, the underlying logic of progress is “elimination” (Smith, 2006, 68). Through the Indian Act, this logic was articulated through policies such as legislation for the ‘gradual enfranchisement of Indians’ (1869), which sought to help Indigenous peoples ‘progress’ by encouraging them to voluntarily relinquish their Indian Status in order to vote, own land and assimilate into Canadian society. Similarly, the spirit behind the Indian Residential Schools was improvement: helping Indigenous children into modernity by ‘killing the Indian in the child’ (Chrisjohn et. al, 2006; Churchill, 2004).

Eliminating Indigenous peoples through assimilation was actively pursued in order to pursue Western expansion and settlement of the Canadian state, and since settlement, to resolve the lingering issues of Indigenous resistance and the questions of legitimacy their survival produces. Edward Said clarifies the logic of the impulse to improve, noting, “You’re not just robbing the people… You’re improving them in some way” (4, 1993).

Above all, settler colonialism operates on the principle of white supremacy (Smith, 2006). Andrea Smith outlines the three pillars of white supremacy: “(1) slavery, anti-black racism, which anchors capitalism; (2) genocide, which anchors colonialism; and (3) orientalism,
which anchors war” (Smith, 2006, 68). Smith outlines how Indigenous peoples and people of colour at are once victims and participants in structures of white supremacy. Smith’s three pillars offers an analysis of how interlocking systems of oppression function in our society.

Several scholars have shown that through the construction of Indigenous peoples as incapable, backward, violent or immoral, Canadians are produced as their more worthy opposite (Anderson & Roberson, 2011; Razack, 2011). The consequence of this symbolism is material; if the people who claim the land are seen as inherently deficient and not as fully capable humans, Canadians become the rightful owners of the land through our labour, virtue and industriousness (Thobani, 2007; Razack, 2012). Despite the success of this mythology in building the nation and forming subjects who believe themselves to be legitimate on this land, Russell Lawrence Barsh suggests that Canadian preoccupation with our own goodness and virtue is a reflection of our insecurity concerning being a “kinder, better, more international, more inclusive nation than the United States” (Mackey, 1999, 63). Barsh argues that this need ‘to be good’ comes from Canadians’ memory of the dispossession of Indigenous land, and the increasing, assertive presence of Indigenous activism that reminds us of this fact. Barsh argues, “A country with a clear conscience does not go out of its way to defend its honour. Nor does it engage in hyperbole to convince others that it is not only innocent but also utterly incapable of sinning” (2005, 280).

This preoccupation with goodness becomes especially important in times of disaster or crisis in Indigenous communities. Jiwani (2009) has analyzed coverage of the missing and murdered Indigenous women in British Columbia and found that the erasure of structural violence and presentation of Indigenous women as victims of violence or addicted sex trade workers produces these women as responsible for the violence they experience. However, Jiwani contrasts this coverage to discourses of Afghan women in the news, and argues that preoccupation with concern for Afghan women over there, provides an opportunity to relinquish
complicity for the violence done to Indigenous women here. As compared to conflict, where Indigenous people are portrayed as violent or criminal (to produce the Canadian state as protecting law and order), the crisis provides a different narrative and opportunity for engagement with Canadians. Crisis obscures Canadian wrongdoing and emphasizes rescue. Murdocca provides some insight into this tendency of Canadian rescue, tracing the story of how the 2006 flooding emergencies at Kashechewan First Nation were transformed into a national goodwill story (2010). Through a public action of good feelings, such as “a new policy incentive, of a new government plan or study, of reparation, of apology, of reconciliation,” Murdocca argues, “suffering and structural violence are absorbed by the liberal state and folded into forms of national adjudication of “Indian affairs”—and thereby into the national story” (Murdocca, 2010, 370-1). Here Murdocca describes two processes, of white subjectivity creation, and nation making, wrapped up in representations and knowledges of Indigenous people and their place in the social order. Murdocca uses Foucault’s idea of biopolitics as a way to explain that this process operates to produce subjects. She writes, “The biopolitics of structural violence that is central to colonial projects suggests that forms of racism and degradation become techniques of colonial and economic projects insofar as they contribute to manufacturing people, communities, and geographical areas as “slow dying”/decaying subjects or spaces” (2010, 395), as well as the process of producing subjects in the service of nation building (Murdocca, 2010, 373), i.e. the white Settler subject. Similarly, as I will show through analysis of news coverage of the 2011 housing emergency, Attawapiskat is constructed as a both responsible for the suffering they experienced, and as space of degeneracy. This thesis investigates how these discursive representations worked to reproduce the racial hierarchy between Canadians and Indigenous peoples.
Chapter 2:  
The Making of the Attawapiskat Housing Crisis: Exceptionality and Indigenous Emergency in Canada

In this chapter I will examine news articles that covered the 2011 Attawapiskat Housing crisis and take up the discourses and ideas circulated. I investigate how the crisis emerged into national visibility through the mobilization of specific knowledges and expertise to create the crisis as an exceptional emergency that required intervention. I examine how these discourses produced Indigenous emergency as originating in Indigenous inferiority. Furthermore, I trace how this focus on inferiority allowed non-Indigenous Canadians to ignore our complicity in the crisis and establish ourselves as subjects who are superior to and caretakers of the Indigenous Other.

The first section of this chapter will provide a background of the Attawapiskat First Nation and the events leading up to the 2011 crisis. I then define important concepts and ideas I use to examine the emergency of the crisis. Next, I provide an overview of the newspaper articles that covered the crisis, to establish how print media brought Attawapiskat into visibility. Using the critical discourse analysis methodologies outlined in Chapter 1 (van Dijk, 1991; Hook, 2001), I trace how narratives produced in this coverage work to construct a position of white superiority for Canadian subjects through the creation of discourses that centered on ideas of Indigenous inferiority. I examine how the discourse used to explain the crisis drew from well-known knowledges of “third-world” suffering in order to justify concern for and/or intervention in the community. With the crisis constituted in this way, Canadians reacted through performances that recreated colonial relationships and knowledges. Taking up the crisis through discourses of “nationhood”, and “Canadian shame” transformed the crisis into a story about Canada. I argue that this process of transforming the story takes Indigenous peoples into the fold of the Canadian
project in order to shift blame, and ignores the contradictions that Indigenous emergency causes for the Canadian national. Second I analyze how newspapers covered the federal government’s decision to install Third Party Management on the community’s finances. I trace how financial discourses produce similar knowledge of Indigenous failure, but provide assimilation and neo-liberal economic “progress” as the only solutions. Finally, I trace how these responses all work to build white Canadian identity within the structures of white supremacy. To conclude this chapter I discuss how these discourses, which oppose one another in the space of print media, work to obscure how Indigenous emergency is a result of ongoing practices of settler colonialism.

Background and the Conditions of Crisis

In order to adequately trace and contrast the newspaper coverage of the community, and situate the material and power relations at play, it is necessary to provide some historical context. The First Nation of Attawapiskat is located on the James Bay, approximately 800 kilometers north west of Timmins, Ontario. The community is only accessible from Southern communities by air or winter road (Witt, 1998, 14). Catholic missionaries first came to the area that present day Attawapiskat has been built on in 1850 (Obomsawin, 2012). The presence of white missionaries and Settlers grew as the Oblates of Mary Immaculate built a church in 1893, followed by the building of a trading post by the Hudson’s Bay Company in 1901 (ibid.). During this time, the people who lived in the area of the Kattawapiskak River belonged to the Fort Albany Indian Band, signatories to the James Bay Treaty, Treaty Number 9 (ibid.). In 1929 however, Indian Affairs established the community as a separate band under Treaty 9, promising 1 square mile for every family of 5 (ibid.). The government reneged on this promise and the reserve that was ultimately built was far too small to support the community (ibid.). Despite the
small geographic size of the reserve, the surrounding Mushkego-Cree people were encouraged to move from their hunting camps and communities to the reserve throughout the 1930s to the 1960s (Witt, 1998, 14). At the same time, the Ministry of Indian Affairs, and the Catholic Church set up a Residential School in Fort Albany, where many children from Attawapiskat were sent (CBC News, 2012). Residential schools were part of a policy of assimilation, elimination, and cultural genocide pursued by the Canadian state (Chrisjohn, et. al, 2006). The effects of the Fort Albany Residential School continue to negatively impact individuals, families and the community of present day Attawapiskat (Chrisjohn, et. al, 2006; Killian, 2011, CBC News, 2012).

Beginning with the false promise of land for each family, there is a long history of chronic underfunding of the community’s infrastructure, including housing. Alanis Obomsawin, in her 2012 documentary of the community, The People of the Attawapiskat River, describes how houses that were built in the 1970s were able to withstand winter temperatures, but as the community grew, newer houses were not built with the same quality. Unable to withstand the extreme northern climate, these houses require constant maintenance. The high cost of shipping housing materials to the community makes this nearly impossible, causing these houses to experience leaks, mold and other structural issues (Obomsawin, 2012).

This persistent underfunding of the community was a major contributor to the shortage of housing. Another issue was the damage done by the DeBeers mining company. In 2005, the Attawapiskat First Nation signed an Impact Benefit Agreement with DeBeers Diamond Company for the development of the Victor Mine, 90 km from the community on the Nation’s traditional hunting land. Several community members work at the mine, or for companies that service the mine. However in the spring of 2009, Attawapiskat began to protest the mine, as the wealth being generated from the resource has not benefited the community. Instead, much of the
wealth ends up in southern cities where the majority of the mineworkers come from, and where The DeBeers Company is headquartered (Obomsawin, 2012). The community asked DeBeers to reopen the agreement to create a more equal revenue sharing agreement, but the company refused. The material benefit our nation gains from the use of Attawapiskat First Nation’s land is significant, as the Victor Mine will create 6 million carats of rough diamonds in its lifetime, diamonds that contribute to The DeBeers Diamond Company’s billions in profits and which generate huge tax revenues for our provincial and federal governments.

In March 2005, DeBeers disposed of their sewage in the community’s lift station, causing a sewage backup that spilled into basements of the community, causing many of these homes to be evacuated (APTN, 2011). With insurance payouts that were inadequate to fix the damage, especially in this isolated community where building materials are extraordinarily expensive, the homes deteriorated and quickly became contaminated by mold, leaving them inhabitable. The Ministry of Indian and Northern Affairs was notified of the inadequate pump at the community’s lift station, but did not take action to update the sewage pumping system, nor to clean up the damaged homes (ibid.). In 2009 the pumps failed again, causing another backup and more homes had to be evacuated. Losing additional homes after several had already been contaminated was especially difficult to recover from, and resulted in more people sharing homes with family members while others resorted to building sheds, tents and other temporary housing (APTN, 2011).

The combined effects of chronic underfunding of the community’s housing, and the loss of additional homes due to the pump failure caused by DeBeers, left the community with a severe housing shortage. With over 20-30 people living in small, single family homes, many chose to set up tents and make shift sheds (Obomsawin, 2012; Angus, 2011). By October 2011, it became clear these shelters could not provide adequate shelter against the northern winter
temperatures, as forecasts below negative 20 degrees Celsius were anticipated. The shortage of housing had reached a critical point. The following catastrophic statistics were recorded by the local Member of Parliament, Charlie Angus: 19 families lived in sheds without running water, 128 families lived in condemned homes, 118 families lived with relatives in extreme overcrowding situations, 90 families lived in a construction trailer and 35 families required serious repair to their homes (Angus, 2011). On October 27, 2011 Attawapiskat Chief Theresa Spence was forced to declare a state of emergency (Angus, 2011).

This declaration however, was neither heard nor responded to by the rest of Canada until it was verified by other types of knowledge and expertise from white ‘experts’. The conditions of truth could not be met without certain authorized voices and knowledge (Mills, 2003, 74; Foucault, 2003). Without the ‘authorized’ voice, the threshold of what could be considered abnormal, or intolerable, could not be comprehended. Few media outlets covered the crisis at this point making it nearly impossible for the Canadian public to know about the crisis, as the community’s distant location from settler cities made first hand knowledge difficult to obtain without media exposure. Importantly, the Ministry of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs failed to respond to the declaration, illustrating how the events taking place were not deemed exceptional enough for immediate action by the Canadian government.

