Errors of Commission: Canada’s Legacy of Indian Residential Schools

by

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A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
Department of Anthropology
University of Toronto

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2016

Abstract

This dissertation examines contemporary discourses of Indigenous trauma, healing, and reconciliation in Canada, and explores their social and political implications for Indigenous-settler and Indigenous-state relations. Drawing on twelve months of multisited ethnographic fieldwork, my study juxtaposes the proceedings of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools with the lived experience of Inuit in Labrador, a region excluded from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. My research responds directly to the Commission’s stated premise of creating a national memory of Indian residential schooling, in the hope that similar injustices will not recur, and problematizes these presumptions by making several interrelated arguments. Firstly, I show how Commission proceedings enact a pedagogy that pathologizes Indigenous anger and valorizes expressions of grief in the service of healing, in effect schooling survivors on the therapeutic nature of speech, and rescripting survivor testimonies to show evidence of reconciliation. Structuring truth-telling in this manner, I argue, hinders public recognition of the truths of survivor experience, and
collective responsibility for their contemporary legacies. Secondly, I demonstrate that making Indian residential schooling the sole object of national redress obscures a broader range of colonial injuries with which it interlinks. I show how the residential school experience maps onto both older and ongoing colonial interventions, including missionization, forced community relocations, and continuing apprehensions of Indigenous children in the name of child welfare. These experiences demonstrate the recurrence of familial rupture, disruption in the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge, and ultimately, Indigenous peoplehood, underscoring that corrective interventions in Indigenous kinship are foundational to settler colonial governance. Thirdly, I explain how the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement severely constrains Indigenous self-government, and coincides with a rise in trauma-based mental health interventions that devolve responsibility for healing onto individual Inuit, creating a form of self-government through governance of the self. Ultimately, my central contention is that the assimilatory spirit of the residential schools endures through the proliferation of new modes of reschooling Indigenous peoples, and I argue for the need to analyze pedagogy as a tool of settler colonial governance, and as a constraint upon Indigenous life and self-determination.
Acknowledgments

It could take another dissertation to fully acknowledge the teachers, colleagues, institutions, and most importantly, family and friends that have sustained and uplifted me with their encouragement, insights, humour, and companionship during this PhD, as I journeyed down a road that was unusual and often difficult, meandering through peaks and troughs and hairpin turns, alternating illuminations and mystifications. The words on these pages were written in Toronto in the traditional territories of the Mississauga Anishinaabek and Haudenosaunee peoples whose hospitality I gratefully acknowledge.

This dissertation would not have been possible without the financial support of the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada, the Lorna Marshall Doctoral Fellowship in Social and Cultural Anthropology, the Northern Scientific Training Program of the Canadian Polar Commission, and research grants from the Indigenous Health Research Development Program of the Canadian Institutes for Health Research – Institute of Aboriginal Peoples’ Health, the Institute for Social and Economic Research at Memorial University of Newfoundland, and the J. R. Smallwood Foundation for Newfoundland and Labrador Studies.

My most important teachers along this journey have been the hundreds of residential school survivors and Elders who so generously shared their life experiences, lessons, struggles, and joys with me – whether publicly, at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, or privately, during my time in Labrador. The insight, endurance, and grace you have shown me has been a humbling and deeply moving experience in ways that I cannot fully articulate, but which leaves me with lessons that will continue to
inform and guide my life’s work for many years to come. While I cannot mention your names here in order to respect confidentiality, please know how grateful I am for what you have taught me. I hope that the pages that follow – though not, I sometimes think, written in a form that might best convey the enormity and significance of what you laboured to convey to me – will reflect my commitment to sitting with you in thinking through one of the central stories in our relationships as Indigenous and settler peoples, and in grappling with what we should do about it. In writing this dissertation, the most important insights came from you, while I acknowledge any shortcomings, omissions, errors, or misinterpretations in the analysis as my own.

This project would not have happened without the guiding hands of several people who helped to make it possible. At its earliest stages, Carol Brice-Bennett, Michelle Kinney, Krista Maxwell, Joshua Moses, and Michele Wood helped in various ways to pave the path that brought me to Labrador. Carol’s generosity, deep and immeasurable knowledge of Labrador and Labrador Inuit, and her intellectual and practical mentorship were a precious resource, and I think back to the questions and conundrums we explored and the laughter we shared over dinners in Happy Goose with fondness and gratitude. Michele was an advocate for me and for my work, a dear friend, and one of the kindest people I have met. Krista has been a steady source of encouragement, thoughtful ideas, and trusted, grounding advice, and I am grateful for her generosity and willingness to provide a sounding board for this project throughout its twists and turns and tribulations. In Labrador, I also wish to thank Patricia Kemuksigak and Evelyn Winters for their encouragement and logistical support of my research into residential schooling, and for important insights and advice that was crucial in steering
the direction of my work. Appreciation also goes to Marjorie Flowers and Edna Winters for their hospitality and help in coordinating my research in Hopedale and Nain, respectively.

Several formative experiences were pivotal in preparing me for this project. Fellow members of the steering committee for The Meeting Place: Truth and Reconciliation Toronto 2012 welcomed me into their midst, showing me by example how to sit together and navigate the joys and conflicts of our co-presence as Indigenous and settler peoples striving toward allied work in noncolonizing ways. Fond thanks to John Bird, Andrea Chrisjohn, Victoria Freeman, Donna Magee, Brian McIntosh, Linda Parsons, Lori Ransom, and Cynthia Wesley-Esquimaux. Auditing Victoria Freeman and Lee Maracle’s course on the politics and process of reconciliation was one of the wisest decisions of my PhD. Thank you, Lee, for teaching me that the stories of our shared history belong to the land, and that it is my responsibility to learn them. Thank you, Victoria, for providing a model of determination and courage in facing the issues that matter. Tanis Day, Heidi McBratney, and Mariam Vania count among my most important mentors of, and during this PhD and before, they have offered founts of wisdom and guidance that helped steer me through to the end.

In my trips to the TRC, I was blessed to find myself in a community of kind and brilliant researchers open to researching and thinking together about the implications of the Commission, and conversations with the late Naomi Angel, Jeff Denis, Bev Diamond, Robyn Green, Matt James, David MacDonald, Keavy Martin, Rosemary Nagy, Dylan Robinson, Pauline Wakeham, and Karine Vanthuyne consistently provided wonderful food for thought.
At the University of Toronto, faculty, friends, and colleagues helped to advance and enrich this project in so many ways. I acknowledge my advisors, Michael Lambek and Holly Wardlow, for their support of this project, advice during its most important junctures, and their willingness to trust my judgment and offer me latitude and freedom in articulating what I felt this dissertation most needed to say. Thank you, Michael, for your consistently thought-provoking insights, and thank you, Holly, for your extremely thoughtful and conscientious readings of my drafts; this dissertation has improved immeasurably through your joint engagement. Thanks are also due to the wonderful administrative staff in the Department of Anthropology – Josie Alaimo, Kristy Bard, Annette Chan, Sophia Cottrell, and Natalia Krencil all provided invaluable logistical and practical support in navigating the hurdles of administrivia required to do and finish a PhD. I am also grateful to other committee members at my dissertation defence (Katie Kilroy-Marac, Krista Maxwell, and Cheryl Suzack) and to committee members at my proposal defence (Bonnie McElhinny, Andrea Muehlebach, and Lisa Yoneyama) for important insights and generous engagement with my work. It was my great pleasure and honour to have Dian Million engage with my work in the capacity of external examiner; when Dian’s brilliant and masterful *Therapeutic Nations* was published partway during my fieldwork in 2013, it immediately resonated both theoretically and intuitively and helped to make sense of and clarify the social and political complexities that I had been sensing and grappling to apprehend. My most important scholarly debt is to Dian and her intellectual influence should be evident throughout the pages of this dissertation.
I count my lucky stars for the friends I made among peers in U of T’s Department of Anthropology, a department that is rich with graduate students doing brilliant and often brave intellectual work. Too many of you have met me on this path – and made this path the better for it – than I could possibly name here, and if you find your name omitted here, know that I am thinking of you, too. Those whom I have known the longest or whose influence has in various ways been strongest include Shayne Dahl, Erika Finestone, Jennifer Gibson, Rochelle Johnston, George Mantzios, Sandy Oh, Seth Palmer, Tori Sheldon, Jessika Tremblay, and Joey Youssef. Thanks also to my fellow denizens in Room 420 for companionship and laughter during the writing process. Friends who were either one or several steps ahead of me throughout the PhD journey and were so generous with tips as to what I’d be encountering next were a crucial resource and a category of their own: deep thanks to Kori Allan, Stephen Campbell, Chris Little, Kate Rice, and Laura Sikstrom. Very special thanks go to Mac Graham and Letha Victor for providing hilarity, insight, and stalwart companionship as we muddled our ways through this program. Finally, I am especially indebted to Koreen Reece, a cherished and steadfast friend and a deeply trusted co-interpreter of my life’s journey over the course of this PhD and beyond.

Ultimately, my most important debt of all is to my family, who have supported me in countless ways over so many years, and who will remain the richest blessing of my life. It is hard to imagine this step or the ones that preceded it being possible without the foundation that was provided for me by my parents, Kim Cross and Axel Molema. My sisters Seija and Tasya Molema have been here from the beginning, and I am glad that brother-in-law Dave Pietrangelo has joined us as well. My extended Cross family – the
late and missed Dalton, Pamela, Lynn, Suzanne, Lisa, David, and Don Love – have offered consistent encouragement and interest in my pursuits, and special thanks here to my aunt Suzanne Cross who offered so much more than a parking spot over the course of my PhD, but was often the first point of contact in hearing about its developments, and made it possible for us to celebrate its completion in style. Thanks also to my in-laws, the Biondic family, who are now a second source of family encouragement and interest in my doings. My sister Seija has kept abreast of every step of this process, and offered comfort, commiseration, and irreplaceable companionship as a fellow millennial working tirelessly and endlessly to launch. Words are not enough to express the gratitude I have for my mother, Kim Cross, whose love, support, and insight have been so constant, and without whom I would not be recognizable as who I am today. And to my partner, Daniella Biondic, whose unwavering love, support, and company have been a rock and a solace throughout these last and most crucial years, I thank you with all my heart.
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INTRODUCTION

We stand expectantly, perhaps three or four hundred of us, assembled in a large hall. A group of youth drummers, sitting in circle, perform a Cree victory song. Steady drumbeats pulsate and reverberate through the room, layering the young male voices that fall back only to rise again, in piercing ululation. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada is opening with a ceremonial procession. The three Commissioners are ushered into the hall by two Elders bearing ceremonial objects: a wooden staff adorned with eagle feathers as well as a red banner, carrying the name of the commission, on which First Nations, Inuit, and Métis symbols are interwoven. Elders, Indigenous political leaders, and church authorities enter in behind the Commissioners, carrying in with them wafts of smoke from the burning of tobacco, sage, and sweetgrass in the corridors.

This procession of greying dignitaries moves toward seats at the front of the hall and the stage in a slow, discreet dance, bobbing up and down almost imperceptibly, feet inching forward in small, shuffling steps. Members of the audience, with faces of different colours, turn to watch this procession enter. Some of us bob with them or move ever so slightly side to side in tacit acknowledgement of the drumming. Others stand still. A few snap photographs.

We are instructed to be seated for the opening of the fourth national event of Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission on Indian Residential Schools (TRC). The date is June 22nd, 2012, and the venue is Prairieland Park in Saskatoon, an events centre that is more accustomed to hosting agricultural fairs and trade shows than hearings
that spotlight the impact of colonial policies in Canada. The Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair and chief Commissioner of the TRC, greets us first in his Anishnaabe language and asks the residential school survivors in the room to stand so we can greet and applaud them. In what has become a standard ritual for the TRC, Justice Sinclair prefices his opening remarks with some clarifications that attempt to dispel the persistent confusion about what the Commission is, what it is mandated to do, and the nature of its relationship to the federal government. He introduces present representatives of the parties to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the legal settlement that gave birth to the Commission. Members of national Indigenous political organizations are present, and dressed in traditional regalia; they contrast starkly with the sombrely clad representatives from the various church entities who ran residential schools. Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development John Duncan, we are informed, has a prior commitment and will be arriving later in the day. These introductions completed, Justice Sinclair offers the audience a way of framing our reasons for being here.