Crisis Made Visible: Making Emergency

The reportage of the crisis first worked to establish the crisis as a discursive emergency. Three weeks had passed between the time Chief Spence declared a State of Emergency and the moment the crisis began to be depicted as an emergency within the national print media. I will trace what enabled this crisis to be understood as what Ophir (2010) describes as a “discursive catastrophe” (Ophir, 2010, 68). Ophir develops his theory on ‘catastrophization’ as a way to
understand the temporary problematization of distinct populations that experience conditions of chronic crisis. Developing a crisis into an emergency that is understood to be a situation of unbearable suffering, and contain “a sense of moral urgency” (2010, 69) requires establishment of a threshold of what can be deemed an emergency. Ophir calls this, a process “that is especially concerned with the moment of exception, or when the crisis is constituted in a way that requires exceptional action” (Ophir, 75, 2010). The idea is that objective or literal crises can occur on a regular basis without being understood as exceptional or in need of a special response. It is when the conditions are problematized, and applied to a distinct population, that it can become a uniquely “discursive catastrophe” (Ophir, 2010, 68). Ophir defines this process of problematizing a disaster or “catastrophization” in this way,

[C]atastrophization in this sense is a way to describe a state of affairs so as to make what has been a “tolerable” or “normal” situation seem too dangerous or intolerable, to arouse moral and political reactions, and to mobilize assistance… An imaginary threshold that separates a state of disaster or the happening of catastrophe from protracted disastrous conditions is invoked… invoking the crossing of this imaginary threshold is an appeal for an exceptional response (62, 2010).

Additionally, Ophir clarifies that catastrophization is a process that emerges through and as an effect of the discourse of governmentality.

The term governmentality, as developed by Michel Foucault, understands power to operate throughout the social network as actions on other’s actions; it works “to structure the possible field of action of others” (2003, 138). Foucault explains that the exercise of power operates in this way, “a set of actions on possible actions; it incites, it induces, it seduces, it makes easier or more difficult… The exercise of power is a “conduct of conducts” and a management of possibilities” (Foucault, 2003, 138). The conditions of possibility sustain and order what relations of power and materiality can emerge, and produce the conditions of truth, i.e. what can be known as truth, what can be said, and what is known to be reasonable or rational
(Foucault, 2003, Hook, 2001). These ideas are helpful to explore how the situation in Attawapiskat emerged as an exceptional emergency, the specific ideas and discourses that followed, and how it invited certain bodies into specific subject positions.

Following Foucault, I understand power to operate through the production of knowledges, which condition discourses through which certain forms of power arrangements are maintained and which, in turn produce and legitimize knowledges and discourses. Similarly, we can see that what could be said about Attawapiskat had to operate within an authorized field of discursive possibility. The process of ‘catastrophization’, i.e. the way the crisis was studied, talked about and what responses were generated were highly conditioned by knowledge of Indigenous people, knowledge of Canadian-Indigenous relationships, and the arrangements of land, resources and power that are the foundation of all of this. The statements deemed reasonable, demands made that were considered acceptable and above all, “with what cannot be said” (Hook, 2001, 527, emphasis in original), were a part of and conditioned by the practices of discourse/knowledge/power.

To this Foucauldian theory of power, Ophir adds that, “The “true exception” implied by the ghostly presence of the threshold of catastrophe both authorizes and calls upon governments and citizens alike to act in unusual ways” (2010, 75). These unusual acts of intervention can be legal, economic or humanitarian, however Ophir stresses the provisional aspect of them. He writes, “What is common to all these forms [of exceptional response] is their temporary nature, or more precisely, the fact that they are proposed and declared as temporary, ad hoc responses to an emergency. They [the proposed responses] are meant (or presented) as temporary interjections and interventions in cases where the social order has collapsed or is about to collapse, and they are supposed to take place as part of an interim regime that should facilitate the restoration of an old order or the constitution of a new one” (2010, 75).
Therefore, the discursive effect of this process, specifically of bringing Attawapiskat into public visibility, is what enables the threshold to be crossed. The discursive consequence is that the crisis is understood to be exceptional, past the threshold of what is tolerable, and in need of an exceptional response. This idea of exceptional response is significant, as the deplorable conditions and racism endured by Indigenous peoples on and off reserve are an ordinary, regular fact of Canadian society. The ‘exceptional response’ that Ophir describes, is in this case, that the Canadian media, society and government all of whom actively reacted to the conditions in Attawapiskat, as opposed to the standard response of denial, or indifference. These conditions were exposed in a way that were able to convince many that the situation had crossed the threshold of acceptableness into the level of humanitarian crisis, i.e. an emergency they could not ignore.

Catastrophization also allows for the conditions and practices, outside the exceptional intervention, to carry on. Ophir describes this double meaning of emergency, “as a response to discursive catastrophization, on one hand, and as a way to create or accelerate the condition of actual catastrophization on the other” (2010, 77). This process both recognizes the strategic decision of the Band Council to stage press conferences and use Charlie Angus’ position of influence to advocate for badly needed assistance, but also why the emergency was so readily consumed. Though contributing to the objective or literal conditions of crisis, the Canadian gestures of humanitarianism and exception responses to temporary moments of emergency become productive moments of nation building. Confronted with suffering we cannot refuse (through Indigenous persistence and resistance) discourses of humanitarianism and Indigenous inferiority transform the emergency into a moment of “moral urgency” that tells a story of Canadian benevolence which obscures ongoing practices of land dispossession, violence and ‘slow death’ (Berlant, 2007, 754).
Newspaper Coverage:

Below I analyze headlines, lead paragraphs and quoted sources, identified by van Dijk (1988) as three key areas that constitute a coherent discourse from news coverage. I examine these characteristics from the Toronto Star, The Globe and Mail, and the National Post. The Toronto Star was the first major newspaper to cover the emerging crisis on Attawapiskat First Nation. These first headlines worked to establish the situation as an emergency:

“Northern Ontario reserve begging for evacuation; Chief declares an emergency, says Attawapiskat is in crisis” (Brennan, 2011)
“Red Cross steps in to help Attawapiskat; Queen's Park, Ottawa bicker over aid to town” (Talaga, 2011)
“Aboriginal agony must lead to action” (Harper, 2011)
“Ottawa to assess troubled Attawapiskat” (Campion-Smith, 2011)
“The Federal help headed for troubled first-nations village” (Galloway, 2011).

Subsequent to contextualizing the situation as emergency, the headlines reinforce that the reserve is “troubled,” in “agony” and dependent upon federal and provincial governments to end this suffering. This construction of Indigenous peoples having a relationship of dependence with and on Canadian society is one that has permeated Canadian news headlines for decades (Singer, 1993, 357). While it is the federal and provincial governments that are allegedly needed to step in, the reasons why they are required to step in are obscured. By ignoring treaty obligations as well as the Canadian government’s complicity in creating the crisis through a century of broken promises and inadequate funding, a relationship of charity is created and reinforced instead of the contractual agreement that allows the Canadian state to be on this land.

Experts and Images

The newspaper coverage during the first week also stressed how the conditions in the community constituted an emergency. Specific appeals were made to distinguish the crisis as “past the threshold of tolerability” (Ophir, 2010) and generate a reaction from the Canadian public and the federal government. The first appeal issued through print media made use of
medical and psychological expertise that was quoted extensively in several articles. In news discourse, van Dijk has argued that one of the most influential ideological forces present is the use of quotations in news reporting. van Dijk contends that quotations “allow the insertion of subjective interpretations, explanations, or opinions about current events, without breaking the ideological rule that require separation of facts from opinion” (1991, 152). It is not my point to argue that the experts asked to weigh in on the developing crisis in the community were not qualified or correct in their assessments of the emergency in the community. Rather, I suggest that their voices, presented as rational and controlled, were used to make the crisis intelligible to Canadians. In contrast to Indigenous speakers, who are often represented as emotional or hyperbolic (Anderson & Robertson, 2011), these experts represent authority and truth. It took three weeks following Chief Theresa Spence’s declaration of a State of Emergency for the crisis to gain traction with the federal government and national mainstream media outlets. Only through the use of medical experts were the words of Chief Spence given credibility and deemed the crisis as both critical and legitimate.

In order to verify Chief Spence’s call for help, Dr. Elizabeth Blackmore, a physician that works for the community’s health authority, held a press conference with Chief Spence at Queen’s Park on November 18, 2011. They called on the provincial government to evacuate the community given the dire conditions. Evacuations had been carried out for neighboring community, Kashechewan First Nation, in 2005 when the community faced a serious E. Coli outbreak (Murdocca, 2010). At the press conference, Dr. Blackmore warned that without access to proper sanitation services such as toilets and running water, the community faced an “increased risk for infectious diseases, scabies, lice, respiratory problems and acute depression. Substance abuse and suicide often follow.” Dr. Blackmore went on to say, “From a medical perspective, we see this as an emergency and that something has to be done” (Brennan, 2011).
Dr. John Waddell from the Weeneebayko Health Authority echoed these concerns as he toured the community with area Member of Parliament, Charlie Angus. Dr. Waddell concluded that conditions in the community had deteriorated to emergency levels. In his diagnosis of the conditions, Dr. Waddell also highlighted the structural issues with much of the temporary housing, and he cautioned that many families were at “immediate risk of infection, disease and possible fire from their increasingly precarious conditions” (Angus, 2011). In an article published by the *Toronto Star* on November 25, 2011, the Registered Nurses’ Association of Ontario is quoted at length, from a letter they sent to the Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Ontario Premier Dalton McGuinty. Calling the situation, “shameful and inhumane” (Talaga, 2011), they write, "We are profoundly concerned about the dangers of fire, freezing, infectious diseases, skin conditions and mental health challenges that arise when people are forced to live in inhumane conditions" (ibid.). Employing their authority as medical professionals, the Nurses’ Association highlights in detail exactly how the conditions there pose physical threats to bodies. The legitimacy these expert voices granted to the crisis is significant; it wasn’t until these medical professionals, and a politician called the conditions an emergency did the Canadian media and federal government register and draw attention to what Chef Spence had declared weeks before.

Additionally, the newspaper coverage included many photographs on the conditions there. The use of images proved to be an important strategy to verify the crisis in the minds of Canadians. These images worked to corroborate Chief Spence’s call for help through a visual display of the conditions, and their effects on the community. The images used were shocking; images of children suffering from a rash on their faces and eyes (*Toronto Star*, December 1, 2011), another with a serious burn scar, highlighting the danger of living in a crowded, wood heated, shelter. Two other images, displaying the poor quality of the shed homes, and the
insufficient attempts to insulate the structures with blankets, gave the reader visual proof that these homes were substandard for most Canadians to live in any time of the year, and incredibly dangerous in extreme winter temperatures (National Post, November 29, 2011; Toronto Star, November 29, 2011).

The material representation of these conditions was an important way that the crisis was able to emerge as visible and as an emergency. The medium of photography can be more emotive than text or speech; Susan Sontag (2003) argues this idea in her investigation into war photography. Sontag illustrates that a photo can provide reference, memory and sentiment in ways that words cannot (2003, 84-85). Photographs can help us recall past horrors, framing the photo’s context; Sontag uses the example of photographs of Bosnian prisoners in a Serbian death camp in 1992 that inevitably drew on the stock of meanings and images easily conjured up of photos taken during the liberation of Nazi death camps in 1945 (2003, 84). If we look to how truth is conditioned in this case, especially the photos of the children, the Canadian Settler was induced to read these images in very specific ways that reflected a humanitarian crisis in the ‘Third World’.

Narrating the Emergency

“Third World Canada”

The Toronto Star’s coverage emphasized narratives of humanitarianism, lament of “Canada’s third world”, and Canadian benevolence. Headlines such as “Province assesses housing crisis at reserve; Emergency staff on site to probe conditions in remote Attawapiskat” (Talaga, 2011a) and “For Attawapiskat residents, life is a constant struggle; Red Cross volunteers in remote community with emergency relief” (Ross, 2011) emphasize imagery of aid
workers assessing and assisting that are reported on during humanitarian aid interventions in situations of war or disaster.

This theme of humanitarianism emerged in the coverage following the establishment of the situation as an ‘emergency’, and can be seen in the coverage that evoked ideas of and used the phrase “third world Canada” that was reiterating over and over in the coverage by the *Toronto Star, The Globe and Mail* and the *National Post*, though for different ends. The humanitarian discourse found most prominently in the *Toronto Star* and *The Globe and Mail* was circulated through headlines that evoked several sentiments. The first sentiment underscored was Canadian morality, seen in one headline that read “The greatest moral challenge in our politics” (Gibson, 2011); second, Canadian benevolence reinforced in an invitation to offer charity to the community, “Want to help the people of Attawapiskat? Here's how” (Pearce, 2011); the third, references to extreme suffering and poverty such as these headlines, “Abysmal conditions a 'normal' way of life; Poverty, hardship and neglect mainstays of life in northern Community,”(Ross, 2011a) “A Cree community's suffering” (Barmark, 2011), and “The sweat lodge of tears; A former deputy minister recounts his enlightening encounters with native Canadians” (Pascal, 2011).

These headlines all depict the space of Attawapiskat as, “Canada's version of Third World” (Ross, 2011b). Within the articles this appears again, quoting white Settlers, like Dr. Blackmore, Charlie Angus, and other politicians who constantly compare the conditions to those seen, or known to be found, in poor countries of the global south. In one article, the community’s physician Dr. Blackmore is quoted saying, “I often have to remind myself that I’m working in the province of Ontario” (Brennan, 2011). The focus given to the Red Cross also works to make this comparison, as the organization’s work is most often reported on when
providing humanitarian aid to far away places. This article, published on November 28, 2011 in the *Globe and Mail*, reports the details of the humanitarian mission,

The Red Cross is now preparing to co-ordinate donations, and buy blankets, generators and other items to bring them into the community which can only be reached by air until the winter ice roads form. Many people in the community of about 2,000 are living in tents or shacks, using extension cords from other houses as the only source of power (Clark, 2011).

The *National Post* also reported on the Red Cross intervention, one article reads, “Canadians are accustomed to the Red Cross sending emergency aid to Haiti and the Horn of Africa. They are less used to the organization sending blankets and winter clothing to impoverished native Canadians living in tents” (Ivison, 2011). Naming countries that have easily conjured images of suffering, starvation, and death offers a vivid description of “Third World Canada”.

Though these discourses, predominately published by all three newspapers, the coverage offered by *National Post* had a more pessimistic tone, and offered very different solutions that I expand on below. I argue, however, that this difference is only on the surface. Through the construction and labeling of “Third World Canada” and the humanitarian impulse that ran through such depictions, Indigenous people were produced as inferior and the emergency produced was a result of their failure. Such discourses continuously presented and invited white readers into a position of racial superiority through their benevolence, and care of the Indigenous Other. For many Canadians, the comparison of reserves to the third or fourth world evokes powerful images of what they “know” to be extreme poverty and suffering in parts of the global south (Dempsey, et. al, 2011, Razack, 2007). Alluding to these images and knowledges is a powerful way to articulate crisis in a space (the Indian Reserve) that cannot be easily visited, and that exists in Canadian imagination as a space of difference (Razack, 2011) or as a place of primitive backwardness (as cited in Cannon and Sunseri, 2011). Through the idea of the natural savage, using wilderness/hinterland mythologies (Anderson, 2011) the Reserve is constructed as
a place of pre-modernity that result in suffering and social dysfunction. Deborah Doxtator has argued that the idea of “Indianness” has not changed significantly over the last four hundred years; as it evolved overtime it has continuously emphasized indigenous inferiority (as cited in Cannon and Sunseri, 2011, 32). Doxtator further articulates that European Settlers physical distance from Indian reserves made it easier for these constructions to be widely disseminated and accepted (as cited in Cannon and Sunseri, 2011, 35).

The vast physical distance between Attawapiskat and the majority of Canadians helped condition how the emergency was read as a humanitarian crisis. Much like crises in far away lands, we are told about the severity of suffering through descriptions of their imminent deaths, photos of suffering children (Angus, 2011) and the Red Cross flying in to provide aid. Placing the ‘third world’ onto Canadian soil activated urgent responses and produced a discourse of Canadian humanitarianism. This is not to say the emergency was not a humanitarian crisis, but that it is necessary to recognize the aberrational social response to Attawapiskat following this public comparison to commonly consumed descriptions of “third world” suffering and benevolent Canadian intervention. Sherene Razack (2007) traces this idea in her exploration of Canadian consumption of the Rwandan genocide through the heroic figure of Romeo Dallaire. Just as we witnessed the unfolding genocide in a far away place, we witnessed the development of the crisis in far away Attawapiskat. Razack explains what this position offers us, she writes,

Our engagement with the world is everywhere depicted as the engagement of the compassionate but uninvolved observer. We come to know ourselves as a compassionate people; indeed, trauma suggests that it is our very vulnerability to pain that marks us as Canadians… Possessed of unique sensibilities, sensibilities that take us to the depths of grief and trauma, we can diagnose the trouble and act as the advance scout and the go-between. In this way, trauma narratives furnish middle power nations such as Canada with a homemade, that is to say a specifically national, version of the politics of rescue (2007, 381, emphasis in original).
Conditioned by what we know our role to be internationally in times of crisis, political opposition leaders took up this language and were quoted continually in the coverage linking the failure to respond to the emergency to how we respond to other third world emergencies (Horgan, 2011, Galloway, 2011, Angus, 2011). A clear example of this language, is Liberal Leader, Bob Rae, speaking of his visit to the community:

We talk a lot about the third world, we talk about Haiti, we talk about poverty in other parts of the world. This is our third world. It’s right here at home. These are our fellow citizens, and these are conditions which simply we cannot allow to continue indefinitely into the future (Horgan, 2011).

This construction of the Reserve as ‘developing world’ resonated with many Canadians. The Red Cross was flown in (Obomsawin, 2012); Canadians donated money, blankets, and warm clothing (Pearce, 2011) and the Ministry of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs was compelled to send homes to the community (Talanga, 2011; Chung, 2011). This threshold was constituted by appealing to Canadian’s shame of allowing “third-world” conditions to take place in their backyard. Knowing themselves to be a “compassionate people” (Razack, 2007, 381), it is now readily acknowledged that Canadian society is deeply organized by and concerned with its own civility and goodness (Coleman, 2006, 5; Barsh, 2001), and appealing to this ‘quality’ proved to be a successful strategy.

This takes us to how the responses to the emergency in Attawapiskat became transformed into a discourse of nation and Canadian identity. The rhetoric and discourse mobilized to constitute the crisis, evoked discussion about how the event was a ‘national shame’ and should not happen in a country ‘as wealthy as Canada’. This discourse mobilizes Canadian concern by bringing Attawapiskat into the fold of a national story. In marking Attawapiskat as our own, and as our “fellow citizens” (Horgan, 2011), sanitizes the complex relationship that exists between First Nations and the federal government, making the First Nation like any other Canadian
community. Effectively, this appeal to ‘sameness’ works to achieve the needed response, but allows the erasure of why they are usually not treated like other Canadian communities in the first place. The outrage is found in that this happened to be a community in Canada, not that these conditions, and conditions of racism, violence and suffering are regular functions of the state’s rejection of nation-to-nation relationships with all Indigenous nations.

This incorporation of Attawapiskat into ideas of ‘third world Canada’ conditioned how Canadians responded to the crisis, and with colonialism being an “inconvenient fact” (Dean, 1999, 36) exposed along with the crisis, the rush to call the emergency a humanitarian crisis served to reconcile this awkward reality. With the crisis constituted as an emergency the situation privileged action above all else. Craig Calhoun (2011) argues, “[emergency] calls for humanitarian response, not political or economic analysis” (30). The necessary qualities of this position are “impartiality and neutrality” (Calhoun, 2011, 33), which flourishes as an ethical response that simultaneously works to obscure or forget the historical, political, and economic factors that contributed to these situations. A loss of specificity is a feature of the humanitarian crisis, in order to produce sympathy despite distance or difference; an idea that both Calhoun (2011) and Sontag (2003) develop. Sontag argues,

They show a suffering that is outrageous, unjust, and should be repaired. They confirm that this is the sort of thing, which happens in that place. The ubiquity of … those horrors, cannot help but nourish belief in the inevitability of tragedy in the benighted or backward – that is, poor – parts of the world (2003, 71).

The inevitability of the situation neutralizes how it could have happened, and who could be responsible, and what might be done in terms of restitution. Instead a sanitized version of events emerges, the bad things that happen in that (racialized) part of the world (country) happened, so we need to help.
It is through this rush to neutral innocence that Sara Ahmed argues, the performative act of doing anti-racism (or in this case, performing outrage at government inaction and horrifying conditions on Reserve) slips into the “non-performative” (2004, 54). The non-performative of anti-racism is how Ahmed describes the ways in which white subjects can make declarations, speech acts or admissions of racism to feel better about their white identity. Ahmed writes, “The declarative mode, as a way of doing something, involves a fantasy of transcendence in which ‘what’ is transcended is the very thing ‘admitted to’ in the declaration: so, to put it simply, if we admit to being bad, then we show that we are good” (ibid.). Sontag echoes this idea another way, she writes, “our sympathy proclaims our innocence as well as our impotence” (2003, 102-3).

This rush to innocence is important given how Canadian society derives its legitimacy from maintaining the idea that Indigenous people are inferior, and colonization can be justified in order to improve them (Razack, 2012). As the crisis emerged, and became established through discourses as a humanitarian emergency, Canadians were invited to first imagine, and then perform their compassion. The consequence of this performance is the creation of ourselves as subjects who are superior to and caretakers of the Indigenous Other. The way that this functions to conceal bad feelings and questions of complicity is a way of reclaiming a Canadian identity of goodness.

Sara Ahmed also describes how recognition of suffering or past injustice has become a way for white Settlers in Australia to feel good about their identities again. Ahmed argues, National shame can be a mechanism for reconciliation as self-reconciliation, in which the ‘wrong’ that is committed provides the grounds for claiming national identity. Those who witness the past injustice through the feeling of ‘national shame’ are aligned to each other as ‘well-meaning individuals’… By witnessing what is shameful, about the past, the nation can ‘live up to’ the ideals that secure its identity or being in the present” (emphasis in original, Ahmed, 2005, 77).
The white subject can reconcile the suffering in Attawapiskat with the supposed values of Canadian identity by professing outrage, sorrow, and shame. The part that is missing from this process however, is recognition of the benefits and privileges the white subject enjoys from land and resource theft that have created the conditions in Attawapiskat. The white Settler can be outraged at the government for not stepping in, or sad about the conditions there, but the performance of these feelings is not the same thing as coming to terms with how we as Settlers benefit from those conditions and structures that create suffering on a regular and consistent basis.

I argue that this performance continues for the same reason it rings hollow; it remains so psychically satisfying. The emergency becomes a key opportunity to renew and stabilize the colonial relationship in which the Settler’s identity is fixed upon. It becomes central for the Settler to see the native as pre-modern, incapable and damaged in order for them to know themselves as the benevolent caretaker of these people, and of their land. As Indigenous scholar Marcia Crosby argues, “the portrayal of Indigenous people as victims, contaminated by European culture and dying rather than changing, has benefited those who have participated in its construction” (Crosby, 1991, 270). The crises play out over and over without substantive or enduring solutions because the solutions are too threatening, and the crisis too productive.

For concerned Settlers, the crisis provides an opportunity for rescue of a less developed Other. Fanon argues that the Manichean nature of the colonial relation between Settler and Native relies on this dehumanization of the colonized (Fanon, 1963, 7). If Indigenous peoples’ humanity were fully believed, (and that Settlers saw as their equal), serious ethical questions would have to be asked. Why are some communities made to live, and others left to die (Foucault, 1997, 254)? How is it ethical for our society to mirror the “compartmentalized world” described so vividly by Fanon (1963, 3)? Why are some subjected to the conditions of death and
why does this operate so racially? Through the ideas of Indigenous failure, Indigenous refusal to progress/assimilate, Andrea Smith’s ‘logic of genocide’ operates justifiably. The requirement that “[Indigenous peoples] must always be disappearing” (2012, 69, emphasis in original) is fulfilled, securing land and nation through Settler superiority.

The fundamental reality that Settlers rely on the idea of Indigenous inferiority and to know themselves leads us to very different questions and answers about the path forward. Furthermore this necessitates Settler accountability for the violence and dispossession that continues to take place. It seems unlikely that such an admission and reckoning could take place with so much feeling caught up with perceived innocence and goodness. With our identities and subjectivities reconciled, we can go back to our daily lives and all the privileges that entails. We can even feel proud of our capacity to care, and our compassion for those less fortunate. As seen in the headlines and throughout the news coverage, there was no shortage of this kind of response following the exposure of the conditions in Attawapiskat. Its popularity was rivaled only by another dominant view that described the crisis as a result of financial irresponsibility. This narrative relied on common tropes of Indigenous people’s improper use of “Canadian tax dollars”, and the inevitability of their assimilation into Canadian society, i.e. the ‘unreasonable’ expectation that the Canadian state should continue to let Indigenous peoples live in places that are remote, isolated and expensive to support. These discourses emerged soon after the crisis, and increased as the federal government placed the First Nation under Third Party Management.

‘Too Sad to Survive’ and Third Party Management

The *National Post* provided exemplary coverage on this discourse of financial irresponsibility and assimilation. They covered the emergency with reporting that stressed the
unsurprising, inevitability of the crisis in Attawapiskat. The headlines below offered a sense that such disaster was something to be expected, that ‘failure’ is typical:

“The rising toll of a 'failed experiment'; Money can't fix remote reserves like Attawapiskat” (Ivison, 2011)
“Plenty of Attawapiskat blame to go around” (Ivison, 2011a)
“Communities too sad to survive” (National Post Editorial, 2011)
“End native apartheid” (Kheiriddin, 2011)
“Political correctness caused Attawapiskat” (Gunter, 2011)
“A road out of native hardship” (Ivison, 2011b)
“A 'homeland' at the crossroads; Relocation: A dirty word on remote reserves” (Blaze Carlson, 2011)
“It's a disgrace, not a surprise” (Blatchford, 2011).