“Our obligation as a Commission,” Sinclair tells us, “is to ensure that a national memory is established for this country, so that we can assure ourselves that in fifty or one hundred years from now, our children’s children – and their children – will be able to have a source of information and truth available to them so that this country will never forget what happened and will never be able to deny that it did happen.” There is applause in the audience.

***
This dissertation is an attempt to pause over and critically explore the premise that Canada’s truth commission is to create a “national memory” around the history of Indian Residential Schools. Taking one step back, a number of questions or conundrums present themselves for analysis. We might ask instead what qualifies as national memory? Who declares it so, and for what ends? What gets omitted, elided, or forgotten in the process? “The production of knowledge about the past,” as Lisa Yoneyama (1999: 27) has argued, is “always enmeshed in the exercise of power,” and this problem is an acute one for Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the first truth commission of national scale to focus explicitly on violence perpetrated against Indigenous peoples. Unlike most truth commissions, which have occurred during democratic transitions from authoritarian rule, Canada’s TRC occurs in a “nontransitional” context (Jung 2011): there has been no obvious rupture with the settler colonial power relations that shaped the creation of the residential school system, the Indian Act, and other violent policies and legislations. Indigenous peoples in Canada today remain to a large extent marginalized from power and from the resources that once constituted their land base. The idea of building a mode of governance based on nation-to-nation relationships that seeks to reconcile Indigenous and Crown sovereignties is a prominent one among Indigenous political leaders, but such a transition remains an item of discussion, rather than action. What happens, then, when marginalized Indigenous memories rub up against – and irritate – official accounts of collective history where they have been denied and disavowed?

Questions such as these provide the direction for this dissertation, which examines Canada’s historical reparations for Indian Residential Schools from the vantage
point of 12 months of research conducted at two research sites: event-based ethnography at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and community-based fieldwork in the Nunatsiavut Inuit region of Labrador. Framing this project then as an ethnography of a truth commission and its margins, I will explain in the following section the impetus for my selection of these two research sites. To do so, I will first provide a brief chronology of the processes that led to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, introduce its constituent components, and underline how its limitations open up a space for critical analysis.

MANAGING OUR “SAD CHAPTER”: THE SETTLEMENT, THE COMMISSION, AND THE EXCLUDED SCHOOLS

On June 11th, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper rose in the House of Commons to deliver an official apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools. Addressing the assembled parliamentarians, representatives of Indigenous political organizations and former students present in the House, the apology entextualized the federal government’s performance of contrition for this “sad chapter of our history” (Harper 2008). Acknowledging that the government’s agenda of assimilation undermined Indigenous languages, cultural traditions, and families over generations, in tandem with the endemic emotional, physical, sexual abuse, and deaths of children in the schools, Harper assured former students that “[t]he burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a Government, and as a country.”

The Prime Minister’s official apology was meant to cap off the completion of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) in 2007, itself the outcome of
a class-action lawsuit that was over a decade in the making. Knowing the antecedents of the IRSSA is important: placed in historical context, the government’s reparations for the schools appear, as Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (2013: 4) have put it, “less the product of a magnanimous government and more the result of extraordinary political mobilization and tireless negotiation by Aboriginal organizations.”

The atrocities of the Indian Residential Schools system first came to the attention of the public in the mid-1990s, although even then in a fairly circumscribed way. Previously, Canadians had been virtually entirely ignorant of this federal policy and its consequences, with the exception of those individuals directly involved in the operation and planning of the schools. Even in many Indigenous communities, the residential schools were a subject of pained silence: some children did not know that their parents attended, and could not therefore grasp the connection between residential school attendance, the abuses endured there, and the ruptures in their own family life. While most residential schools had closed in the 1970s, a remaining few did not close until the mid-1990s, ending a long history of residential schooling of Indigenous children which the federal government had funded since Confederation in 1867 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2012b: 5).

The 1990s also marked a decade of armed land disputes between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state, including the Ipperwash Crisis in Ontario and the Gustafsen Lake Standoff in British Columbia, both in 1995, and most notably, the Oka Crisis in Québec in 1990. The assault on Indigenous land rights and televised scenes of overt racism and police brutality in these confrontations, among other developments, prompted Indigenous political organizations to lobby successfully for a Royal
Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) mandated to systematically study and provide policy recommendations on the issues and injustices affecting Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Through public hearings and investigations conducted between 1991 and 1996, RCAP unearthed extensive testimonies of abuse perpetrated in the residential school system (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996), among other findings of acute socioeconomic inequalities and widespread racist attitudes affecting Indigenous peoples. As Mary Sillett recalled to me, speaking about her time as one of the Royal Commissioners,

We travelled extensively throughout Canada. We heard about every single issue. But the ones that really impacted all of us were the residential school stories! They were horrific! Got to a point where I really… you know, I… I could not hear anymore. And thanks to the work of the Royal Commission, they did make very, very strong recommendations that there should be reconciliation, that there should be compensation, that there should definitely be healing. And that there should be apologies issued by people who represented those institutions today. They may have not been [the actors directly responsible], but … someone had to say I’m sorry and that didn’t go far enough. (interview, 8 Apr 2013)

Although most of the RCAP recommendations were simply shelved by the federal government, the public disclosure of residential school abuses helped galvanize thousands of litigation claims by former students, culminating in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement in 2007, the largest class-action lawsuit in Canadian history. The IRSSA comprises five components: 1) the Common Experience Payment (CEP) to all former students based on their number of years of attendance; 2) the Independent Assessment Process (IAP) for claims of serious physical and sexual abuse; 3) monies for healing programs and 4) commemorative activities; and 5) the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
I focus this study on the TRC itself, and the ways in which Labrador Inuit in particular have experienced this forum for historical reparations. In so doing, I join with other anthropological work that ethnographically anchors the study of truth commissions through tracing their lived effects and aftermaths in particular locations (e.g. F. Ross 2003a; Sanford 2003; Theidon 2012; R. Wilson 2001, 2003). As the space in which reparations for residential schools are most visibly enacted and mediated for the Canadian public, the TRC has a privileged role in shaping dominant discursive formations on the Indian Residential Schools history. In short, it is the central spectacle of Canada’s redress process, and my ethnographic study links up and critically juxtaposes this public stage with its wings offstage – its excluded margins.

As of 2015, 139 residential schools are recognized in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, but there have been requests pursuant to Article 12 of the IRSSA to add further institutions to the agreement, of which only 9 have been accepted to date (Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada 2015). The federal government most frequently cites insufficient evidence of its own involvement, where the schools in question were primarily operated by provincial, religious or private organizations. Prominent among these unrecognized institutions are the Indian day schools, whose students, while not in residence, were subject to many of the same abuses; several schools attended by members of the Métis Nation; and five residential schools in Newfoundland and Labrador. In several cases, former students of unrecognized schools have launched new class-action lawsuits in pursuit of recognition under the settlement.

In this dissertation, I spotlight the experiences of Labrador Inuit with residential schools and their exclusion from the IRSSA. Owing to the late entry of Newfoundland
and Labrador into Canadian Confederation in 1949, the federal government’s responsibilities to the Indigenous peoples of the province were never made clear (see Tanner 1998). On this pretext, the federal government therefore denies its role in the funding and administration of Indian Residential Schools in Newfoundland and Labrador. As a people on the margins of this public stage of reparations, the experiences of Labrador Inuit, both historical and contemporary, may help us to complicate dominant narratives that are forming around the Indian Residential Schools history. As my discussion in Chapters Four and Five will suggest, however, in many respects Labrador Inuit experiences of the legacies of Indian residential schooling resemble those of other communities that have been publicly recognized under the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, including the interconnection of residential schooling with other forms of forced family rupture, such as Indigenous child welfare apprehensions, as well as the proliferation of psychological interventions designed to manage those legacies, under the paradigm of intergenerational trauma.

THE POLITICS OF “NATIONAL MEMORY” AND TRAUMA

My study engages with a longstanding conversation on memory within anthropology and the social sciences more broadly. Émile Durkheim’s (1915) studies of commemorative ritual and the work of his student Maurice Halbwachs (1992) are often credited as the first detailed studies of the social life of memory. More recently, however, such studies have multiplied as memory has become not only a scholarly preoccupation but an important and frequently used idiom in public discourse in a moment perceived as
littered with “posts” – postmodernist, postcolonial, post-Holocaust – an irony given the continuities in colonial forms of power and genocide in late liberal capitalist modernity.

Anthropologists and other social scientists have made critical interventions in this debate in several ways, grounding the study of memory in cultural conceptions of personhood, emotion and morality, as well as the very politics of identity (e.g. Antze and Lambek 1996; Kwon 2006; Shaw 2002; Sturken 1997). Memory is shaped by ideology and subject to a variety of incitements and repressions; as such it is a consummate political technology and is frequently enmeshed in relations of power (Boyarin 1994; Feldman 2003; Sider and Smith 1997; Yoneyama 1999). Although recent work sheds new light on how transnational geopolitics influence memory (Fujitani et al. 2001; Schwenkel 2009), nationalisms and the state have traditionally played the most powerful role in authorizing particular regimes of memory and officialising what counts as historical knowledge (Alonso 1994; Anderson 2006; Bhabha 1990; Olick 2003; White 1999). Theory on memory politics also underscores the importance of popular memory or countermemory practices (Foucault 1980; Zemon Davis and Starn 1989), suggesting that the power relations that inform memory are not unidirectional but a contested field.

Reading the Labrador Inuit exclusion from the residential schools settlement as an exclusion from “national memory” would be a misleading simplification. Rather, Labrador Inuit experiences contest and contradict emergent narratives of a national memory of residential schools, and point instead to some of its foreclosures. They raise questions about the inclusiveness of the “national,” and demonstrate significant omissions and elisions in what counts as residential school memory. For Labrador Inuit, isolating the residential schools as the sole justiciable injury for redress from the state is
problematic: as for many other Indigenous peoples in Canada, Labrador Inuit experiences of colonialism have included multiple forms of imposed family ruptures and intergenerational child removal, of which the residential schools are one important link in a chain. Multiple forced relocations of Labrador Inuit communities and subsequent family separations (Brice-Bennett 1994, 2000) as well as the ongoing apprehension of Labrador Inuit children under the provincial Child, Youth and Family Services open up channels for rethinking the interconnections of intimate violence (Stoler 2006) in Canadian settler colonialism (see Chapter Four): they problematize the narrowness and very “pastness” of what has come to be called a “national memory” of residential schools and call attention to its foreclosures.

Within the social science literature on memory and its politics, an increasingly important theoretical preoccupation is the construction and deployment of concepts of trauma. Anthropologists have been critical to this conversation and particularly alert to the increasing ubiquity of discourses of trauma as a contemporary global phenomenon that seems to affect and travel through a wide range of ethnographic contexts (Abramowitz 2014; Antze and Lambek 1996; Fassin and Rechtman 2009; James 2010; Kirmayer et al. 2014; Maxwell 2014; Ticktin 2011). Trauma, as Fassin and Rechtman (2009: xi) have noted, has become “a major signifier of our age,” a catchall term increasingly used to describe the aftermath of a wide variety of often disparate experiences of violence (cf. Scheper-Hughes and Bourgois 2004), and a new “language of the event” (6): trauma has become central to the lexicon through which moral categories of victimhood are ascribed, and an increasingly necessary qualifier to demands for reparation, social justice, and political accountability. The attention to trauma
converges with broader cultural and scholarly preoccupations with memory as a way of apprehending unresolved or unruly pasts; as Lambek and Antze (1996: xii) have observed, “[i]ncreasingly, memory worth talking about – worth remembering – is memory of trauma.” Within Indigenous contexts, memory worth talking about is increasingly memory of intergenerational trauma; an anthropologically informed conversation on the implications of the intergenerational trauma concept has begun to form (e.g. Gone 2014; Kirmayer et al. 2014; Maxwell 2014; Waldram 2014), and it is to this conversation in particular that I seek to contribute through my case study of intergenerational trauma pedagogies in Inuit Labrador in Chapter Five.