The *National Post* is known to provide a more conservative or right wing view to their news coverage and analysis. As such many of their articles identify lack of financial responsibility and economic opportunity for Indigenous people on reserves as key problems in the Canadian-Indigenous relationship. These ideas are built from the characteristics identified by Anderson and Robertson, “depravity, innate inferiority and stubborn resistance to progress” and are used to represent Indigenous people in mainstream Canadian culture (2011, 6). These headlines also naturalize the logic of elimination of Indigenous peoples, in that the logic most often repeated was one in which Indigenous communities must assimilate in order to be expect a decent quality of life. The headline “Communities too sad to survive,” suggests that they must relocate or die in a place the government should not be expected to support. This headline and the articles that reiterated similar language, suggests that the community’s “stubborn resistance to progress” (Anderson and Robertson, 2011, 6), is a roadblock to improving the conditions for their people. What this fails to consider, is how Indigenous communities have already been subject to forceful land relocations for decades and indeed centuries. Nor does this consider the implications that relocation would have for land and treaty rights. The existence of the reserve at Attawapiskat is a result of such policies that relocated people from their seasonal camps into the village
The community’s call for relocation was not for permanent resettlement, but as a means to survive the winter. Permanent relocation, as a means to address the community’s ability to have a sufficient housing stock, and adequate infrastructure funding ignores how the systemic underfunding, and ultimately broken treaty promises contributed to the crisis.

The *Globe and Mail* also emphasized these ideas of Indigenous backwardness and resistance to progress. The first headline, published on the front page of the December 15 publication read, “Private property push for reserves; Call to study private ownership of reserve land sparks new debate on how to raise living standards” (Curry, 2011). The next day *The Globe and Mail* published a column by conservative academic and pundit, Tom Flanagan, echoing these ideas. The headline read, “How the First Nations can own their future; Governance matters, writes Tom Flanagan, but it must be the right kind of government – the road to advancement runs through property rights, contracts and markets” (Flanagan, 2011).

These calls for relocation, and ending support to remote reserves were given added credibility through the inclusion of ‘insiders’, Settlers who had worked in remote, Northern Reserves. John Ivison writes in a November 29, 2011 article,

“Laurie Gough, a teacher and author who spent three months in [neighbouring community Kashechwan, has offered a more realistic take [on the situation]. She believes the only solution to improving the lives of natives on reserves is to get them off those reserves. “For the sake of this generation of children, having to grow up in those squalid conditions, we have to face the fact that isolated reserves have been a failed experiment and it’s time to move on” (Ivison, 2011).

The next day, on November 30, 2011, Ivison quotes another teacher with ‘first hand’ experience of the problems on northern reserves. Ivison writes,

I was contacted by a young man who had recently returned from teaching on a northern Ontario reserve. He requested his name not be used - he said he still has friends on the reserve and they would be offended by some of the things he had to say. But he wanted to speak out. He said the problems on reserves are compounded
by abysmal leadership… “Native leadership is really bad. There is apathy and no worldview. No one sees a solution. It’s pretty depressing. I don’t see any possible way for the problems to be fixed – they’re too far gone…They need to be closer to civilization to see how to see how dysfunctional things are,” he said (Ivison, 2011a).

If the financial and political ‘experts’ weren’t enough to convince readers of the necessity of relocation, the frustrated and good intentioned teachers who endured the troubled conditions themselves, confirm that there is no way out for reserves like Attawapiskat.

What is unquestioned is how these teachers have the knowledge needed to solve ‘problems’ like Attawapiskat, and that they are entitled to do so. The first teacher’s three months in the community, and the second’s proximity to the Other, through his friends on reserve, and his first hand exposure to the problems, position them as having the ability to know what is wrong and how to fix it. Razack writes about how white bodies travelling from white spaces to racialized spaces and back again confirm their superiority and colonial subjectivity (2000, 95). Though Razack writes about the violent murder of an Indigenous woman by two white men, the physical journey these teachers take to a ‘zone of disorder’ (Razack, 2000) on the Northern reserve, and return to Southern Canada are just as important to constructing the Settler-Indigenous binary. It is significant that these ‘insiders’ are teachers. The impulse to ‘save’ racialized students is another way to reproduce racial superiority in ‘helping’ or ‘improvement’ professions (Schick, 2000). Schick and St. Denis clarify, “helping others is proof of one’s privileged positioning (one is the helper – not the helped) (2005, 308). Through proximity these teachers become able to know the problems facing reserves, and with their helping intentions are entitled to offer solutions to improve them.

The pernicious aspect of the relocation discourse is the way it promotes assimilation through appeals to reasonable solutions in support of addressing emergency on reserves. In their study of the policies of private land ownership on reserves, Dempsey, Gould and Sundberg
(2011) describe how private property was one instrument through which Indigenous peoples were racialized as inferior, “due to their apparent lack of this particular land management regime” (Dempsey et. al, 2011, 240). Dempsey et. al argue, “conceptions of private property in Canada are deeply entwined with colonial and capitalist systems of governance that sought to create a white setter society in which Euro-American models of land and subject reigned supreme” (2011, 241). Through “inviting First Nations individuals to become equal with other Canadians by becoming property-owning entrepreneurial citizens” (Dempsey, et. al, 2011, 235) this policy removes Indigenous people from their land, eliminates their unique title and relationship to that land, and brings them into the fold of so called ‘responsible, mature, neo-liberal Canadian citizenship’. This move makes treaties, and the Canadian state’s responsibilities to them, obsolete. The parallels to the Indian Act’s act of assimilating Indigenous people into ‘Canadian society’ are intact, through ownership of private property the Indigenous body is eliminated as it is brought into white citizenship. Furthermore, these ideas rationalize and blame Indigenous people for their own suffering. As Verna St. Denis argues, “This idea of the Aboriginal cultural Other as unwilling and unable to adapt to changing social, economic, and political contexts is a long entrenched assumption that justifies oppression and inequality” (2011, 184). This common idea deflects attention away from how these crises and problems are fundamentally a Canadian one as Martin Cannon (2012) reminds us. Cannon, quoting Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair makes the argument, “It is not an Aboriginal problem. It is a problem that all people in Canada need to think about and address” (as cited in Cannon, 2012, 22). These maneuvers work to position Indigenous peoples as the problem, obscuring Settler responsibility and complicity for the crisis.
Following the Government’s decision to place the community under Third Party Management⁢ the discourse on financial irresponsibility became more prominent. The Toronto Star published articles that questioned and criticized the decision, and offered some coverage that gave space to critical Indigenous voices, and questioned the political implications and motivations of the decision. These headlines read:

“Minister orders new management for northern town; 'They're penalizing us for helping our own people’, local chief says after control of finances removed” (Campion-Smith & Ross, 2011)

“Feds blame ‘victim,’ leaders charge; Move wresting control of finances from elected council sparks outrage” (Ross, 2011c).

These headlines highlight that the Council had democratic legitimacy and critiqued the government’s motives for placing the community under a third party manager. Additionally, more space is given to Indigenous voice, "I'm very shocked," Spence told the Toronto Star. "We were in the process of emergency planning. It tells me (federal officials) are not really helping us. They're penalizing us for helping our own people." Yet, the rest of the quoted sources following Chief Spence’s one sentence are white politicians. The same article quotes at length Minister John Duncan, Member of Parliament Charlie Angus, Liberal Interim Leader Bob Rae and NDP Interim Leader Nicole Turmel (Campion-Smith & Ross, 2011). The Indigenous voice is again verified, and deemed credible through Settler ‘authorities’. It could also be argued that the entrenched trope of “corrupt band council” is one that is so engrained in the minds of

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⁢Third Party Management is a temporary policy used by the Ministry of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs in situations where the Band Council’s financial management difficulties have resulted in a delay or stoppage in the programs and services needed by the community. The Department appoints the third-party manager to manage the funding agreement between the First Nation and the Department. The third party manager becomes responsible for the administration of all funds allocated to the First Nation, removing financial authority from the Band Council. According to ANAC this policy is only imposed as a last resort (ANAC, 2013).
Canadians that even these attempts at placing context and Indigenous voice in the headline are not enough to contest the associations made by the words, “control of finances removed” and “Move wresting control of finances from elected council.” Furthermore, these headlines failed to highlight the implications the decision had for Indigenous sovereignty. Through treaty the people of Attawapiskat First Nation represent a nation that entered into a treaty with the Crown and subsequently the nation of Canada. Overriding their inherent rights to self-government, including administration of their finances (and also ignoring that the community’s finances were already in the public domain, and in good fiscal shape) demonstrates how persistent, and productive these discourses remain in producing Indigenous failure and inferiority.

This discourse of inferiority was clearly reinforced in coverage of the third party management decision by the National Post. Their headlines were very factual and brief, but simultaneously reproduced troubling ideas of Indigenous inferiority and corruption. Echoing Anderson and Robertson’s argument, “That the prose may have become less “blatant” however suggests that the audience has become more familiar with the genre conventions of colonial discourse. To put it another way: the nation has been built. Obviousness becomes somehow gauche once “common sense” takes over” (267-8). The headlines read:

“Ottawa places reserve under management; Will administer funding in Attawapiskat” (Chung, 2011)
“Reserve under new management” (Chung, 2011a)

The simplicity of these headlines, suggested a cut and dry solution to the crisis. Ottawa installed an accountant to look after the finances and the problem would be essentially solved. When the band council refused to accept the manager and expelled him from the community however, this caused the discourse perpetuated in the media to focus on the financial failures of the community and suggest that this resistance was pointless. This discourse reiterates Indigenous inferiority. Reinforcing the government’s role as protector of the community (i.e. state paternalism) seen in
headlines such as, “Band expels third-party manager; 'Worrying': ministry” (Hopper, 2011) and thereby depict the community as incapable of taking care of themselves and reiterate Indigenous dependence on a benevolent Canada. Other headlines like, “Another facet of troubled reserve; Attawapiskat gets hefty diamond mine payments” (Ivison, 2011c) and “Crunching Attawapiskat's numbers” (Milke, 2011) rely on common tropes of Indigenous depravity or dishonesty and highlight our superiority at figuring out their accounting errors, and catching them in a scandal. The Globe and Mail featured a similar headline, “Officials investigate state of emergency; Federal minister wants to know why housing is so deplorable after 'significant funding' provided” (Galloway & Howlett, 2011). These headlines reinforce the idea that the First Nation is financially incompetent, and not honest about needing financial support, if they also earn “hefty diamond mine payments” on top of their “significant funding” from the federal government. Citing financial records, listing figures, spending amounts, quoting at length from auditors’ reports, and Government sources like Prime Minister Stephen Harper and Minister John Duncan, these articles position this expert knowledge in service of discrediting Chief Spence and the Attawapiskat Band Council. One article in particular from the National Post, “He said, Chief said” (National Post, Dec. 6, 2011) contrasts what Minister Duncan had said about the emergency, to what Chief Spence said, comparing the different stories side by side. Alluding to the common saying about disagreements “He said, She said” the article questions the legitimacy of the speakers, but not equally. Compared to Minister Duncan’s authority as government official and male, Chief Spence’s gender, and position as an Indigenous person makes her voice less credible. In the phrases they quote, Duncan is printed first, positioning Spence’s words as a rebuttal or excuse to Duncan’s charge, most damaging in the section on “Financial Reporting”. Here Duncan argued that he will seek an independent auditor go through the Nation’s finances. Even though Spence argues due diligence had been carried out and
approved by the Ministry, the accusation is too powerful in the context of common tropes and beliefs that exist in Canadian society. Through these discourses, headlines and who is regarded as having authority to speak, common ideas held by Canadians are reproduced; i.e. that Indigenous peoples waste their tax dollars, cannot manage their own affairs, and cannot be trusted. Ultimately these discourses also work to make the First Nation community culpable for the crisis, and in the process remove our own complicity. If we hold no responsibility, effectively erase treaty obligations, histories of dispossession and violence, as well as the present-day benefits we continue to reap from the land, the money given to the community is not justifiable.