**LANGUAGE, AFFECT, AND THERAPEUTIC TALK**

Doing ethnography on the first Indigenous-focused national truth commission in a settler polity invites the opportunity to explore questions about the politics of memory from a different angle. Unlike many other truth commissions, the Canadian TRC lacks subpoena powers to compel perpetrators of abuse to appear and testify, and the former students who provide statements are proscribed from publicly naming individual perpetrators of abuse. Canada’s TRC therefore has a weaker judicial mandate than many previous commissions, and yet ironically it is the first to emerge from litigation, whereas other commissions have been part of brokered peace accords or investigations into the abuses of past political regimes (Stanton 2011: 4).

The Canadian TRC instead claims to draw inspiration from Indigenous traditions of restorative justice and is victim-centred, with a distinctively therapeutic ethos. While health support workers circulate in the audience during testimonies, proffering water and
gathering tear-soaked tissues to be burned in a sacred fire, former students of residential schools are enjoined to “share your truth,” “begin your healing journey,” or cautioned that “those who are going to inherit this legacy are going to inherit your anger if we do not do something about it,” as Commissioner Sinclair suggested at the TRC’s Atlantic National Event in October 2011. The TRC is part of and contributes to a broader discursive sphere where “trauma,” “healing,” and “reconciliation” have become master tropes for discussing relations between Indigenous peoples, the state, and Canadian society. They are deployed, albeit in different ways, by the media, professionals and community activists, and Indigenous and non-Indigenous politicians alike. In sum, Canada’s reparations for residential schools occur in a space that is laden with emotionally charged tropes and discourses. Accordingly, my dissertation makes an argument for the need to study the role of affect and therapeutic discourse in shaping the national negotiation of residential school memory, which I explore centrally in Chapters Two and Three.

There has been some engagement with truth commissions using linguistic anthropological approaches, most notably around the South African TRC, where work has focused on the construction of reconciliation discourse, narrative inequalities, and on gendered ideologies of language surrounding speech and silence (Anthonissen and Blommaert 2007; F. Ross 2003a; Verdoolaege 2008). Few studies, however, have made affect their explicit focus, despite the often highly emotive tenor of truth commission proceedings. Initially, it might seem curious that affect, or emotion (a distinction I will clarify shortly), has not been a subject of explicit concern in the literature on truth commissions, in spite of the fact that giving and receiving testimonies on experiences of
political violence is an inherently and inescapably emotive process. In extant literature on truth commissions and transitional justice (e.g. Hayner 2010; Kritz 1995; Kymlicka and Bashir 2008; Rotberg and Thompson 2010; Torpey 2006), dominated by political science, affect is epiphenomenal to the primary interest in “transitology” (Olick 2003: 123-129): a comparative study of the mandates and operationalization of transitional justice processes and their subsequent outcomes, notably for legislation. Even accounts that deal more explicitly with the emotive character of truth commissions seem to naturalize dominant truth commission discourses on affect – such as national healing (Minow 1998) or closure (Hamber and Wilson 2002) – and focus primarily on how these affective outcomes might best be achieved, rather than pause to explore more critically how affect is invoked, commented upon, and represented in truth commissions.

Anthropological explorations have opened up other forms of analysis, providing fine-grained ethnographic studies of the lived experiences, cultural politics, and discursive processes that arise during truth commissions and transitional justice processes (Borneman 1997, 2011; Feldman 2002, 2004; Niezen 2013; F. Ross 2003a, 2003b; Theidon 2012; Verdoolaege 2008; R. Wilson 2001, 2003). These ethnographic studies have tackled numerous theoretical concerns, including the politics of memory, the politics and imperatives of nation-building, problems of “voice” and testimony, as well as the discursive power of tropes of “truth” and “reconciliation” themselves. Even in the anthropology of reconciliation processes, however, affect has not thus far constituted a central subject of inquiry. The omission of affect might simply reflect differences in theoretical predilections and political commitments. It may also reflect an outdated assumption that emotions are interior, individual properties that are not easily studied in
public settings such as truth commissions – a methodologically individualist presupposition that has not kept pace with anthropological theorizing on emotion and the emergence of affect theory.

The study of emotions, both in anthropology and beyond, has undergone important permutations, particularly since the 1980s and 1990s. Michelle Rosaldo’s (1984) call for an “anthropology of self and feeling” prompted a range of anthropological responses that challenged psychology’s disciplinary monopoly on the study of emotion. These works collectively problematized universalistic understandings of emotion and the projection of ethnocentric Western models of emotion and personhood, demonstrating instead that emotion is culturally meaningful, contextually specific, and imbricated in language and politics (Besnier 1990; Lutz 1988; Lutz and Abu-Lughod 1990; Lutz and White 1986). While the distinction between emotion and affect remains a vexed one in scholarly debates, affect is increasingly privileged in recent anthropological work (McElhinny 2010; Muehlebach 2011; Navaro-Yashin 2012; Stewart 2007; Stoler 2004) for the following reasons. Good (2004) has argued that the anthropology of emotion remains freighted with the conceptual baggage of psychological individualism because of an inattention to emergent theories of subjectivity. Richard and Rudnyckyj (2009: 62) argue that emerging theories of affect privilege intersubjectivity: in their terms, affect is not “an object that circulates among subjects” but rather “a medium through which subjects circulate.” As McElhinny (2010: 310) has noted, the turn to affect also enables anthropologists to engage more explicitly with the efflorescence of affect theory that has emerged within feminist, queer and critical race studies, offering new possibilities for politicizing anthropological analysis. New conceptual frameworks like national
sentimentality (Berlant 2000) and the affective public (Berlant 2005), wounded attachments (Brown 1995), affective economies and the politics of good and bad feeling (Ahmed 2004a, 2004b, 2005, 2008) are all directly instructive for the political analysis of affect.

Within the discipline of Native Studies, there has also been a call for increasing engagement with affect. Tanana Athabascan scholar Dian Million has been particularly prominent in advancing what she terms a “felt theory” (Million 2008, 2009, 2013) that theorizes affect as a critical site in the negotiation of Indigenous-settler and Indigenous-state relations (cf. also Rifkin 2011, Suzack 2010). For Million (2013: 20), affect “provides a space for articulating what colonialism actually is in Indigenous terms: a painful dismembering of families and societies,” an insight that invites new conversations for anthropological studies of the relationship of affect to the state (Muehlebach 2011, 2012; Navaro-Yashin 2002; Stoler 2004, 2006). My dissertation seeks to dialogue with and build upon this analysis by linking the study of affect, language, and memory politics to broader questions of political recognition that are currently at the heart of debates in anthropological and Native Studies scholarship on Indigeneity and settler colonialism.

ANTHROPOLOGY, SETTLER COLONIALISM, AND INDIGENOUS SOVEREIGNTY

It has become part of the “oral tradition” of contemporary anthropology in recent years that Indigenous North America has declined as a subspecialty, as Regna Darnell noted in 1997 (Darnell 1997: 269). Darnell dismissed these charges as exaggerated, arguing that the study of First Peoples remained an area of strength for Canadian anthropology, but rumours of decline have remained persistent. Writing more recently
from the United States, Orin Starn (2011: 180) similarly noted anthropology’s “estrangement” from research with Native North America, citing the rise of review boards within Indigenous tribal councils and hard-hitting critiques of anthropology by Indigenous peoples themselves – the earliest and most memorable of which was a lampooning of “Anthropologists and Other Friends” by Standing Rock Sioux scholar Vine Deloria Jr. (Deloria 1969).

Although the decline of Indigenous North America as an anthropological subfield remains a matter of debate, the debate itself is interesting as a social fact, and as an index of changing conditions of knowledge production. My own engagement in this particular doctoral project began in the virtual absence of department faculty and graduate students pursuing ethnographic research with Indigenous peoples in Canada (which would gradually increase over the course of my doctoral studies), in what is otherwise one of the largest Canadian anthropology departments. Changing conditions of knowledge production and the unreliability of traditional models necessitate an engagement with different methodological approaches. One such shift that directly informs my work is the turn toward anthropological work that takes the study of Indigeneity and settler colonialism to be inextricably linked objects of inquiry (Cattelino 2010, 2011; Povinelli 2004; A. Simpson 2011b, 2014; Wolfe 1999). Accordingly, I frame this project as neither an ethnography of Indigenous peoples nor of Labrador Inuit specifically; rather, my primary objects of study are the formations of history and discourse that shape our relations as Indigenous and settler peoples of Canada, in their current conditions of possibility, as they are negotiated through memory, language, affect, interventions in kinship, and pedagogies of intergenerational trauma.
A second theoretical shift that informs my approach is the growing anthropological interest in a long overdue rapprochement with the academic discipline of Native Studies, for which Mohawk scholar and anthropologist Audra Simpson has been the most vocal and articulate proponent (see A. Simpson 2011b, Simpson and Smith 2014). Perhaps one of the most obvious directions for a rapprochement between Native Studies and a political anthropology of Indigeneity and settler colonialism is to synergize conversations around the politics of recognition that have become increasingly crucial in each discipline – sometimes separately, and sometimes in dialogue with one another.

These conversations respond to a need to analyze and better understand the complications and contradictions that a liberal politics of recognition poses for Indigenous peoples and Indigenous sovereignty with the context of settler states. These conversations are also particularly resonant in Canada because Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor (1994) has provided the paradigmatic exemplar of political theory oriented toward recognizing Indigenous peoples within a liberal pluralist, multicultural framework. Within Native Studies, Yellowknives Dene political theorist Glen Coulthard (2007, 2014) has provided the most systematic critique and revisitation of liberal pluralist relations of recognition as they pertain to Indigenous rights and sovereignty struggles. Positions like Taylor’s, in Coulthard’s (2014: 29-30) rereading, acknowledge that for Indigenous peoples, relations of recognition are fundamentally asymmetrical, but they collapse Indigenous peoples alongside Québécois as “threatened minorities” requiring accommodation for their “cultural distinctiveness.” The problem here, for Coulthard, is twofold: not only do liberal pluralist, multiculturalist forms of recognition erase the special status of temporally prior and ongoing Indigenous sovereignty, but they are
ultimately a gesture of bestowal by the settler state, “where ‘recognition’ is conceived as something that is ultimately ‘granted’ or ‘accorded’ a subaltern group… by a dominant group or entity,” ultimately “fail[ing] to significantly modify, let alone transcend, the breadth of power at play in colonial relationships” (Coulthard 2014: 30-31). Drawing on the work of Martinican political philosopher Frantz Fanon, Coulthard (2014: 17) suggests that recognition, framed in this way, is not so much a “source of freedom and dignity for the colonized, but rather… the field of power through which colonial relations are produced and maintained.”

Anthropologists and Native Studies scholars have worked in multiple productive directions in order to elucidate the social and political dynamics at the heart of the problematic that Coulthard identifies. Scholars have explored the challenges that asymmetrical “relations of recognition” (Coulthard 2007: 442) create for Indigenous peoples in the areas of law, torts, and land claim settlements (e.g. Barker 2011; Blackburn 2012; Lawrence 2012; Povinelli 2002). Another focus has been the politics of blood quantum and the bestowal of Indian Status (e.g. Andersen 2014; Lawrence 2004; Sturm 2002), including the gendered implications for Indigenous women who lost federally recognized Indian Status through marriages to non-Indigenous men (e.g. Fiske 1995; J. Green 2001; Lawrence 2003), as well as new problematics of recognition that emerge through genomic studies of Indigenous DNA (TallBear 2013). Jessica Cattelino’s (2008, 2010) work sheds light on problems of recognition in the area of economy, illustrating the double bind faced by Florida Seminoles, who achieve prosperity and enact Indigenous sovereign rights through their management of casino
operations, but are thereby charged with accusations of cultural inauthenticity that jeopardize their sovereignty and United States federal recognition.