The emergency is treated as a present day failure of the First Nation, making it a target for intervention. This headline, “Tory bill to target reserve politics” (Ivison, 2011d), demonstrates one way this discourse of catastrophization can have two functions (Ophir, 2010, 77). The intervention (of addressing believed governance problem) works to address the present emergency, while accelerating and contributing to the conditions of chronic catastrophe (intervening in the governance structures of sovereign nations, and subjecting them to ongoing discourse of their supposed inferiority). The article in question begins,

The Harper government will introduce new legislation Tuesday aimed at building a stronger election system on native reserves across Canada. A senior government source said the biggest change will be to extend the length of term in office for chiefs and band council members to four years from two, in order to create more stability (Ivison, 2011c).

The idea that subjecting Indigenous communities to legislation in order to promote stability and improve their electoral system, was an early project of the Indian Act, used in many cases to control Indigenous resistance to land dispossession (Hill, 2008, 38). The Indian Act banned traditional governance structures and implemented the current Band Council system, through transferring funds and recognizing only the government mandated structure (ibid.). The discourse around this legislation, and decisions like third party management remain rooted in the
same ideas and ‘knowledge’ of Indigenous people that circulated a century before, i.e. that Indigenous people are inferior and must be brought into modernity (Anderson and Robertson, 2011, Razack, 2011). The function of emergency interventions, as Ophir describes, “facilitate the restoration of an old order or the constitution of a new one” (2010, 75). The restoration of both the old order and new order described above are those of maintaining settler control of Indigenous land and populations.

These discourses (i.e. of humanitarian intervention in ‘Third World Canada’ and the response of fiscal responsibility and increased legislation) are portrayed as opposite of each other in the space of dominant print news, what Cowlishaw calls a “bogus binary” (2003, 105). The idea that these positions are polar opposites works to obscure the foundational ideas of Indigenous people that they have in common, i.e. their superiority and entitled position of offer solutions. Cowlishaw argues of this tendency in the Australian context,

all the commentators – public and academic, ignorant and well informed, left and right (and within each of these categories, Indigenous spokespersons)- display a sense of authority and moral duty. There is a common willingness to proclaim knowledge of causes and solutions, but even more pervasive is the display of a sense of virtuous responsibility toward this depressed minority (2003, 105).

All three newspapers employed the same language of ‘Third World Canada’, though they offered different responses to it, whether it was humanitarian aid, tough love or assimilation, there was no question in their authority to offer such solutions. Indigenous peoples remain the focus of problematization and the object of intervention. Instead of questioning our own role in the persistence of these problems, we continue to think that, “More intervention… will solve the problems that intervention has caused” (Cowlishaw, 2003, 111). These discourses work to normalize the conditions endured by Indigenous people and the countless reports, commissions, and statistics that point to a problem of serious structural and economic violence taking place in contemporary Canadian society.
Furthermore these ideas work to construct the Indigenous body as in need of assistance and in a position to be improved by the same culture and society that is responsible for its colonization. As Razack argues, “[V]iolence comes clothed in the language of improvement, a space through which the Settler can come to know himself or herself as legitimate owner of the land through his capacity to improve Native Others” (2011, 89). It is through this wider context of history, ongoing practices of colonialism, and enduring knowledge of Indigenous people as fundamentally in need of improvement that the discourses produced in response to the 2011 Attawapiskat housing crisis remain deeply colonial and construct the Canadian nation imaginary as racially superior. Dominant forms of media remain rooted in narratives that reproduce Settler superiority. With the majority of print media serving to invite Canadians into the project of white supremacy through their daily newspaper, independent/alternative websites have been developed as spaces that challenge mainstream reporting practices and media institutions.
Chapter 3:  
Spaces of Anti-Colonial Media: Frameworks for Settler Engagement

Alternative and independent media provide different perspectives than typically represented in mainstream, dominant media organizations. These spaces of alternative and independent media can offer a space of (un)learning for those Settlers who either seek out, or are exposed to the ideas featured in these articles. In this chapter I investigate these alternative discourses about the 2011 Attawapiskat housing crisis that contested the dominant narratives explored in Chapter 2. These articles, written from the position of solidarity or allyship, placed Settler complicity and white supremacy within the conversation about the Attawapiskat emergency. I explore these positions (or counter-narratives) of solidarity and interrogate how alternative or independent media can provide a space for anti-colonial pedagogy that challenges Settlers’ knowledge of themselves and Indigenous peoples. Additionally I question how these narratives can offer non-Indigenous Canadians a different kind of relationship with Indigenous peoples, mediated through principles of treaty, that does not rely on the reproduction of colonial relationships and Indigenous failure. Nonetheless, I also ask how this approach may create yet another fantasy needed to assuage white guilt. Using frameworks of solidarity and allyship laid out by Indigenous scholars, I investigate how the production of alternative media discourses could still re-centre “settler future[s]” (Tuck and Yang, 2012, 3) or perpetuate whiteness. I offer a preliminary discussion on how the approaches used by these Settlers to challenge the dominant media discourse on Indigenous emergency can provide both steps forward and serious limitations for anti-colonial engagement with Indigenous crises and as well as areas for future research and organizing.
Anti-Colonial Media Pedagogy: Lessons for Troubling Media Narratives

In this thesis I have demonstrated how print media functions in reproducing Canadian citizens as the caretakers of failed Indigenous peoples. As such, media remains an important site of public education, as well as nation building. Containing this capacity to educate, print media also has the potential of being an important (and accessible) space for (un)learning, and contesting dominant forms of media/knowledge production. In online and print forms, independent or alternative newspapers, websites, blogs and forums, produce articles and reports that challenge and contest dominant news discourse. Much of the literature that exists on media education or ‘media pedagogy’ (Qvortrup, 2007), either focuses on the power of media in teaching and reproducing existing power, social and material relations in our society (Stack and Kelly, 2006; Kellner and Kim, 2010; Cui & Kelly, 2011), or explores its potential as a pedagogy of the oppressed to empower, reclaim and re-represent marginalized identities (Kellner and Kim, 2010; Qvortrup, 2007; Retzlaff, 2005). How alternative media can be used by, and become a space for, privileged learners to unlearn and challenge dominant narratives has yet to be explored (see Dion, 2009 for an approach within formal schooling contexts). This is an important consideration in order to offer a framework for how Settlers might create alternative media that successfully offers solidarity/allyship with Indigenous people and decolonization efforts (and not re-centre their own whiteness) (Tuck & Yang, 2012) or reproduce colonial relationships of sympathy and rescue. As well, there are lessons to be learned from anti-racist and anti-colonial educators who have published multiple works on teaching and engaging privileged learners with their complicitcies and ways they benefit from white supremacy. I first describe a framework for Settlers to engage in solidarity with Indigenous peoples through the principles of Indigenous philosophy and the Two-Row Wampum. Then, I provide an overview of relevant educational theory on teaching anti-racism to privileged learners in the Canadian context. I conclude by
interpreting and analyzing examples of alternative media that Settlers produced in response to and in solidarity with the 2011 Attawapiskat housing crisis, and engage with questions of how this material could perpetuate and re-centre white identities.

**Theorizing Settler Solidarity**

Theoretically in this chapter, I draw heavily from the work of critical Indigenous scholars in order to understand how solidarity, decolonization and possibility for future relationships are articulated through Indigenous principles and worldviews. I do not use these concepts (Indigenous principles and worldviews) in ways that romanticize or appropriate Indigenous philosophy, but instead understand them as crucial for expressing Indigenous claims for sovereignty and self-determination. Often Settlers hear demands for sovereignty as a call for Indigenous statehood, or for Settlers to move back from where they came from. Taiaiake Alfred clarifies this misconception, arguing, “Irredentism has never been in the vision of our peoples” (2009, 181). Instead, these ideas of sovereignty and self-determination are rooted in an Indigenous worldview that defines these concepts alongside an ethic of responsibility and respect. Key here is the idea of relational or “flexible” sovereignty (Smith, 2005, 129). This kind of sovereignty is separate from that typically understood of nation-states. As Andrea Smith explains, “Whereas nation-states are governed through domination and coercion, Indigenous sovereignty and nation hood is predicated on interrelatedness and responsibility” (2005, 129). This idea is similar to how Patricia Monture described sovereignty (not as ownership, but) as responsibility to one another. Monture wrote, “We have a Mohawk word that better describes what we mean by sovereignty and that word is tewathata:wi. It best translates into ‘we carry ourselves’… the responsibility to carry ourselves collectively as nations, as clans, as families” (1999, 36). Monture explains that an important lesson to take away from this is that the “request to have our sovereignty respected is really a request to be responsible. I do not know of
anywhere else in history where a group of people has had to fight so hard just to be responsible (1999, 36). The work of Monture and Smith provides us with an Indigenous conception of sovereignty that exists outside of the nation-state, and as a way of being responsible in our relations to each other and to the land we are on. Responsibility to our relations, as a principle of interaction and method of solidarity between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples becomes a crucial idea to allyship (Barker, 2010, 324).

Relational sovereignty is exemplified in the original treaties entered by the British Crown and the Indigenous Peoples. It is a common myth that Indigenous peoples were ignorant of treaties when they signed them with the Crown. It is now widely accepted that treaties were an Indigenous political practice long before the first Europeans arrived (Sehdev, 2011; McNab, 1999; Borrows, 1997; McKay, 2008). Treaties entered between Indigenous and European nations were guided by the principle of the Covenant Chain of Silver, also known as Guswentah or the Two Row Wampum. This was an original treaty brought into being through the exchange of Wampum belts between the Haudenosaunee and the British Crown (Sunseri & Cannon, 2011, xiv). The wampum belt bears the symbols of the river of life with two separate boats travelling down it; one represents the Haudenosaunee canoe and the other the British Crown’s sailing ship (ibid.). The wampum belt formalizes the treaty between the two separate people, each with their own forms of governance, which engage in shared responsibility and mutual respect for one another (ibid.). Neither nation tries to “steer the other’s vessel” (ibid.), but instead travels down the river as allies. The three rows of white beads on the belt symbolize the foundation of the relationship between nations, that of everlasting “peace, friendship and respect between the two nations” (ibid.). This treaty articulates the relationship between two nations, and was a concept used by Indigenous nations in their interactions with others. Métis historian David McNab explains,
The Covenant Chain is an Aboriginal concept of relationships in their totality, which have included, among other things, cultures, diplomacy and trade. The Chain, which was adopted by the Dutch, the French and then the English, was originally wrought in iron and then in silver; it was a metaphor for the partnership, or covenant, meaning a sacred agreement, between the Aboriginal and European nations in all matters regarding their mutual relationship (1998, 8).

The Covenant Chain of Silver/Two Row Wampum established that all treaties reaffirm and reestablish this peaceful and respectful relationship. The metaphor of silver is equally informative, left unpolished (through a neglected relationship) silver will tarnish, but a well-maintained relationship produces a shining chain (Sehdev, 2011, 270). The practices and traditions that surrounded the treaty making process highlight its importance to Indigenous political philosophy and governance.

The way Europeans viewed treaty, however, was very different. The consequences of this different outlook we still experience today, as treaty is viewed as a transaction for land versus a relationship based on mutual coexistence, respect and responsibility. As Indigenous legal scholar, John Borrows has described, “The different objectives that First Nations and the Crown had in the formulation of the principles surrounding the [Royal] Proclamation [of 1763] is the reason for the different versions embedded in its text. Britain was attempting to secure territory and jurisdiction through the Proclamation, while First Nations were concerned with preserving their lands and sovereignty” (Borrows, 1997, 161). These two objectives of land and sovereignty remain fundamental to Indigenous nations and to the Indigenous-Canadian relationship today. Taiaike Alfred clarifies, “Something was stolen, lies were told, and they have never been made right. That is the crux of the problem” (2009, 180). Furthermore, this requires Settler to recognize themselves as part of treaty too (McCreary, 2005). Alfred suggests that the histories of how we came here and the history of the land we ended up on determine what kind of treaty commitments we are required to uphold in order to be on this land ethically (2010, 7). In
dominant news discourse covering the Attawapiskat emergency, treaty commitments were only discussed in a cursory manner and not as a specific relationship of Treaty 9, but as the responsibility of the Canadian government generally. The removal of this specificity distances the benefits Canadians receive from the wealth and resources extracted from land of Treaty 9, to the level of unrelatable federal government structures. The failure at Attawapiskat, when not directed at the Chief and Band Council, was placed on the Ministry of Aboriginal and Northern Affairs, blaming “bureaucratic neglect” (Angus, 2011). The discourse of administrative or bureaucratic dysfunction, or lack of leadership from Minister John Duncan, erases the neglected treaty relationship laid out by Treaty 9, and its original precursor, the Two Row Wampum. Additionally, this discourse allows Settlers to see themselves as outside of the problem or simply not complicit. Without discussions on treaty and the responsibilities and commitments Settler Canadians are required to uphold to be on this land, the discourse easily constructed Indigenous failure as the cause of the crisis as traced in Chapter 2.

The basis of a more responsible relationship is outlined in Treaty, and gives Settlers a place to start in seeking allyship, or more simply, a better relationship with Indigenous people. Teaching treaty, and Settlers’ roles and responsibilities within Treaty Rights, was an approach used by the late Patricia Monture, a Kanienkahaka scholar. Tyler McCreary (2005), in writing about Monture’s approach, highlighted how Monture would explain that both Settler and Indigenous nations possess treaty rights (in different ways), and that these rights “determine our relationship to the territory” (7). Displaying how non-Indigenous people are also a part of treaty, engaged students with the idea that they benefit from treaty in ways that are directly connected to Indigenous people. The potential that Treaty has as a method for connecting Settlers to issues of settler colonialism makes it an important starting point (Cannon, 2012, 27).
Along with treaty (as method), the frameworks offered by anti-racism and critical whiteness education approaches, are valuable to interrogate in attempts to confront Settler complicity and benefits from white supremacy. These approaches also identify ways to engage and trouble both white Settlers and arrivant/Settlers of colour who may resist exposure to discussions of race and complicity. Carol Schick and Verna St. Denis (2005) have identified commonplace narratives of Canadian nationalism that construct racial identifications and whiteness, and describe how white students often resist understanding their own implication in racial hierarchies (2005, 308). They write,

We are not surprised if some students offer initial resistance to learning the effects of racial identifications of themselves and others; for most students in our program, an analysis of power relations is unfamiliar in language and concept. Such an analysis illustrates to them that racial identifications are produced through social, political, and historic relations, and, as such, students cannot stand outside and view themselves in a neutral and objective manner (2005, 310).

In order to challenge this resistance, Schick and St. Denis outline what they call “Anti-Supremacist Pedagogy” (2005, 309), which centres the way their students’ non-Indigenous identities implicate them in oppressive power relations. Schick and St. Denis explain, “As they come to understand the implications of their social positioning for anti-racist pedagogy, students learn that there is no innocent space. This is a traumatic experience for many, but we think it could not be otherwise” (2005, 311). Challenging innocence, and understanding how their position/identity is built from a foundation of “normative social practices and histories” (ibid.) Schick and St. Denis’ students begin to understand, “how racial dominance, such as whiteness, is an ongoing process and how identifications can shift and change in accordance with dominant discourses” (ibid.). Naming whiteness, and placing the power and privilege this identity receives, interrupts the invisibility of race for white students.
Martin Cannon calls for a similar pedagogical approach that troubles normalcy, but also argues for relationality to the Other. Connecting teaching homophobia to his investigation into teaching colonial dominance and race, Cannon writes,

I asked my students to consider themselves differently, and in relation to the bullied other—to consider what it is about heterosexuality (perhaps better stated as sexuality in general) that requires repeated violence and cowardice. My point is that normalcy—in this case heternormativity—needs also to be troubled in classroom contexts. We will only come to know and change heterosexist supremacy if we are able to identify its inner workings as a modality of power that polices our realization of erotic and gendered diversity (Cannon, 1998) (Cannon, 2012, 23).

Relating to the Other in this way gives us the opportunity to understand our own identity, and investments in maintaining it. Indeed, the focus on relationality is also rooted in the ideas of Smith and Monture outlined above. Cannon argues that a pedagogy that begins with Settlers (and their histories, and treaty relations), and not Indigenous “cultural difference” (or Otherness) has the potential to disrupt the reproduction of colonial identities and relationships (2012, 27).

An important consideration for all of these approaches is that it must not be limited to what Applebaum describes as “white privilege pedagogy” that fails to connect how individual privilege and “whiteness works through white bodies and the discursive practices of well-intentioned, caring and even progressive white people” (2010, 180). Learning about privilege alone often results in white people confessing their privilege in an attempt to regain innocence and goodness. Though Applebaum does not discuss settler colonialism, or specifically Settler privilege, Applebaum’s work is especially important in the Canadian context as goodness and innocence are so tied up in Canadian national narratives that construct identity. She writes, “Confessions of whiteness, therefore, constitute a form of pleasurable relief because what has produced the discomfort of learning about complicity is removed and one is purged of wrongdoing” (2010, 19). Announcing one’s privilege becomes a way to satisfy white needs and
desire to be good again, rescuing a good white identity. To disrupt this claim of innocence, Applebaum argues for a “white complicity pedagogy [that] begins with the principle that the recognition of complicity, not just privilege, [as] the starting point for white engagement with systemic racial injustice” (2010, 180). Fundamental to this approach is the question, “What allows whites to see themselves as part of the solution and to deny that they are part of the problem?” (Applebaum, 2010, 180).

From these considerations, I now turn to print media that challenged the dominant discourses of Indigenous failure, humanitarianism and Band corruption. In evaluating them I will consider the lessons outlined above and ask the following questions: How do these articulations of solidarity align or diverge from Indigenous conceptions of sovereignty? How do these Settlers view treaty? How do they articulate resistance or challenge to white supremacy? How is the future/steps forward conceptualized?

The articles chosen for this section are: “If White People Lived in Attawapiskat”, by Krystalline Kraus, published on rabble.ca on November 29, 2011; “We have to pay the rent in Attawapiskat” published as an Op-Ed in the Toronto Star on January 26, 2012 (re-published online as: Strengthening the chain between First Nations and non-aboriginal Canadians), by Catherine Murton-Stoehr, “What if Natives Stopped Subsidizing Canada?” by Dru Oja Jay, published in Issue 87 of The Dominion Paper and on The Media Co-op website on January 27, 2013 and; and Decolonizing Together, by Harsha Walia, published in the January/February issue of Briarpatch Magazine and online on January 1, 2012. I limit the articles to four, (one published exclusively online, and three in both print and online) in order to examine them closely given the length and time limits this thesis imposes. Additionally these articles were published in well-known alternative media websites and publications. While many individual journalists and bloggers certainly published commentary and reports on Attawapiskat, the sheer magnitude of
these individual websites and blogs makes it unfeasible to review and assess all of this possible content. As a result I limited my search for alternative content to websites and publications identified by the Simon Fraser University Library, Mount Allison University Library and independentmedia.ca (directory of non-corporate media) in an attempt to create a list that was representative of the content and what articles were most accessible to readers. Of the extensive list catalogued by these libraries, there were only three organizations that had a Canada wide focus (as opposed to city, regional or specific issue based focus), and covered the Attawapiskat crisis during the winter of 2011 – 2012. These organizations were: Rabble.ca (10 articles), The Dominion Paper/Media Co-op (2 articles), Briarpatch Magazine/Briarpatch Blog (3 articles). In the case of the Toronto Star Op-Ed, I have chosen this piece because it provided an alternative position to the one expressed in the majority of the Toronto Star’s coverage, and for its large circulation (both online and in print) that allowed many readers to be exposed to the ideas in it.

“If White People Lived in Attawapiskat”

The first article, “If White People Lived in Attawapiskat” was written by self-described, “veteran activist” Krystalline Kraus. I chose this article because it was published on rabble.ca, a popular news website/blog targeted to progressive and activist readers. Rabble.ca calls itself ‘progressive’ and highlights its participatory structure that allows for readers and contributors to “explore political passions and an opportunity to expand ideas” (Rabble.ca, 2013). Potential allies of Indigenous struggle would be more likely to stumble across this article than say, supporters of the Conservative Government’s decision to impose Third Party Management. As well, Kraus’s article was posted on the “Top Picks” of the homepage, making it more accessible to those browsing the website, and was shared widely on social media (Rabble.ca, 2011).
Kraus’ article was published a week after the emergency began to be covered by national news outlets, and replied to the Government’s inaction, as well as the way the story was beginning to be discussed through ideas of charity and fiscal accountability in mainstream news. Kraus writes, “If white people lived in Attawapiskat, this "crisis" would never have happened. If white people lived in Attawapiskat, there would be no acute housing "crisis," period. It's not fair to consider the housing situation there an acute crisis since racism is the root cause of the historical, consistent and systemic neglect of First Nation issues in Canada” (Kraus, 2011). Naming whiteness (and Attawapiskat’s position outside of it) powerfully highlights how race functions in Canada to displace and disregard Indigenous peoples. Kraus clarifies, “I want to note this is not an environmental disaster or a region destroyed by war, but a First Nation reserve left to rot for lack of care and the consequence of racism-based neglect” (ibid.). Though Kraus does not elaborate on why we have a responsibility through a treaty relationship to care about or provide support to the community, she draws attention to how the situation there is a product of many years of indifference. Kraus contests the narrative of financial incompetence by arguing, “The community is in debt because it was forced to pay for an evacuation two years ago when a sewage -- poor, neglected infrastructure -- backup left 100 people homeless” (ibid.). While the majority of the article goes on to report on numbers, facts and figures of what the crisis constituted of and how it was affecting the people there.

Kraus was successful in turning the issue of an “Indigenous problem” on its head, pointing out instead how this is a historical and systemic problem of race, though the article fails to talk about future possibilities of the Indigenous-Settler relationship. As a first response to the wave of humanitarian “good will” and conservative disavowal, Kraus succeeded in cutting to the point of white complicity, and white privilege, while educating Settlers about the history of this problem through years of state-sanctioned neglect. However, in this article much of the criticism
is directed at the provincial and federal governments. With such a narrow focus of blame/complicity, it is easy to leave this article thinking, if only we elected better, less racist governments, this problem would go away. Though other kinds of governments may do less harm, the singular focus on colonial structures of governance and organizations of power, fails to consider how these forms of power are reproductive and a part of more than just formal governmental relations. Readers can also view themselves as outside the problem, as it is a bad government that caused the problem, leaving their innocence intact.

“**We Have to Pay The Rent in Attawapiskat**”

The second article, “We Have to Pay The Rent in Attawapiskat”, was published as an Op-Ed in the Toronto Star on January 26, 2012. It was then posted on the Toronto Star’s online news website, under the title “Strengthening the Chain between First Nations and non-aboriginal Canadians” (thestar.com, 2012). The piece was written by Nipissing University history instructor, Catherine Murton Stoehr. I chose this article because of its accessibility to a wide number of readers, and for Murton Stoehr’s direct reference to the Covenant Chain of Friendship. Highlighting this part of the history between Indigenous nations and Canadians, Murton Stoehr gives context to why Canada has a responsibility to the community. Describing the relationship with Indigenous nations today, Murton Stoehr writes, “the chain is almost rusted out” (Murton Stoehr, 2012). Re-contextualizing the problem found in Indigenous communities as a failure of the relationship between our nations interrupts prevalent ideas that the problems lies with the Indigenous community itself. In this way Murton Stoehr starts with the Settler problem, and attempts to educate Settlers of their Treaty rights and responsibilities.

To do this, she makes a comparison to paying the rent for being on this land. She writes, “One of the central reasons for this breakdown [in the Indigenous-Canadian relationship] is that
non-aboriginal Canadians see all money and resources given to First Nations people as charity, while people in [Assembly of First Nations Chief] Atleo’s world see it as rent. If you’re handing out charity, you get to set conditions like submission to unelected managers. But people paying rent don’t get to interfere in their landlords’ business” (Murton Stoehr, 2012). With this comparison Murton Stoehr is able to illustrate how through taking the land, we made treaties that said we would agree to pay (rent) to live here. She argues, “In the same way that a lease remains in effect as long as a person rents a house, the treaties remain in effect as long as non-First Nations people live in Canada. Consistently fulfilling the terms of the treaties is the minimum ethical requirement of living on the land of Canada” (ibid.). Positioning the First Nation as landlord is an interesting way to show Indigenous claim over the land in a frame of reference most Canadians will understand. Murton Stoehr then takes a “long view” of history (Alfred, 2009) and describes how treaties were made, and the First Nation practice of making oral agreements. Murton Stoehr argues,

Indeed, the written documents cut out many of the oral promises and all of the shared “spirit and intent” of the oral agreements. So when we in 2012 talk about fulfilling the written treaty documents, we are talking about a limited, achievable goal. The more difficult part will be recovering and living up to the spirit and intent of the treaties (Murton Stoehr, 2012).

The strength of this article is that it gives the reader their historical responsibility, and invites them to honour the “spirit and intent” of the treaties, taking seriously that within treaty there lies a model for a better relationship. Importantly, this article asks Canadians to live up to their end of the deal, and see themselves as part of the problem. She writes,

The bad news is that we have been left holding the bag and the profits from a 200-year-old land heist. The good news is that there is a clear path forward. To strengthen the chain between the First Nations and non-aboriginal Canadians, we must turn our gaze from the shortcomings of First Nations people onto our own. We must restore our side of the treaty relationship, which means learning the written and oral promises made over our bit of Canada and requiring our representatives to put fulfilling them at the top of their priority list (ibid.).
The Op-Ed concludes with an appeal to values that Murton Stoehr believes the Canadian reader will relate to. She concludes, “We must do this because we said we would and we are honest. The Canadian people are not thieves and profiteers and we will make good on the deals from which we have received one blessing after another. My generation will pay the rent in Attawapiskat” (2012, 8).