My contribution to this conversation is to provide ethnographic analysis of other and as yet underexplored areas in which problematics of “recognition” surface – namely in the politics of national memory, affect, and language. Ultimately then, my desired contribution to anthropological literatures on these topics, which I delineated in the previous sections, is also intended to be of service toward theorizing, in the chapters that follow, some of the possibilities and problematics of Indigenous sovereignty within settler colonial contexts. I do so specifically by emphasizing how the bestowal of “recognition,” in various contexts, is often conditional and premised upon pedagogical imperatives that attempt to “reschool” Indigenous peoples: into the delivery of appropriate affect and therapeutic testimonial language, into “trauma-informed” subjects responsible for self-management in impoverished communities, and into Indigenous self-governments coopted into exogenous bureaucratic forms that do not reflect their aspirations for self-determination. In so doing, I build on and reintroduce anthropologist Robert Paine’s (1977) undercited insights about the role of “tutelage” or pedagogy in Indigenous-settler relations, and elucidate some of the pedagogical imperatives that Canada’s recognition of Indigenous peoples often presupposes.

METHODOLOGICAL CONSIDERATIONS

My doctoral research is based on 12 months of ethnographic research, conducted between October 2011 and June 2014, including 3 months of cumulative fieldwork at the National Events of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (and subsequent
follow-up research) and a further 9 months of research in Labrador to ground my study of Canada’s residential school reparations in the experience of Labrador Inuit. Fieldwork in Labrador was conducted between October 2012 and July 2013. I took inspiration from the burgeoning literature on Indigenous epistemologies and research methodologies (e.g. Kovach 2009; L. Smith 1999; S. Wilson 2008) – notably its emphasis on relationship building, reciprocity, and relational accountability – during the seven months of collaborative discussion on my proposed research and three successful ethics reviews that culminated in a negotiated research partnership with the Department of Health and Social Development (DHSD) of Nunatsiavut Government, the self-governing body of Inuit in Labrador. In return for permission to pursue my research on the residential school experience in Labrador, I would conduct a follow-up study of the DHSD’s flagship Inuit Intergenerational Trauma and Addictions Healing program. I quickly discovered, however, that even in light of changing conditions of knowledge production for research with Indigenous peoples, some of the new research orthodoxies that have emerged prove complicated and ambiguous in actual practice.

Participant observation was conducted in a number of settings, including community meetings, workshops, rallies, celebrations, and formal or informal gatherings, whether with former students of residential schools or others. I was based in Happy Valley-Goose Bay (population 7,552), Labrador’s largest urban centre, but with extended research visits to Hopedale and Nain, smaller fly-in communities on Labrador’s north coast. Much of my participant observation occurred within Nunatsiavut Government itself, thanks to the office I was provided within the DHSD. As Pauline Turner Strong (2005: 256) has rightly noted, much recent ethnographic research occurs within
Indigenous governmental institutions, in part due to communities’ concerns for privacy; while work in institutional settings may in part necessitate a shift toward more formal methodologies than some of the more community-based studies of the past, they are key sites where Indigenous politics, policies, and discourses are elaborated and thus important objects of study in their own right.

While the “sharing circle” has become the *sine qua non* of Indigenous research methodologies, I was quickly advised by Inuit colleagues in Labrador that circles were often a problematic setting for discussing traumatic issues, even in their own practice as mental health professionals. Many Inuit would keep quiet in circles, I was told, fearing collective judgement of the stories they disclosed; other circles conducted in the past had degenerated into angry confrontations between community members, which were sometimes left unresolved. My colleagues in the mental health professions expressed a preference for one-on-one counselling work, and I similarly decided to conduct much of my data collection through private interviews, usually by invitation in the intimate setting of my research participants’ homes, mostly in the absence of other family members. I conducted fifty interviews with Inuit Elders, former students of residential schools and community professionals, many of whom were Inuit, others Kablunaat (white) and Kablunângajuit (mixed race). Interviews were semi-structured but kept very informal: I allowed much time for uninterrupted oral history and many interviews were as long as three hours.

My dual occupation conducting research in government and more “traditional” community settings – and the movement back and forth between them – was the source of much insight but also some personal disquiet for me during fieldwork. Although
“community-based research” and “participatory methodologies” have become *de rigueur* in both the ethics review boards of liberal bureaucracies and Indigenous research literatures alike (itself an uncanny convergence), these buzzwords have been hollowed of heuristic value. In my experience, as well as the experience of many of my interlocutors, claims to “community-based research” flatten and depoliticize the nature of “community” itself. The notion that one’s research can include, reciprocate, and benefit a community in an egalitarian fashion romanticizes “communities” and elides the lateral violence and hierarchies in which the researcher must struggle to navigate ethically. In the end, perhaps, there is no methodological panacea for “being there” (Borneman and Hammoudi 2009) in the embodied everyday contradictions and ethical anxieties of fieldwork.

The methodological considerations as well as limitations of my particular research project directly impact what this dissertation can and cannot do as a work of ethnography. In contemporary ethnography, “thick description” (Geertz 1973) remains the gold standard that anthropologists seek to approximate as far as possible: richness of ethnographic data is judged by its nuance and multidimensionality, or its “messiness” – its ability to capture some of the ambiguities and contradictions of social and cultural life. Readers may find here that my ethnographic paintbrush is inconsistent in its application, thickening out in some places only to thin back again in others; in some cases, because thicker description was methodologically impossible, in others, because it was ethically inadvisable.

First, I consider this dissertation a work of multi-sited ethnography. The nature of multi-sited ethnography, as George Marcus (1995: 97) helped to define it, is “piecemeal… embedded in discontinuous, multi-sited objects of study,” but which retains
a commitment to “following connections” and attempting “to discover new paths of connection and association by which traditional ethnographic concerns with agency, symbols, and everyday practices can continue to be constructed on a differently configured spatial canvas” (98).

Marcus (109-110) describes multiple pathways to multi-sited ethnography that include following the story, and following the conflict – both of which apply to how I designed this project, dividing my fieldwork between the National Events of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, a central node in the production of this story of national reconciliation, as well as Inuit Labrador, excluded from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and seemingly at the margins of this contestable national story.

Research at the TRC involved six different visits to six different Canadian cities, fieldwork of a punctuated nature that has sometimes been called “event ethnography” (Little 1995; MacDonald 2010): a methodological approach to large public events that guides data collection to questions of structure, orchestration, and the culture of the event itself, which I have attempted to do here in my focus on dominant discourses – and debates – about affect and therapeutic language within the spectacle of the TRC.

Within Labrador, while primarily based in Happy Valley-Goose Bay, my fieldwork was also further divided through extended research trips to the fly-in coastal communities of Hopedale and Nain, venturing yet again from the “conventional single-site location” (Marcus 1995: 95). My focus on the residential school experience directed me toward phenomena that could not precisely be observed or thereby rendered in the ethnographic present: the history of residential schooling, and the memory of that experience. Attempting to reconstruct that history meant that within the ethnographic
toolkit, I was primarily reliant on direct interviewing in order to take me there, rather than participant observation in my present surroundings. Here I am influenced by, and sympathetic to, the way that anthropologist Lessie Jo Frazier (2007) has described the possibilities and challenges of historical ethnography, drawing on her work in Chile.

For Frazier, historical ethnography “hold[s] history and ethnography in tension,” straddling, sometimes uncomfortably, the “Past” and the “thick Present,” without necessarily doing justice to either, representing the past or present in a fully satisfying way. And yet, Frazier contends, tackling historical ethnography in this way has its possibilities, particularly when it comes to “disrupt[ing]” the “temporal demarcation” or “periodization” (17) that occurs in dominant state or national narratives. I have attempted to do something similar here in challenging the dominant periodization I have heard in government and mainstream Canadian discourses, which typically places the legacy of residential schools in a linear chronology, where residential schooling constitutes a “dark chapter” of our national history, a chapter now closed in a reconciling present, moving toward a hopeful national future. I have sought to trouble this reductive (and convenient) periodization, particularly in Chapter Four, where I juxtapose Indian residential schooling with other colonial interventions in Labrador Inuit kinship, including early Moravian missionization, beginning in the 18th century, the forced community relocations of the 1950s, and the ongoing apprehensions of Labrador Inuit children by provincial child welfare services. What this messier juxtaposition of time periods points to instead is the ongoing centrality of Indigenous kinship and cultural reproduction as objects of assimilatory interventions in the interests of settler colonial statecraft, with complicated historical interconnections and reverberations.
A final methodological concern that will return in Chapter Five but is important to introduce here is that some of my representational choices – and omissions – in this dissertation hinge on acts of what Audra Simpson (2014) has termed “ethnographic refusal.” Readers unfamiliar with current directions in Indigenous research in anthropology might find this gesture puzzling, perhaps even a coy or lazy attempt to rationalize sloppy research, but I believe Simpson’s concept brilliantly articulates longstanding complexities and concerns about our research with Indigenous peoples, one that is likely to be a central conversation and reference point within this subfield in the years to come.

For Simpson, acts of ethnographic refusal are fundamentally about carefully parsing the implications of ethnography for matters of Indigenous sovereignty, and about thinking through the potential repercussions of our ethnographic representations for Indigenous sovereignty, given the significant constraints on Indigenous self-determination in a settler colonial context. Refusal “is for the express purpose of protecting the concerns of the community… [and] acknowledges the asymmetrical power relations that inform the research and writing about native lives and politics” (A. Simpson 2014: 105). In this instance, Anderson v. Canada remains an open court case, in which residential school survivors in Labrador are contesting their exclusion from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and seek reparations from Canada. For this reason, I have made my representational choices with deliberation and care, and have avoided discussing particular complexities that could be misconstrued and misused, or that could betray the ethical and political commitments that have driven this research project. This research project has been a politically driven one since its inception, and
much of this dissertation takes the form of ethnographically informed critique; I concede that some of the avowed messiness and complexity of social life disappears from the final product, and believe that the challenge of balancing our commitments to thick ethnographic description and political critique remains a crucial open question. These reasons inform my use of an ethnographic refusal, and in my reading of Simpson’s framework, I believe a refusal should be made explicit, and so I do so in Chapter Five, in the interest of making my commitment clear. I believe an ethnographic refusal should not be seen as an ethnographic silence, and so I mark it explicitly, in the interest of recording or archiving a kind of “absent presence” – an admission that there was more to the story I have uncovered than what I have chosen to tell here, an “excess” in this story that it seemed neither the time nor my place to convey, but which may yet be conveyed, at some other time.

OUTLINE

I structure this ethnographic account of Canada’s truth commission and its margins through five substantive chapters. In Chapter One, discussing the memory politics of the TRC, I describe the historical context of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and the process through which Labrador was made ineligible for recognition. I discuss competing visions of what national memory of Indian residential schools might mean and how it should be used, as crystallized in the unveiling of a stained glass window commemorating residential school survivors on Parliament Hill. I discuss how the TRC, the state, and the public have selectively taken up this history, in various ways, in conceptualizing and articulating a “national memory” of the residential
schools that itself engenders multiple foreclosures. The central question driving this chapter is how – in a settler colonial context that has engendered multiple forms of violence for Indigenous peoples – did the Indian Residential School experience come to be selected as the site of reparations for injury and the focal point for Canada’s attempts to remember its colonial heritage? My response focuses on the centrality of child abuse within the proceedings of the TRC, and I reflect on the politics in which Indigenous child abuse is subject to redress in the current moment, along with the exclusions inherent in such a focus, as well as its broader implications.

The subsequent two chapters explore the role of language and affect at the TRC. In Chapter Two, I explore the multiple and sometimes competing affective registers within the space of the TRC. I parse discourses on emotion produced at and about the TRC, and critically examine the ways in which the TRC and public expectations seem to require of Indian residential school survivors a kind of affective labour: former students of residential schools are called upon to work on, transform, or effectively “re-school” the raw traumatic emotion of the residential school experience. A dominant affective choreography at TRC hearings appears to perform a discursive temporalization of affects, prescribing that the inevitable and necessary telos of the abused Indigenous child of the past becomes the triumphant, reconciled residential school “survivor” of the present and future, which, in part, would seem to conveniently absolve the settler polity of historical crimes, and places much of the burden of responsibility for residential school legacies upon its survivors, through their own emotional self-management. Chapter Two explores the affective labour required of survivors as part of their process of giving testimony at the TRC, and considers this labour as embedded in a kind of economy of affect that
gestures toward the necessity of reciprocity, but ultimately manifests in a kind of failed affective exchange.

Chapter Three focuses on language and explores how regimes of anticipation both at the TRC and within the Canadian public sphere prefigure, shape, or constrain how Indian residential school testimonies can be told or heard, as well as how Indigenous speakers creatively resist or “interrupt” (A. Simpson 2014) these structures. In this chapter, drawing on the therapeutic turn in linguistic anthropology (e.g. Carr 2006, 2011, 2013; Wilce 2009), I seek to problematize the ways in which dominant discourses and language ideologies construct the speech acts of residential school testimonies, apologies, and verbal expressions of reconciliation as inherently therapeutic for both the speaking individual and listening nation. Within the framework of the TRC context, I ask whether residential school survivors can truly “speak” (Spivak 2010a[1987]) and call attention instead to the uneven afterlives of these testimonies. The TRC, I argue, institutionalizes a particular truth that privileges therapeutic, rather than political, testimonies on the Indian residential school experience, with ultimate implications for the audibility and memorability of survivor accounts that do not conform to this dominant template.

Chapter Four moves from the TRC or public stage of Canada’s residential school reparations to its margins, introducing in more detail my field site in Labrador. I introduce colonial and contemporary histories in Labrador that help to illustrate how, for Labrador Inuit, intergenerational family ruptures and child removal form a consistent thread through the forced relocation of their communities, the residential schools, and the ongoing apprehensions of children under provincial Child, Youth and Family Services, and constitute a defining feature of their experience of colonialism. Labrador Inuit
history, I show, helps us to understand how experiences of Indian residential schooling interwove with other experience of colonial intervention in kinship, opening the possibility of thinking of kinship intervention more broadly as a political technology that was and is central to the settler colonial project, rupturing families in ways that interfere with the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous culture and peoplehood, and which draws Indigenous peoples into quasi-kinlike relations of “wardship” with the settler state.

In Chapter Five, I revisit and newly problematize the teleology of the abused residential school student turned reconciled survivor, and explore the varying discourses and resources available to Labrador Inuit living their lives in the wake of intergenerational experiences of family disruption. I provide an ethnographic case study of programs touted as “best practices in Inuit mental health” and illustrate how they diffuse medicalizing and often pathologizing biopolitical pedagogies of intergenerational trauma, which downplay histories of Inuit anticolonial resistance and depoliticize current political struggles. I argue that the proliferation of mental health programs and psychological interventions in Labrador have the effect of externalizing expertise on Inuit mental health as perpetually “elsewhere.” I join to this analysis an exploration of the Labrador Inuit land claims negotiations that resulted in the formation of the Nunatsiavut Government, but in so doing, also institutionalized significant limits and constraints on Labrador Inuit sovereignty, which raises similar and interrelated concerns about the valorization of Labrador Inuit knowledge and expertise within these new governance structures.

My conclusion to this dissertation recapitulates some of these discussions and with some ambivalence. In June 2015, the TRC completed its work as I was nearing the
completion of my dissertation, and while its official report is yet to be released, the TRC has issued a set of reasonably comprehensive recommendations for policy change that changes the tone from its earlier focus on the therapeutic responsibility of individual survivors, and calls the settler state to account for the legacies of Indian residential schools through a series of thoughtful and well-targeted political actions. A change in federal governments in 2015, with a new government that has promised to implement the recommendations of the TRC, seems to open a policy window through which important reforms might be conceivable, although memory of other well-intended but unimplemented past commission recommendations, notably from Canada’s Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, leaves room for some scepticism. But as I note in the conclusion, there are significant continuities in the Indigenous experience of settler colonialism that remain deeply entrenched and intractable. One of these, as I attempt to show throughout the chapters of this dissertation, is that the assimilatory and disciplinary spirit of Indian residential schools remains alive, sometimes in unexpected ways and places: in pedagogical prescriptions for appropriate Indigenous affect and speech, as in the proceedings of the TRC, in mental health programs and psychological interventions that discount Indigenous knowledge, and in negotiated forms of sovereignty that still significantly constrain Indigenous peoples in the assertion of their own priorities and expertise. Policies and practices that in effect seek to “re-school” Indigenous peoples remain a central and ubiquitous feature in Canadian settler colonialism: Indian residential schooling should not be seen as a “sad chapter” of national history, but rather as a particularly apt exemplar of the assumptions of pedagogy and tutelage that continue to frequently underpin Indigenous-settler and Indigenous-state relations in Canada.
“Our obligation as a commission... is to ensure that a national memory is established for this country, so that we can assure ourselves that in fifty or one hundred years from now, our children’s children – and their children – will be able to have a source of information and truth available to them so that this country will never forget what happened and will never be able to deny that it did happen.” – The Honourable Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, at its fourth National Event in Saskatoon, June 22nd, 2012

Truth commissions have a powerful discursive toolbox at their disposal, in which the serviceable tropes of “truth” and “reconciliation” are ready to hand. At the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), however, references to creating memory, and national memory in particular, have also been audible. Holding national events across Canada as well as commemorative activities in communities, the TRC has collected thousands of statements from former residential school students. Many of these are public, mediatised via webcast, and they will be archived along with other historical records in a National Research Centre in Winnipeg. Creating this repository of oral and written records is, as the TRC sees it, a project of national memory-making: educating Canadians on the residential schools – where, for over 100 years\(^1\), generations of Indigenous children were often forcibly interned – is an exercise in corrective historiography, amending a central omission in the way we remember Canada’s past. Further, the very notion of nurturing national memory in an invitation to (re)imagine a

\(^1\) The TRC places the timeline of Indian residential schools from 1831-1996. Other sources date the era as beginning in 1879 when the Davin Report made federal support of church-run residential schools a matter of official government policy. There were also sporadic and short-lived efforts to introduce residential schooling for Indigenous children as early as the 1620s with the Jesuit and Récollé Order in Nouvelle-France.
community of Canada (cf. Anderson 2006), taking the notion of the unified, encompassing nation for granted, and in so doing helping to re-enact it.

In holding its TRC, Canada adds its name to a varied and ever growing list of countries that have held truth commissions, over forty of which have been implemented since the early 1970s (Hayner 2010; R. Wilson 2003). Indeed, the truth commission model has proliferated to the point of becoming a default, almost knee-jerk policy response for dealing with violent or otherwise tricky pasts: cyclist Lance Armstrong’s doping scandal in 2013 prompted the International Cycling Union and the World Anti-Doping Agency to propose a truth and reconciliation commission on doping in international cycling, illustrating how omnipresent the TRC model has become in the global political vocabulary, sometimes to the point of banality.

Canada’s truth commission, however, confronts a far graver past, and in addressing the state-sanctioned intergenerational removal and residential schooling of Indigenous children, it establishes new precedents for truth commissions, and distinguishes itself from its predecessors. The vast majority of truth commissions implemented to date have occurred in countries of – in the absence of a more perfect geopolitical term – the Global South, and often follow military dictatorships, genocides, and other violent political transitions. Canada’s is the first TRC to examine political violence perpetrated against Indigenous peoples in a settler state\(^2\), and while parallels could be drawn with, among others, the iconic TRC of post-Apartheid South Africa, there is no “post” of which to speak in the Canadian context – unlike so many other truth

\(^2\) Other historical truth commissions have addressed violence that disproportionately targeted Indigenous peoples, but did not discursively frame their findings in this way.
commissions, it occurs in a context of “non-transition” (Jung 2011), where the settler colonial foundations of the Canadian state remain intact.

Making room for Indigenous memories of residential schools within Canadian historical memory – when they are largely unrecognized by the Canadian public – is a messy and deeply compromised project. Residential schools epitomize the colonial violence that European settlement brought to Indigenous peoples in these territories, a violence that is frequently denied and officially disavowed in contemporary Canada³. Settler colonial societies, as Lorenzo Veracini (2010: 14) has observed, obscure the conditions of their own production, drawing on a “transferist imagination” (33) that erases the presence of Indigenous peoples and their claims to colonized territory, thereby naturalizing the legitimacy of the settler state.

In Veracini’s analysis, “transfer” serves as a central, and flexible, political technology through which the settler state manages the contradictions inherent in its sovereignty over territory on which Indigenous peoples have temporal precedence of occupancy, and indeed, continued occupancy. These technologies of transfer can be repurposed in numerous ways: institutions such as the residential schools attempted a “transfer by assimilation,” while various forms of “narrative transfer” similarly effect to efface or marginalize Indigenous peoples, by associating them with the past, or an “elsewhen” (Veracini 2010: 37-41). Recollecting my own Canadian history textbooks in high school, I recall representations of Indigenous peoples as early helpmates in the fur

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³ Exemplary in this regard are Prime Minister Stephen Harper’s statement that Canada has “no history of colonialism” during a press conference at the G20 Pittsburgh Summit in September 2009, as well as the June 2008 official apology for the Indian residential schools system, which avoids mention of colonialism. Here colonialism is equated with the resource colonies of European imperialism, a convenient evasion of the distinct structure and genesis of settler colonialism (for a useful parsing of the distinctions between resource and settler colonies, see Wolfe 1999).
trade who soon disappear from a settler-dominated chronology of Canada’s military service in the two World Wars, its involvement in humanitarian peacekeeping, and its creation of a modern multicultural “mosaic.”

In statements to the Commission, former students of residential schools have presented a starkly different vision of Canadian history, painfully and painstakingly testifying to the endemic physical, psychological, and sexual abuse they endured in the residential school system, and to the loss of their languages and cultural traditions. The forcible transfer of children from one group to another – the very premise of Indian residential schooling – alone qualifies for consideration under Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide, which Canada signed in 1949. And yet only one-third of Canadians report familiarity with the Indian residential schools, according to a national benchmark survey commissioned by the TRC in 2008 (Environics Research Group 2008: i). Fewer still – one in twenty – describe themselves as very familiar with the schools and their intergenerational impacts.

The official disavowal and public ignorance of the violence of settler colonialism is not the only obstacle the TRC faces in its project of national memory-making. Compounding the challenge, the work of the TRC occurs at a moment where other campaigns for national memory are being waged, presenting alternative visions of Canada that do not merely elide colonial violence but revalorize and glorify imperial heritage. The government of Prime Minister Stephen Harper has demonstrated a distinct preoccupation with technologies of memory, returning the “Royal” appellation to

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4 Recent research has also confirmed the existence of federally sanctioned nutritional experiments in six residential schools (Mosby 2013). The TRC (2015b: 61) has been able to confirm 3,201 reported deaths in residential schools, a number that is likely to be significantly below actual death rates, given the often poor quality of record keeping in residential schools, as well as the number of residential school-related documents that were later destroyed.
Canada’s armed forces, rebranding the Canadian Museum of Civilization, and budgeting $28 million on commemorating the bicentennial of the War of 1812, with significant further historical advertising earmarked for the run-up to the 150th anniversary of Confederation in 2017. Canadian passports and bank notes have been redesigned with new images that disproportionately showcase white male historical figures as well as military iconography and technology. This “politically charged heritage policy” (Canada 2013)5 revalorizes Canada’s British imperial heritage and provides patriotic fuel for the contemporary military industrial complex, while simultaneously sidelining the achievements of women and people of colour and overlooking the unresolved struggles for Indigenous sovereignty in the settler colonial polity. The project of collectively remembering the Indian residential schools is therefore challenged by Canada’s amnesic relationship to its colonial history, as well as concurrent – and directly competing – campaigns to revalorize empire in Canadian historical memory.