This article is very successful in using the Covenant Chain as a method of teaching Canadians of their responsibility and relationship to Indigenous people. Yet, for the strengths of this article, there are important limitations, perhaps because Murton Stoehr made strategic decisions in order to be heard by her audience who may not have been willing to implicate themselves in the crisis. First of all, comparing Indigenous claims to land to commonly understood tenant-landlord relations, does not articulate the Indigenous understanding of a relationship to land that incorporates responsibility to it and each other. This comparison does some things (most successfully clarifying that money given to Indigenous nations is not charity), but obscures and misses others (that we established the Canadian state and our presence here through violence, force and genocide). Secondly, Murton Stoehr suggests that to fulfill our end of the treaty, we must rely on our representatives to do this work. Though she’s right, we do rely on state structures that control “Crown” land, resource extraction, environmental regulations and taxation systems to fulfill components of our treaty agreement, this misses the opportunity to trouble the very legitimacy of the Canadian state to have the authority to do these things. As well, this misses how we could, collectively as white Settlers, begin to recognize our history, our relationships and responsibilities to Indigenous peoples and the land, in ways that would not rely on the state, or colonial forms of administration (Smith, 2005; Monture, 1999) to do so. Andrea Smith articulates this idea as “taking power by making power” (2013). Smith explains,
The principle undergirding these models is to challenge capital and state power by actually creating the world we want to live in now. These groups develop alternative governance systems based on principles of horizontality, mutuality, and interrelatedness rather than hierarchy, domination, and control. In beginning to create this new world, subjects are transformed.

The idea of forming subjects outside of the colonial state requires both organizing and thinking about how we relate to and the responsibilities we have to others. I elaborate on this type of ‘Settler self-determination’ project in further detail below.

Lastly, in her conclusion, Murton Stoehr makes an appeal to Canadian honesty and goodness. I read this as a strategic move to invite Canadians into reckoning with their history and inviting them to address the land theft from 200 years ago by upholding what they know of themselves to be true (as Good Canadians). What is difficult to reconcile here, is the question of how to break it to Canadians that our nation is still stealing land today, and that our national identity as good and honest does not hold up to historical (nor contemporary) scrutiny. In the end I think Murton Stoehr realized that this is the trade off. Certain parts of the story can be troubled, if other parts of the Canadian myth remain untouched allowing the reader to identify with, and feel compelled to think differently about their relationship to Indigenous people.

This reluctance to engage in a pedagogy that could be traumatic or uncomfortable for white readers is important to investigate. By upholding myths of Canadian “goodness” as a reason for offering solidarity, the discomfort of learning one’s complicity is avoided. Through this identification, white Settlers can see themselves as “good whites” in comparison to overtly racist or ignorant people that deny the call to “pay the rent”. But, as Applebaum argues about whiteness and race privilege, “[B]eing a good white is part of the problem rather than the solution to systemic racism” (2010, 20). This impulse is very present in attempts to alleviate discomfort for Settler privilege as well; especially given the influence the ideas of goodness and innocence have in creating Canadian identities. Being a ‘good’ Settler still constructs Indigenous
peoples as an object of our benevolence and concern, even if it is disguised in attempts of solidarity.

Adam Barker interrogates how Settler desires to re-establish comfort when confronted with the realities of settler colonialism. Drawing from the work of Paulette Regan (2006), Barker argues,

This place of profound discomfort, generated by an honest inquiry into the causes and effects of colonialism, and our individual responsibility for colonization, is what Regan (2006) has referred to as ‘unsettling the Settler within’. The fundamental premise of Regan’s approach is that we as Settlers must learn to accept that being unsettled is not something to be avoided, but rather to be embraced and explored.

Discomfort is only the first step to a more ethical and just relationship. To move past the initial realization of what Regan (2006) identifies as myths of Settler existence, and become an ally, Barker (2010) argues that “concern for an ally and respect for the autonomy of that ally (core principles of… the Guswentah two row treaty) are principles too essential to alliance building to be ignored, and therefore give Settler people a place to start” (2010, 324). Murton Stoehr does not engage with a pedagogy of discomfort, and perhaps loses an opportunity to provide Settlers a starting point for addressing their role, and complicity in the conditions of suffering experienced in Attawapiskat. However, this article does provide an effective example of how using Treaty as an educational method can refocus the problem from Indigenous failure to Settler society.

“What if Natives Stop Subsidizing Canada?”

The next article I will examine is, “What if Natives Stop Subsidizing Canada?” posted on the Idle No More blog of The Media Co-op (www.mediacoop.ca), and republished in the organization’s affiliated newspaper, The Dominion Paper (2013). This article was written over a year after the initial crisis in Attawapiskat, and as a reaction to the Idle No More Indigenous social movement. Though it was not published in the weeks and months following the 2011
housing crisis I have included it in this analysis because it directly references Attawapiskat (through Chief Spence’s hunger strike), but also by making the argument that Attawapiskat is subsidizing the province of Ontario, the Canadian state, and DeBeers Diamond company with the diamonds found under their traditional lands. In addition, this article grapples with the legacy and after effects of the crisis. The significance and media consumption of Attawapiskat Chief Spence’s hunger strike placed the community back into the imagination of Canadians as an enduring problem facing the Indigenous-Canadian relationship.

The article was written by Dru Oja Jay, who is a co-founder of the Media Co-op, self-identified activist and co-author of the book *Offsetting Resistance*. The Media Co-op is another news website for activist Canadians that is reader-funded and member-run. Formally organized as a solidarity co-operative, and provide “grassroots, democratic coverage of their communities and of Canada” (mediacoop.ca/about, 2013). The organization features this web content, and publishes the work of other independent journalists in their monthly paper *The Dominion Paper*. The focus of the coverage is “news from the grassroots” that “provide[s] accurate, critical coverage that is accountable to its readers and the subjects it tackles” (The Dominion Paper, 2013).

Like Murton Stoehr’s article, Oja Jay begins by challenging the idea that Indigenous people live off “Canadian” tax dollars, and inverts this idea; he writes, “Indigenous people have been subsidizing Canada for a very long time” (Oja Jay, 2013). Oja Jay describes how this is the case, he writes, “Right now, DeBeers is constructing a $1 billion mine on the traditional territory of the Āhtawāpiskatowī ininiwak. Anticipated revenues will top $6.7 billion… Royalties from the mine do not go to the First Nation, but straight to the provincial government. The community has received some temporary jobs in the mine, and future generations will have to deal with the consequences of a giant open pit mine in their back yard… Attawapiskat is subsidizing DeBeers,
Canada and Ontario.” (Oja Jay, 2013). Describing land and resources as ways that Indigenous people have subsidized Canada and the Canadian economy, Oja Jay successfully connects land theft and “generations of suffering” (ibid.) to the benefits and privileges we enjoy today. Naming them subsidies turns the conversation away from problematizing Indigenous peoples to questioning what the Canadian economy requires (displacement, environmental destruction, Indigenous emergency) to generate wealth.

Oja Jay then goes into a discussion of Canada’s history of violence, highlighting how force was necessary to dispossess lands from their original inhabitants and exploit resources. He writes, “The human costs are far greater; brutal tactics aimed at erasing native peoples' identity and connection with the land have created human tragedies several generations deep and a legacy of fierce and principled resistance that continues today” (ibid.). Oja Jay goes on to describe how violence has been a crucial part of our ability to maintain control of the land and resources, “From the active violence of residential schools to the targeted neglect of underfunded reserve schools, from RCMP and armed forces rifles to provincial police tear gas canisters, the extraction of these subsidies has always been treated like a game of Risk, but with real consequences” (ibid.). Violence is an important piece that was missing from both Kraus and Murton Stoehr’s articles. With the truth of violence exposed, Oja Jay then invites non-Indigenous people to move beyond bad feelings or guilt and participate in dismantling this system from a place of solidarity. He writes,

Empathy and remorse are great reasons to act to dismantle this ugly system of expropriation. But an even better reason is that Indigenous nations present the best and only partners in taking care of our environment. Protecting our rivers, lakes, forests and oceans is best done by people with a multi-millennial relationship with the land. As the people who live downstream and downwind, and who have an ongoing relationship to the land, Cree, Dene, Anishnabe, Inuit, Ojibway and other nations are among the best placed and most motivated to slow down and stop the industrial gigaprojects that are threatening all of our lives (ibid.).
As Martin Cannon (2012) has described in teaching teacher candidates about settler colonialism, the need to create common ground is crucial. Cannon incorporates environmental sustainability into his approach to provide a way for white and non-Indigenous students to have an investment in addressing shared oppressions as well as to provide a way to start a discussion on the connection between environmental destruction, capitalism and colonialism (Cannon, 2012, 26). Oja Jay also uses this tactic; he invites Settlers to view themselves as having a stake in the problem, and Indigenous peoples as their partners in addressing it. Oja Jay concludes by proposing a way forward that takes its lead from Indigenous communities, “Movements like Idle No More give a population asleep at the wheel the chance to wake up and hear what native communities have been saying for hundreds of years: it's time to withdraw our consent from this dead-end regime, and chart a new course” (Oja Jay, 2013). Oja Jay’s article is quite in line with the framework laid out above, though does not directly discuss white supremacy, or race. It is interesting that although he is writing for activist/minded readers, his focus remains on capitalism and environmental destruction, again perhaps to create investment to resist from a place of solidarity and not guilt. Yet, if we take seriously the work of scholars like Smith (2010; Khan et. al, 2010), Cannon (2012) and Schick & St. Dennis (2005) who have argued that naming what is normal (in this case, whiteness) is key to troubling identities and challenging white supremacy, Oja Jay misses a key opportunity to discuss race and white privilege as inextricably linked to settler colonialism. This has the potential of creating a risky discourse of ‘sameness’, that obscures how we can be both oppressor and oppressed (Smith, 2006), for the sake of creating common ground and investment in change.

“Decolonizing Together”
The last article I examine is “Decolonizing together: Moving beyond a politics of solidarity toward a practice of decolonization”, by Harsha Walia and published in print in the January/February 2012 issue of *Briarpatch Magazine*, and online on January 1, 2012 at briarpatchmagazine.com. This article does not mention Attawapiskat directly, but given that it was published within weeks following the crisis makes this a relevant article to examine.

Furthermore, *Briarpatch Magazine* is a publication that calls itself, “Fiercely independent”, established in the 1970s as an anti-poverty publication, and now sees its work as “def[ying] the false consensus of the corporate media” (briarpatchmagazine.com). Publishing in both print and online and targeted to activists and/or progressive Settlers makes this an important publication for its accessibility and reach.

Walia’s article, begins by raising the issues explained in the first articles, i.e. “Canada’s state and corporate wealth is largely based on subsidies gained from the theft of Indigenous lands and resources” (Walia, 2012). She attributes the ability to take this wealth through systemic destruction of Indigenous peoples, and policies of assimilation. Walia’s focus however, is different, she is not trying to convince Settlers that land was stolen and that we benefit from it today. Her focus is on how Settlers can engage in this problem through practices of decolonization, which go beyond a politics of solidarity as Oja Jay offers above. Walia writes,

> Given the devastating cultural, spiritual, economic, linguistic and political impacts of colonialism on Indigenous people in Canada, any serious attempt by non-natives at allying with Indigenous struggles must entail solidarity in the fight against colonization (ibid.).

This focus, however, requires that the reader already accepts or believes Walia’s assertion that Canada was built on stolen land through violence. The article though is effective, as it provides the reader with steps forward, beyond raising awareness and arousing bad feelings. Furthermore, Walia introduces the imperative to centre Indigenous worldviews in practices of solidarity and
collective action. Cautioning against simply incorporating/assimilating Indigenous self-determination into the existing movements for social change, Walia argues that, “Indigenous struggle cannot simply be accommodated within other struggles; it demands solidarity on its own terms” (Walia, 2012). Drawing from the ideas I have outlined above, Walia lays out the principles of responsible solidarity that are rooted in Indigenous conceptions of relational sovereignty: Settler complicity as “beneficiaries of illegal settlement”, autonomy and respect for decision making within Indigenous communities, and moving beyond the state to negotiate our relationships and identities (ibid.).