To return to Justice Sinclair’s opening remarks at the TRC National Event in Saskatoon, making “truth available… so that this country will never forget what happened” is a laudable and urgent campaign for public education on the Indian residential schools. As a project of national memory-making, however, it is far from straightforward and it is deeply entangled in the cultural politics of settler colonial Canada. As the preceding discussion intimates, remembering and forgetting are an inseparable pair, where what is commemorated most often has a direct and dialectical relationship to what is negated or ignored. “Forgetting,” as historian Ernest Renan (1990[1882]: 11) memorably declared, “is a crucial factor in the creation of the nation”,

5 Dr. Lorne Holyoak, President of the Canadian Anthropology Society, at the Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, June 5, 2013.
and national memory is as much about disavowals and implicit obligations to forget as it is about active remembrance (Bhabha 1990: 311). When using “national memory” in this chapter, then, I am not referring to an unproblematic, essentialized shared object, but rather to a fluid “memoryscape” (Yoneyama 1994) or field of unequal power relations, where competing interpretations of the past battle unevenly to produce historical knowledge and sway collective memory (Foucault 1980; Sturken 1997; Trouillot 1995; Yoneyama 1999).

The objective of this chapter is to provide historical background and a more thoroughgoing introduction to the central subjects of study in this dissertation: 1) the TRC, as a key locus for the negotiation of memory around Indian residential schooling; and 2) the exclusion of Labrador Inuit from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) and the specificities of their own experiences of residential schooling, along with other interconnected histories of institutionalized child removal and forced family rupture.

The aim here is not to rehearse an exhaustive history of Indian residential schooling, a project that has already been admirably executed elsewhere (Miller 1996; Milloy 1999). Rather, I respond to the TRC’s invitation to consider their work as a project of national memory-making and explore the negotiation of Indian residential school history in Canadian cultural politics. I examine several such sites of negotiation, and suggest that the incorporation of this colonial history into “national memory” is far more contradictory and elusive than the TRC might desire. First, I explore the representational politics at play in the unveiling of Giniiganimenaaning, a stained glass window commemorating the survivors of Indian residential schools on Ottawa’s
Parliament Hill. The window supplies a prism that refracts back starkly different ways of remembering and (re)viewing Canada’s colonial history: central here is the tension between invocations of memory as forms of closure, and memory as a progressive instrument to be harnessed for social change.

The following section hones in more specifically on the development of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, highlighting the case of Labrador’s exclusion and reflecting on the politics of recognition whereby the law is empowered to adjudicate whose residential school memories count, and, more broadly, which colonial injuries are recognized as justiciable for redress and compensation from the state. Building on this point, the final section of this chapter poses the question of the selectiveness of national memory, and how certain histories obtain eligibility for becoming potentially “memorable,” on a collective level. I ask why and why now are the Indian residential schools the central focus of redress from the state, when a host of other ongoing colonial injustices remain comparatively less visible? Anything from the overrepresentation and underfunding of Indigenous children in the child welfare system, the issue of missing and murdered Indigenous women, the disproportionate incarceration of Indigenous people in Canadian correctional services, or housing conditions on reserves could have been slated for repressive action, all of the above being issues that have been criminally neglected in Canadian state priorities.

Perhaps the most curious occlusion of all is the problem of land, at a time where the Northern Gateway Pipeline, the Alberta Tar Sands, Northern Ontario’s Ring of Fire, and other megaprojects demonstrate in bold relief the problem of resource development and redistribution in territories where Indigenous peoples have either unceded
sovereignty or treaty rights and relationships that the federal government has disavowed. Instead, the TRC on Indian Residential Schools focuses on and to some degree contributes to a fetishization of the figure of the deserving child, and I reflect on the politics and implications for memory that are posed by this decoupling, where the pain of the (now aged) Indigenous child can be acknowledged, but not the state-sanctioned occupation of Indigenous land for European settlement, of which the removal and assimilation of Indigenous children was part and parcel.

**GINIIGAANIMENAANING: LOOKING AHEAD TOWARDS THE FUTURE FOR THE ONES YET UNBORN**

June 11th, 2012 marked four years since the Statement of Apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools, which Prime Minister Stephen Harper had delivered to assembled parliamentarians and Indigenous dignitaries in the House of Commons, on behalf of the Government of Canada. On this occasion of the fourth anniversary of the apology, a stained glass window was unveiled, created for display in the Centre Block of the Canadian parliament buildings in Ottawa. *Giniigaanimenaaning* – Métis artist Christi Belcourt’s visual tribute honouring the Indigenous children who attended residential schools – was to be prominently and permanently installed above the entrance to the foyer of the House of Commons, visible to Members of Parliament leaving the House, to cameras conducting media scrums with politicians in the foyer, and to the estimated 600,000 visitors who flock to Parliament Hill each year.

Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Minister John Duncan had first announced that a stained glass window would be commissioned for Parliament at the Atlantic National Event of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in October 2011.
Offered as an “Expression of Reconciliation” (a staple feature of TRC programming which I will discuss at length in Chapter Four), the government announced that it was to invite submissions of designs from Indigenous artists and that a committee of Indigenous art experts and former residential school students would then review the proposals. Christi Belcourt’s Giniigaanimenaaning design was selected, and it was transformed into glass at Toronto’s Vision Art studio, and in the artist’s words,

It is a story done visually. The glass design tells a story of Aboriginal people with our ceremonies, languages and cultural knowledge intact, through the darkness of the residential school era, to an awakening sounded by a drum, an apology spoken to the heart. Hope for reconciliation, transformation and healing through dance, ceremony, languages and resilience to the present day. Giniigaanimenaaning means looking ahead but as it’s been explained to me… it also contains a deeper meaning, that it means everyone is looking ahead towards the future for the ones yet unborn.

In selecting the name for her design, Belcourt offered tobacco and conducted ceremonies with her partner Alo White, an Anishinaabe Elder and fifth degree Midewin in the Anishinaabeg Grand Medicine Society. As White explained to those assembled at the window’s unveiling, the name Giniigaanimenaaning came to him in a dream song from an auntie who came in the middle of the night and sang in his ear about the need to continue walking in a sacred manner for the sake of the future generations. The design of the window arcs from the bottom left panel upward and down to the bottom right (see Figure 1.1). In Belcourt’s (quoted in Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada 2012) description, it begins in the bottom left corner with an ancestor smoking in a sacred lodge, representing a time where Indigenous ceremonies, knowledge, and languages were intact, moving upward to a button blanket motif typical of the First Peoples of the Pacific Northwest. Here plants and berries and roots represent the learning of knowledge of plants, animals, and medicines through connections to the earth and ancestors, at a time
when ceremonies such as the strawberry festival marked the transitions from childhood to adulthood, and beadwork and quillwork along with other arts reflected cultural pride adorned in clothing and sacred objects. Moving upward is a sombre middle section with ashen, grey-toned Indigenous children wearing European school uniforms, developed using antique photographs of real children attending residential schools.

The panel moves upward again to shattered glass, representing the shattering of families and communities but also the shattering of silence when former students began to publicly testify about residential school abuses in the 1980s and 1990s. An Inuit drum dancer sounds the beginning of healing, sending out concentric circles that transformed government and church positions from denial to apology, and a dove appears in the panel carrying an olive branch as an offering of hope and reconciliation. A sun emerges at the top of the right panel, emitting rays conveying a movement from the present to the future. An Elder and residential school survivor dances in a jingle dress for the healing of the people and future generations. A young mother embraces her child in a traditional moss bag, back with its mother in its rightful place as the words “I love you, my child” are engraved in multiple Indigenous languages. The bottom right panel completes the arc as a grandmother sits in a lodge smoking a pipe in prayer for her grandchildren, while ceremonies, traditional knowledge, and the foundations of culture are restored as Indigenous peoples and the rest of Canada become witness to their strength and resilience (Belcourt in Indian and Northern Affairs Canada 2012).
Public reactions to the unveiling of the *Giniigaaniimenaaning* stained glass window displayed starkly different ways of seeing, (re)viewing, and thereby remembering the Indian residential schools. Belcourt’s creation of
*Giniigaaniimenaaning* drew inspiration from a dream, and it resonates with Stó:lo writer Lee Maracle’s (2004: 205-208) invocation of the “dreamspace” as “thin lines of silver,” a tenuous and fragile space where Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples may come to think beyond the “fort” of Canadian colonialism by recovering memory of it and bringing it into story.

The stained glass window’s location in Ottawa’s Parliament Hill, at the symbolic heart of the settler colonial polity, may paradoxically make *Giniigaaniimenaaning* simultaneously hypervisible yet invisible, effaced by readings that “unsee” or misrecognize the artist’s intended message. In other words, the stained glass window may become, much like the presence of Indigenous peoples in Canadian cultural memory more generally, “hidden in plain sight,” to invoke the apt phrase of Onondaga scholar David Newhouse and colleagues (Newhouse et al. 2005).

Federal Aboriginal Affairs Minister John Duncan, in his public remarks at the window’s unveiling, interpreted the unveiling from an altogether different perspective than the dreamspace conjured by Belcourt. He suggested that

The apology underlined Canadians’ resolve to learn from these tragic events, to ensure they will *never* be repeated, and establish the foundation for a *new* relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians, based on knowledge of the past, mutual respect for each other and a desire to move… forward together in partnership. Canadians visiting Parliament Hill will soon be able to see one of Canada’s gestures of reconciliation, a lasting memorial to commemorate the legacy of Indian Residential Schools, and the historic apology.

Temporalities are sharply demarcated in Minister Duncan’s remarks, carving out a “new” Indigenous-settler relationship that is moving “forward,” strictly sliced off from a “legacy” that is “past,” soberly commemorated, and “never” to be repeated. This position on memory contrasts sharply with Christi Belcourt’s speech at the unveiling,
which tacitly underlined enduring colonial continuities by linking the residential schools system to one of the most banal, everyday expressions of racist violence toward Indigenous peoples in contemporary Canada: comments made on Indigenous-themed news stories in online media by ordinary Canadians, which are frequently as vitriolic as they are uninformed. As Belcourt noted,

What will a glass do, when there are so many unresolved issues to deal with?... [R]econciliation is not just one-sided. It’s not just us healing ourselves... Reconciliation means the two sides coming together. So I would just like to ask Canadians to please consider this when you are writing your replies to the CBC… or to Globe and Mail or to whatever new media there is out there. Aboriginal people have contributed great things to this country and we continue to do that. And we’ve always done it in a peaceful way. And we have always given. And given, and given. So don’t just write your little… filled with hate comments. That’s so hurtful. That doesn’t do anything to bring us together as a country.

This discursive exchange over the unveiling of Giniigaaniimenaaning itself unveils how a national memory of Indian residential schools is elusive precisely because it is contested. Christi Belcourt’s remarks – much like many of the testimonies former students have provided to the TRC – highlight continuities between Indian residential schooling and the injustices and indignities of contemporary colonial oppression in its everyday forms. Minister Duncan’s response, much like many official government pronouncements on the residential schools, employs a politics of temporality that curtains off the residential schools as a “sad chapter,” a past, “discrete historical problem of educational malpractice” (Henderson and Wakeham 2009: 2) that is safely bookended from – and poses no political challenge to – the contemporary liberal settler state. As Lee Maracle (2015) reminds us, “memory serves,” and “[w]hen settlers tell us to ‘forget the past,’ they are asking [Indigenous peoples] to remain powerless” (37).
A national memory of residential schools is not merely elusive because it is contested, however; it is also problematic because of the profound asymmetry that structures “relations of recognition” (Coulthard 2007: 442) for Indigenous peoples within a settler polity. I turn to this problem in the following section, introducing the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement and its exclusion of Labrador Inuit and exploring the power of law, as an instrument of the Crown and settler state, to adjudicate and recognize Indigenous memories on its own terms.

ADJUDICATING MEMORY: LABRADOR AND THE IRSSA

The Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, implemented in 2007, is the product of sustained Indigenous activism on multiple fronts over several decades. Indigenous feminist writers were at the forefront of this wave, producing literature in the 1970s and 1980s that publicly testified to the centrality of sexual and gendered violence to colonization (Million 2013: 56-57). Following in their wake, former students published accounts of Indian residential schooling in a variety of genres (Graham 1997; Jack 2001; Joe 1996; Johnston 1995; Knockwood 1992; Sterling 1992; also Chrisjohn and Young 1997) and the first ethnographies of residential schooling were published (Furniss 1995; Haig-Brown 1988). The 1991-1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, established to investigate the condition of Indigenous peoples in Canada following the Oka Crisis and the failure of the Meech Lake Accord, unearthed extensive testimonials of residential school abuse and was an important catalyst for action by former students, as was the revelation by future National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations Phil Fontaine of his sexual abuse in residential schools. Indeed, two decades
prior to the TRC’s project of national memory-making, former students were already working to make their residential school memory a matter of Canadian public consciousness, although – as the TRC benchmark survey cited earlier might suggest – this dissemination of memory was not widely recognized by the Canadian public.

Nonetheless, the climate of disclosure helped galvanize demands for redress from Indigenous political organizations as well as through thousands of civil litigation suits. Class action lawsuits were also launched, beginning with *Aleck v. Clarke* in 1988, among which the largest and longest-lasting were *Blackwater v. Plint* (later *Barney v. Canada*), *Cloud v. Canada* and *Baxter v. Canada*. Canada, as a primary legal defendant in many of these class action lawsuits, employed multiple tactics to minimize its responsibility and contain damages, and initiated an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) process in 2003, ostensibly to expedite claims through an Indigenous restorative justice framework that in practice proved adversarial and tightly government-controlled (Assembly of First Nations 2006; Regan 2010; Thielen-Wilson 2012).

As a way of simultaneously addressing the proliferation of court cases and the failure of ADR, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was implemented in September 2007 following extensive negotiations between legal counsel for former students, legal counsel for the Churches\(^6\), Indigenous political organizations, and the federal government. It funds five instruments of redress for the legacy of Indian residential schools: a Common Experience Payment (CEP) for all eligible former students of Indian residential schools; an Independent Assessment Process (IAP) for

\(^6\) The church parties to the IRSSA are the General Synod of the Anglican Church of Canada, the Presbyterian Church in Canada, the United Church of Canada and Roman Catholic Entities. The Moravian Church operated two residential schools in Labrador but is not a party to the IRSSA since Labrador’s schools are not recognized in the agreement.
claims of sexual or serious physical abuse; an additional five-year endowment to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation; funding for national and community-based commemorative projects; and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission itself, which is the central focus of this dissertation, although I briefly discuss some of the limitations of the IAP in Chapter Three.

The negotiations to subsume the outstanding court cases into the IRSSA began on May 30, 2005 and concluded with an Agreement in Principle between the aforementioned parties on November 20, 2005. Among the items for negotiation was which institutions would be recognized as residential schools, and a total of 130 were included at that time, with the proviso that additional residential schools could later be added to the agreement, if they met the eligibility criteria of a two-part test pursuant to Article 12 of the settlement. Indigenous political organizations were party to the negotiations, including the Assembly of First Nations along with the Inuit representatives, Nunavut Tunngavik Inc., Inuvialuit Regional Corporation and Makivik Corporation. The Métis National Council was not party to these negotiations, nor were the Labrador Inuit.

2005 was already a momentous year for Labrador Inuit, who were implementing their transition to self-government with the signing of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement after 28 years of arduous negotiations with the federal government and the province of Newfoundland and Labrador. As a Nunatsiavut Government official

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7 The federal government did not renew funding for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation in 2012 despite a widespread consensus over the importance and efficacy of its healing programs, including highly positive evaluations from federal departments. I discuss the politics and implications of this decision in detail elsewhere (Molema 2012).

8 Numerous institutions attended by Métis were also excluded from the IRSSA. For further information see Chartrand et al. (2006) and Métis National Council (2012). Another important category of exceptions from the IRSSA is the Indian Day Schools, where students did not board in these generally church-operated and federally-funded institutions, but were often subject to similar abuses. Legal actions are currently being pursued in both cases.
explained to me, the Labrador Inuit were not invited to the IRSSA negotiations and upon belatedly learning of their exclusion, requested that Nunavut Tunngavik express concerns on their behalf. The decision to reapprove excluded schools, however, does not belong jointly to all parties of the IRSSA, but rather rests with the discretion of Indigenous and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), representing the federal government.

In response to its exclusion, Nunatsiavut Government prepared a request pursuant to Article 12 of the IRSSA, providing three volumes of historical documentation seeking to demonstrate that – contrary to Canada’s claim that the residential schools attended by Labrador Inuit were operated exclusively by the province or religious organizations – Canada played an active role in the financing and administration of these schools through its capital expenditure agreements with the province and family allowance policies (White, Ottenheimer & Baker 2007a, 2007b, 2008). For Labrador Inuit, this predicament is not an unfamiliar one: their unique status as Inuit “south of sixty”⁹ and Newfoundland’s late entry into Canadian Confederation in 1949 have frequently provided a pretext for the federal government to muddy its constitutional responsibilities and fiduciary duty to the Indigenous peoples of the province (Hanrahan 2003; Tanner 1998). While AANDC rejected Nunatsiavut’s request for inclusion, former students in Labrador have themselves initiated a class action against the federal government, which was certified by the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador in June 2010 and is currently before the courts¹⁰. While most former students I spoke with in Labrador were

⁹ The 60th parallel, north of which lie the other three Inuit nunaaq (homelands): Nunavut, Nunavik, and the Inuvialuit Settlement Area.

¹⁰ Anderson v. Canada represents former students of five residential schools: Lockwood School in Cartwright, Yale School in North West River, Makkovik Boarding School in Makkovik, Nain Boarding School in Nain, and St. Anthony Orphanage and Boarding School in St. Anthony. The latter was situated on the island of Newfoundland but was attended by numerous Labrador Inuit children.
clear about their desire to have their residential school experience recognized publicly and in the courts, they were nonetheless frequently uncertain as to what would constitute appropriate recognition of that experience, and often deeply agnostic over the question of whether appropriate compensation or adequate justice could even be served, given the severity of residential school impacts. As one middle-aged male survivor told me,

We all deserve the apology. We all deserve the compensation. [But] even to me, that’s a slap on the face. I mean, I’m scared to get that money because I don’t know what I’m going to do with it. I keep saying that if I get enough money, I want to buy a house for myself. And after that it’s like, ‘huh! What do I do? What do I do with the rest?’ Take care of my nieces, my nephews, my great-nieces, my great-nephews. You know? But after that, what do I do with the rest of it? I know that I’m an alcoholic and I’ll probably just waste it, you know? Alcohol has been a big factor in my life. And to know that when I get this money, it’s just either gonna destroy me or kill me, maybe even both. And it’s a scary, scary thought [he laughs drily]. I don’t even want to get that money. We need to heal ourselves. We’ve been hurting ourselves and damaging ourselves for so many years, we forgot how to heal.

And in the words of a middle-aged female survivor,

Class action is all about money. And I haven’t become a part of that. Mainly because I cannot fill out that form that the lawyers want. I don’t want to read it on paper. I don’t want to take the time to put it on paper and then have it out there! The pain and the suffering and the beatings and the rapes and the… everything. Suicides. The ones who committed suicide, is their family gonna get anything? Is there gonna be… [she wipes away tears]. And I remember so many that did commit suicide. Not right away but years down. They beat us, we learned how to beat! They fucked us! You know? Three o’clock in the morning when everybody’s asleep and I can’t sleep [she wipes tears]. And I’m alone in this world. And the thoughts are going around in circle. That’s not reconciliation. I don’t think it ever will be, because that time is past. This is still in me. I witnessed [at the TRC]. I bear witness. And in the meantime, these regular people like me, we go along with our lives, our suffering. And they say it’s the start of reconciliation.

The exclusion of Labrador from the IRSSA negotiations and the subsequent settlement – as well as the pending class action – underscores the power of law, as an instrument of government, in authorizing the politics of recognition that surround the
Indian residential schools. Law provides a window for the acknowledgement of some memories of institutional harm, while invalidating others as ineligible for state redress. As Elizabeth Povinelli has inquired in a related Australian Aboriginal context,

What is it… that allows the law to incite national and subaltern memory on behalf of a new collective self-understanding in a way that makes the rewriting of history seem a recognition of and accounting for that history; that allows the (re)entrenchment of cultural discrimination as a technology of state power; and, as if these were not enough, makes this new technology of state power seem like a means of liberating subalterns from the state? (2002: 182)

The law, in adjudicating which and whose residential school memories are justiciable for redress by the nation, plays a foundational role in writing the eligibility criteria for national memory and acknowledgement, a point that is often overlooked in memory studies literature. Canada’s TRC, the first in over forty truth commissions to have emerged as part of a court settlement, is particularly well placed to shed light on this point.

Liberal legal ideology posits that legal decisions “are primarily dispassionate, objective, noncontextual judgments of social facts rather than the primary means by which social facts are produced” (Povinelli 2002: 230). Indeed, examining IRSSA not as legal judgment but as social production calls attention to the unequal power relations that determined who had a right to be party to the settlement negotiations. It also spotlights the ongoing authority of the federal government, channelled through AANDC, to include or reject additional residential schools, unless the law finds favour with the plaintiffs in new court cases by former students of excluded residential schools. Upcoming court decisions on excluded schools may well rule in favour of the plaintiffs but do not change the foundational power asymmetry that affirms the settler state as arbiter of Indigenous rights and recognition. These asymmetrical politics of recognition are at their foundation
authorized by the law, a vexed vehicle for Indigenous peoples which has “repeatedly refused to challenge the racist origin of Canada’s assumed sovereignty over [them] and their territories” (Coulthard 2007: 451). In settler polities, the law provides the vehicle for the recognition and granting of Indigenous rights by the settler state, even while, perhaps less conspicuously, the state relies on the law for the recognition of its own sovereignty and legitimacy.

Within the context of the TRC, its Commissioners have nonetheless employed a progressive interpretation of their mandate and made overtures to groups excluded from the settlement agreement. As Robyn Green (2012: 142) has argued, the TRC’s inclusion of excluded groups provides a measure of symbolic recognition even while material compensation is denied. Labrador Inuit were invited to attend the TRC National Events in Inuvik in June 2011 and Halifax in October 2011, and the TRC conducted two Labrador regional hearings in Hopedale and Happy Valley-Goose Bay in September 2011.

Symbolic recognition may be of small comfort when legal recognition is denied. At the TRC National Event in Halifax in October 2011, a group of over twenty Labrador Inuit dressed in traditional white fur-trimmed silapaks were invited to make a public expression of reconciliation. Nunatsiavut Government Minister of Health Patricia Kemuksigak spoke on behalf of the delegation (Figure 1.2):

We all need to stand together - and I’m glad that we’re all here together … so that the Labrador experiences of Residential Schools are acknowledged, recognized, and we too have an apology of the injustices that happened in the residential schools. Our trauma, abuses and losses in Residential Schools are real, true, and we need that acknowledgment. The Federal Government paid the Provincial Government of Newfoundland and Labrador who in turn paid the International Grenfell Association to administer Residential Schools in our area. We deal with intergenerational trauma daily. We have many issues, as was mentioned before,
family dysfunction, suicide, family violence and poverty, just to name a few. I would also like for people to send prayers to Nunatsiavut and to the community of Hopedale as on Wednesday we lost another young man to suicide, a 16-year-old boy from Hopedale. We all need your prayers and support, and some of his family members are here as survivors.

Figure 1.2 – The Labrador Inuit delegation to the TRC’s Atlantic National Event, October 2011
Photograph courtesy of Minister Patricia Kemuksigak

The Labrador Inuit delegation closed their presentation with an Inuktitut language performance of the hymn “God Be With You Till We Meet Again.” Some Inuit cried and were comforted by others onstage, and their mournful keening and often halting rendering of the hymn belied the hopeful promise of its lyrics. As Minister Kemuksigak instructed the audience, “This [hymn] is our traditional way to end events. We don’t say goodbye. We say till we meet again.” The tearful recitation of the hymn itself performed a cry for recognition of memories that are not acknowledged, and this poignant attempt to
make Labrador Inuit memories of residential schooling recognizable implicitly questions the closure presumed in the IRSSA.

As Yellowknives Dene political theorist Glen Coulthard (2007: 437-8) has noted, recognition, like reconciliation, has become a key trope and master discourse in contemporary Indigenous-state relations, and it couches all manner of negotiations surrounding the Crown’s fiduciary obligations to Indigenous peoples, land claims, or Indigenous rights to economic benefits from resource development in their territories. Importantly, Coulthard cautions us that “the reproduction of a colonial structure of dominance like Canada’s rests on its ability to entice Indigenous peoples to come to identify, either implicitly or explicitly, with the profoundly asymmetrical and non-reciprocal forms of recognition either imposed on or granted to them by the colonial-state and society” (439, emphasis original).

As far as memory and the adjudication of histories are concerned, the premise of incorporating Indigenous memories of residential schooling into a Canadian national memory naturalizes and fails to problematize the asymmetrical “relations of recognition” (442) in which the rehearsal and adjudication of Indigenous memories take place. As Anishinaabe political theorist Dale Turner (2006: 59, emphasis mine) has noted, “this notion of incorporation is problematic and fraught with historical injustice”, as it mirrors the reduction of Indigenous nations into “‘national minorities’ that somehow became ‘incorporated’ into the Canadian state.” Contrary to the TRC’s avowed objectives, creating a national memory of residential schooling is a profoundly troubled project, in that the politics of memory in settler states minoritize Indigenous peoples, adjudicating
the facticity of their historical experiences in a way that is structurally disadvantageous and profoundly asymmetrical.

The following and final section of this introductory chapter interrogates one final problem in the memory politics of residential schooling, asking what it is about the current moment that has spotlighted Indian residential schooling for state redress, making this history potentially “memorable” while other colonial injustices are dimmed from view.

**DESERVING CHILDREN ON FORGOTTEN LAND: NEOLIBERALISM AND THE POLITICS OF MEMORABILITY**

While other truth commissions have examined harm done to children, Canada’s TRC has attracted attention for being the first commission to focus its inquiry primarily and explicitly on violence perpetrated against children (Niezen 2013: 5). As far as truth commissions are concerned, this focus may open a novel precedent and possibilities; indeed, the Maine Wabanaki-State Child Welfare TRC drew direct inspiration from Canada’s commission, and it launched in 2012 to investigate Indigenous child welfare abuse in the state of Maine. However new this area of focus may be for truth commissions, social anxieties over child abuse have been ubiquitous and highly significant in North American cultural politics over the last three decades (Berlant 1997; Hacking 1991; Ivy 1993). This is not to suggest that this focus on child victimhood is itself without precedent: child rescue initiatives and discourses played an important role in the British Empire’s civilizing missions in its colonies, and they indexed sexualized,

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11 Notably the second Ugandan commission of 1986-95 and the Sierra Leone commission of 2002-4, which investigated harms perpetrated against children who were recruited as soldiers and sexual slaves (Niezen 2013: 5).
classed, and racialized anxieties that reverberate in the contemporary preoccupations over child abuse (Stoler 2002, 2006; Swain and Hillel 2010).

What differentiates the current fixation with child abuse is the neoliberal social and political-economic context in which it germinates. In a context of fiscal austerity, retrenchment of the welfare state and social entitlements, as well as ideologically motivated backlashes and recriminations against social movements and identity politics, the figure of the deserving child acquires new potency as “an unmarked universal, unaffiliated with any social and ideological conflicts of the past, and poised to realize his or her potential as an individual. In this context,” as Henderson (2013: 70) has argued, “innocence and vulnerability only serve to invest these neoliberal norms of selfhood with a greater sense of incontestability.” Xiaobei Chen scrutinizes this development as the emergence of a “child-victim citizen,” noting (2003: 190) that “[t]he innocent, victimized child is a rare subject who can pass neoliberal scrutiny and be recognized as the citizen with legitimate entitlements.” For Ian Hacking (1991) and Marilyn Ivy (1993), this fixation with the abused child manifests itself in a disproportionate media coverage of missing children, which curiously, as Ivy observes, shares “intersecting rhetorics” (235) with the proliferation of self-help therapies interpellating the lost “inner child” in the name of self-care and arguably, neoliberal self-regulation (see Rose 1990, 1998, 1999).

In the Canadian context, a series of high profile and widely mediatised criminal cases have primed the Canadian public’s receptivity and responsiveness to occurrences of child sexual abuse within institutions. In an early position paper, the Native Women’s Association of Canada (1992) analyzed the extensive media coverage and criminal investigations into systemic sexual abuse after public disclosure of endemic sexual abuse
at the Mount Cashel orphanage in St. John’s, Newfoundland and Labrador, in 1989, and at St. Joseph’s Training School for Boys in Alfred, Ontario in 1990, among other institutions. Since this abuse targeted non-Indigenous children, NWAC sought to strategize how best to bring the abuses of Indian residential schooling to public and political attention. Several years later, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996: 378) concluded that the Canadian public had indeed become more receptive to the issue of Indian residential school abuse, concluding that “[n]on-Aboriginal Canadians found that Aboriginal revelations… fell within the parameters of their own social concerns, and thus non-Aboriginal voices joined the condemnation.” As Dian Million (2013: 81, emphasis original) has suggested, “The abuse that First Nations peoples suffered was recognized as abuse more readily at the time they began to tell and there was a language for it. It was also more punishable.”

While I too condemn the genocidal abuses of the residential school system and consider justice and reparations essential (if not entirely straightforward), what I seek to highlight is the risk that even while Indian residential school abuses become potentially publicly memorable, its intersections with other colonial histories and realities may become forgettable. As Jennifer Henderson (2013: 66) has noted, Indian residential schooling, at least for that segment of the population that is aware of this history, “seems to have to stand, in our present, as a kind of synecdoche for that vaster project, one that can give the colonial enterprise in Canada something more like the form of a case.” Indigenous scholars have critiqued the truth commission’s narrow focus on the residential schools (see e.g. Alfred 2009; Waziyatawin 2009). Waziyatawin (Wahpetunwan Dakota) notes (2009: 193) that “[w]hile the current initiatives in Canada
are focusing on residential schools, settler society eludes responsibility… by narrowing the focus of the harms to be repaired. Because of the extensive violence of the residential school experience, we have been trained to forget that the schools were used as a tool to disconnect us from one another, from our spirituality and cultures, and from our lands.”

As Glen Coulthard (2014: 12) observes, “in the post-fur trade period, Canadian state formation and colonial-capitalist development required first and foremost land, and only secondarily the surplus value afforded by cheap, Indigenous labour.” Indian residential schooling was amenable and critical for this objective, in assisting “the long-term goal of indoctrinating the Indigenous population to the principles of private property, possessive individualism, and menial wage labo[u]r” (Coulthard 2014: 12) which militate against treaty-based understandings of political order and negotiated sovereignties.

Indigenous feminist scholars remind us that racialized sexual violence has been and continues to be deeply intertwined with, and in fact foundational to, Canadian colonialism (Maracle 1988; Million 2013; see also A. Smith 2005). In this sense, the focus of the TRC and broader reparations on the residential schools does offer a kernel of radical potential to lay bare the “intimacies of empire” (Stoler 2006: 24), and in so doing confront some of the most intimate and profound violations at the heart of the settler colonial project in Canada. As Andrea Smith reminds us (2005: 55), however, colonial constructions of Indigenous peoples as “inherently violable” – precisely the kinds of constructions that authorized residential school abuses – should not be dissociated from constructions of Indigenous lands and territories as “violable” and therefore available for settlement and exploitation of resources. In other words, a preeminent status is given to child sexual abuse in both media coverage of the truth commission and in the IRSSA’s
Independent Assessment Process for claims of serious physical and sexual abuse in residential schools (where, in order to determine levels of compensation, a chilling mathematical reduction of traumatic personal experience distinguishes five levels of sexual abuse, cross-tabulated with a range of other harms and effects). In so doing, the broader significance of the residential school system is squeezed into the reductive minimalism of algorithms of abuse, decontextualized and deterritorialized from its place in the broader project of colonial assimilation and dispossession of land and resources.

National memory, then, while an oratorically powerful concept, is slippery and selective in practice and provokes a range of intellectual and ethical concerns. As I have suggested, the neoliberal instantiation of settler colonial politics risks fetishizing the abused and deserving Indigenous child-turned-Survivor, making the deserving child and undeserved sexual abuse the truth commission’s most publicly memorable storyline, while others are forgotten – if not by the former students themselves who carry the “burden of history” (Lambek 2002: 4) of remembering residential schools in their complexity and intersection of legacies.

The figure of the abused Indigenous child is absolutely central in the work and proceedings of Canada’s truth commission. That innocent children were systematically defiled and violated in residential schools is a crime so heinous that few others can compare to the sense of outrage, incredulity, and raw emotion it evokes. In the following chapter, I provide an ethnographic introduction to Canada’s truth commission with a particular focus on the role of affect. I deliberately introduce the commission as an affective space, much in the way that it grabs at you and weighs on you when you enter its proceedings and listen to the testimonies of former students. The focus of the next
chapter, however, is to unpack and critically analyze, rather than naturalize, the affective force of the commission. I revisit the figure of the abused child and the affective work it does for the commission and Canada’s reparations process, explore the curious and uneasy interface of affect and the state, and scrutinize how commission discourses construct pedagogies of affect for former students, a “reschooling” that echoes in unsettling ways the residential school history itself.
“What was it like to attend the truth commission?” I ask a key interlocutor, a Labrador Inuk woman in her fifties. “Oh, fuck!” she says, “Oh, it was hard! Because it was all these people! Hurting. They had all these feelings inside of them! That I had in me. Holy jeez, that was hard! Because they didn’t have to speak! Because I knew we were all there for one reason, that’s for the TRC! And they were all right here because we’re all hurting inside! And there were thousands! That’s a lot of hurt! And that’s when they, uh, spoke about *reconciliation,*” she says, meaning the commissioners. She lets out a tired, dry puff of ironic laughter.

The national events and community hearings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) are deeply, though differentially, emotive spaces: for the former students who come to tell their story of residential schooling; for the family members who may hear some details from their loved one’s history for the very first time; and for the attending public that experiences the alterity of a history that few had known, digested, or internalized. Emotion is palpable and visceral at TRC events, and has a way of grasping you if you attend.

The TRC has hosted its seven National Events in an eclectic variety of spaces, including an open-air venue (Winnipeg, MB), a local high school (Inuvik, NT), downtown convention centres (Halifax, NS; Edmonton, AB), upmarket hotels (Montreal,
QC), and large, sprawling exhibition centres (Saskatoon, SK; Vancouver, BC). Despite these variations in venue, Canada’s truth commission has created a distinct “affective geography” (Navaro-Yashin 2012) that travels with and reassembles itself over the course of the commission’s proceedings.

Let me share my recollections of entering this space during the fifth TRC National Event in Vancouver in September 2013. Hosted at the Pacific National Exhibition at Hastings Park, this TRC’s proceedings opened in the Coliseum. This venue was almost spectatorial with its cascade of bleachers: the Pacific Coliseum was for many years home to the Vancouver Canucks and other ice hockey teams, as well as the venue for figure skating and short track speed skating in the 2010 Winter Olympics. An incongruous venue, at first impression, and yet I was struck by the poetic justice in hosting a commission on Indian residential schools – this invisibilized and yet central story in the making of national history – in a space that is normally the turf of those most hypervisible icons of Canadian national iconography: hockey and winter sports. On this day, those of us assembled in the audience heard the echoes of a group of Indigenous male singers belting out a deep, resonant drumming song as they ushered in the residential school survivors, commissioners, and Indigenous, church, and political dignitaries for their Grand Entry. There was a palpable sense of uncertainty as to what would take place, as the booming of the drums grew louder as the procession neared its entry from outside. A man helping a frail female Elder asks me for whom the first rows of seats are reserved. I don’t know