Walia describes decolonization as “the process whereby we create the conditions in which we want to live and the social relations we wish to have” and calls on Settlers to re-imagine our futures. Much like Smith’s articulation of “taking power by making power” (2013), and Alfred’s call for a radical imagination; this entails moving beyond the state structures and national cultures from which we derive our identities (Alfred, 2010, 6). “Radical imagination is simply Euroamericans deciding to leave the old visions of conquest and privileges of empire behind and focusing on their responsibilities as human beings today” (Alfred, 2010, 7). In the context of January 2012, this article also offered a reading of the Indigenous-Canadian relationship that interrupted the dominant focus on Attawapiskat as an Indigenous problem. Walia’s article takes Canadian society as the underlying problem preventing Indigenous self-determination, and Settler self-determination as well. Walia writes, citing Nora Burke, “If we are in support of self-determination, we too need to be self-determining. It is time to cut the state out of this relationship, and to replace it with a new relationship, one which is mutually negotiated, and premised on a core respect for autonomy and freedom.” Inviting Settlers into the project of self-determination is an important step of building common ground in a radical sense. At the core of this invitation is an opportunity to revolutionize Settler society at the same time creating the
conditions for Indigenous self-determination. This is where Walia differs most significantly from the Murton Stoehr’s appeal, she asks Canadians to engage in order to change their own lives, and not just Indigenous lives in order to be moral citizens.

To do this, Walia outlines what decolonization requires of us, and how this is based on principles of the Two-Row wampum. Walia argues,

> Decolonization requires us to exercise our sovereignties differently and to reconfigure our communities based on shared experiences, ideals and visions. Almost all Indigenous formulations of sovereignty – such as the Two Row Wampum agreement of peace, friendship and respect between the Haudenosaunee nations and Settler – are premised on revolutionary notions of respectful coexistence and stewardship of the land, which goes far beyond any Western liberal democratic ideal (Walia, 2012).

Centering Two-Row wampum, and articulating ways that Settlers can engage in their own process of decolonization places this article within all of the frameworks outlined above. Though she takes certain facts for granted (targeting an audience that is already aware or critical of settler colonialism), she successfully articulates both a framework for decolonization, and the ways that Settlers can begin to practice these ideas that focus on responsibility.

**Radical Potential or Potential for Relieving Radicals?**

These articles present important opportunities for Settlers to investigate their complicity and investments in settler colonialism. However, when we ask the questions about what these articles do, and what subject positions they create, it can be easy to rush past the ways these articles may re-centre whiteness in an attempt to offer constructive, knowable strategies for anti-colonial engagement. It is a serious consequence that these types of counter-narratives could invite Settlers to see themselves as radical, critical and as Sara Ahmed (2004) has termed “the subject who knows”. Ahmed’s argument, in offering her critique on whiteness studies (but very relevant to the argument that is made here) explains,
Studying whiteness can involve the claiming of a privileged white identity as the *subject who knows*. My argument suggests that we cannot simply unlearn privilege when the cultures in which learning take place are shaped by privilege (2004, para. 40, emphasis added).

Focusing on unlearning, in spaces deemed alternative or independent, shapes how these Settlers view their relationship to others, and how they position themselves against those who are ignorant of or indifferent to these practices, ideas and knowledge. Ahmed suggests that the term “critical” can function to produce “good knowledge” (2004). And as Applebaum argues, this impulse towards goodness is another mechanism of protecting and securing “white moral innocence” (2010, 180). Applebaum asks, “What allows whites to see themselves as part of the solution and to deny that they are part of the problem?” (ibid.). Through the creation of a subject position that understands itself to be critical, and self-reflexive, the Settler can once again feel morally superior, and also that they are actively participating in decolonization through self-reflection and knowledge. This self-consciousness subject, as Ahmed (2004) and Rose (1999) trace “is one that turns its gaze towards itself, and that might manage itself, or reflect upon itself, or even turn itself into a project” (2004, para. 40). This subject is characteristically, “a bourgeois subject, one who has the time and resources to be a self, as a subject that has depth which one can be conscious about” (ibid.). The colonial project of improvement is extended to the white subject who has been exposed to troubling truths and seeks a way out of guilt, discomfort or complicity. Andrea Smith (2013) reiterates this idea and argues, citing the work of Hiram Perez, how this subject uses the racialized body to intellectually produce themselves as superior, intellectual, “cosmopolitan subjects” (2013). Smith argues, “The white subject is capable of being “anti-“ or “post-identity,” but understands their post-identity only in relationship to brown subjects which are hopelessly fixed within identity. Brown peoples provide the “raw material” that enables the intellectual production of the white subject” (2013). Smith has also argued that
this tendency has material consequences as well, as white people become professional allies.

Smith explains,

In particular indigenous peoples and people of color become the occasion by which the white subject can self-reflect on his/her privilege. If this person self reflects effectively, s/he may be bestowed the title “ally” and build a career of his/her self-reflection. As many on the blogosphere have been commenting recently (see for instance @prisonculture and @ChiefElk) an entire ally industrial complex has developed around the professional confession of privilege (2013).

Ahmed (2004) calls this a typical ‘progressive story’, but also a ‘fantasy’, that “presumes that to be critical and self-conscious is a good thing, and is even the condition of possibility for anti-racism” (2004, para 40). Asking, or searching for what to do to be anti-racist, re-centres white agency in an attempt to reproduce a positive white identity. Ahmed suggests, “To hear the work of exposure requires that white subjects inhabit the critique, with its lengthy duration, and recognise the world that is re-described by the critique as one in which they live” (2004, para. 57, emphasis in original). Ahmed argues that these projects “should not be about re-describing the white subject as anti-racist, or constitute itself as a form of anti-racism, or even as providing the conditions for anti-racism. Whiteness studies should instead be about attending to the forms of white racism and white privilege that are not undone, and may even be repeated and intensified, through declarations of whiteness, or through the recognition of privilege as privilege” (2004, para. 58). Instead, Ahmed argues for us to “stay implicated” within critique, and not begin to work “‘beyond’… the work of exposing racism, as that which structures the present that we differently inhabit” (ibid.). In other words, Ahmed is suggesting that we focus on the work of exposing racism, but also to stay within the critique, and not place ourselves outside of it, as we don’t yet know what the answers and next steps will be.

Smith (2013) on the other hand has argued for an active approach that includes the creation of new forms of power and structures. She explains, “the undoing of privilege occurs
not by individuals confessing their privileges or trying to think themselves into a new subject position, but through the creation of collective structures that dismantle the systems that enable these privileges” (2013). Smith’s argument in some ways reflects Walia’s argument for Settler self-determination beyond state structures examined above. Smith elaborates,

To quote one of my activist mentors, Judy Vaughn, ‘You don’t think your way into a different way of acting; you must act your way into a different way of thinking’. Essentially, the current social structure conditions us to exercise what privileges we may have. If we want to undermine those privileges, we must change the structures within which we live so that we become different peoples in the process (2013).

However, taking seriously the implications of both Ahmed’s and Smith’s work, Walia’s argument for Settler self-determination and decolonization necessarily requires extreme care and as Applebaum has argued, “vigilance about one’s own moral and antiracist project” (2010, 185). The need to disrupt white certainty, and ask, “are we actually listening?” (ibid.), places Ahmed’s warning to stay implicated and realize the fantasy critique can offer. Ahmed’s uneasiness with white anti-racist action is shared by Tuck and Wang (2012), who argue that academic and activist focus on decolonization too often becomes a metaphor used to reclaim white innocence and goodness. They argue that potential lies in “An ethic of incommensurability, which guides moves that unsettle innocence” (2012, 35) and suggest that, “The answers will not emerge from friendly understanding, and indeed require a dangerous understanding of uncommonality that un-coalesces coalition politics - moves that may feel very unfriendly” (ibid.). Central to this idea is the relinquishment of

settler futurity, abandoning the hope that settlers may one day be commensurable to Native peoples. It means removing the asterisks, periods, commas, apostrophes, the whereas’s, buts, and conditional clauses that punctuate decolonization and underwrite settler innocence. The Native futures, the lives to be lived once the settler nation is gone - these are the unwritten possibilities made possible by an ethic of incommensurability (2012, 35-6).
Working with the idea of incommensurability is difficult, but perhaps that is its function; to stop us from going beyond the ‘exposure of racism’ and fitting ourselves with new, critical subject positions that make us feel good and innocent once again.

In this chapter, I have presented and analyzed the work of allied Settlers as a way to understand how engagement with anti-colonial critique can offer both steps forward, and problematic consequences. Interventions in spaces of alternative/independent news production have the potential to interrupt dominant representations of Indigenous emergency. They ask Settlers to consider themselves within a history of colonialism, but do not effectively challenge Settler desires for innocence and goodness. That being said, it is still significant for Settlers to reconsider their relationship to Indigenous peoples. Ultimately, coming to terms with responsibility and complicity are necessary before the relationship between Indigenous peoples and Settlers can begin to be rejuvenated through mutual respect and recognition (Alfred, 2009; Alfred, 2010; Regan, 2007). This is not where this ends though; careful participation and questioning of white certainty must be part of any attempt at anti-colonial pedagogy. Challenging the underlying and murky arrogance that grounds these critical or allied subjectivities and the ways it can re-inscribe white superiority, seems like an important place to start. How to do this, in spaces of dominant, and alternative media has yet to be realized. This chapter raises more questions than it answers, but in raising these questions, we are provided next steps, and are given important lessons on the incredible persistence of the whiteness and goodness that anchor Canadian identity, and expressions of engagement with Indigenous struggle.
Conclusion

In this thesis I have traced how Indigenous crisis emerges into visibility and enters news discourse as a moment that constructs a racialized national imaginary. Print media constitutes a space where Canadians are produced through learning about Indigenous failure, and their own capacity to assist and care for Indigenous peoples. I have argued that this is part of a nation building practice of settler colonialism and that it is inextricably linked to reclaiming ownership of stolen land, and manufacturing legitimacy for the Canadian nation to exist on this land. Through ‘culturalized’ racism (Razack, 1998) that creates Indigenous bodies as premodern, and in chronic need of Canadian intervention, the Canadian subject and the Canadian nation are reproduced as the legitimate, benevolent caretaker of both Indigenous bodies and their land. Through commonly articulated discourses of “Third World Canada” and “Communities too sad to survive” Indigenous emergency becomes an opportunity to rescue and assimilate Indigenous bodies into the Canadian nation. Responses to emergency become a performative way to alleviate bad feelings caused by the exposure to the damage and violence caused by ongoing, Canadian, settler colonialism. As I have argued, these performances can be more about reconciling Settlers’ desires for innocence and goodness than transformative change of social and material relationships between Settler and Indigenous nations.

Through exposing ordinary forms of creating Settler superiority and Indigenous inferiority in the daily newspapers, we are better able to recognize the multiple sites, and practices through which settler colonial control of this land takes place. As well, the lessons from this study also answer why emergency (and troubling coverage of it) continues to happen; it is far too productive. Crisis creates Canadian self-understanding, and the material origins are quickly obscured and foreclosed. Legitimacy and superiority are reclaimed as we tell ourselves of the inevitable and reoccurring story of Indigenous failure. No matter what solutions are
sought, the story has become about the benevolence and moral superiority of the Canadian nation. Beyond limiting what can be asked, this knowledge also secures Canadian innocence through our acknowledgement of and action to intervene in moments of human suffering. Colonial relationships are reproduced, and the Canadian national imaginary is sustained as a racialized one, as a ‘good white nation’.

It is clear that desires to reclaim innocence and goodness are a significant barrier to re-approaching the Indigenous-Settler relationship. I am left with the following questions: How can we teach or share within our communities (of Settlers) an ethic of responsibility and re-imagination of identities that do not reproduce white innocence, goodness and therefore superiority? During moments of crisis, what opportunities exist to expose the productive/national function of consuming Indigenous emergency and suffering? How are these ideas taken up and felt emotionally by Canadians? This is another area that I did not explore in this thesis, and could provide interesting avenues for theorizing about how racial superiority is both felt and embodied. The way sentiments such as outrage, sympathy, sorrow and shame were mobilized in the emergence of the housing crisis, invited Canadians to feel their superiority much the same way that print media did. Lastly I am left asking, can crises provide, as Lee Maracle has suggested, an effective exposure of colonialism to such an extent that they “can become catalysts for changing [the] relationship” (as cited in McCall, 2011, 99) between Settler and Indigenous nations?

With respect to the last question, I am pessimistic in thinking it can, given the ways that the emergency, and the following waves of activism and resistance influenced by it (i.e. Chief Spence’s hunger strike, and the Idle No More movement) have been heard and (mis)understood in mainstream white Settler Canada. If there is any pedagogical potential in times of emergency, we will need to challenge Settler Canadian identity and fundamentally rethink relationships to
land, and what is required for us to remain here. These are questions that would provide the starting point for explorations into ethical considerations of anti-colonial pedagogies of Settler complicity and responsibility.
References:


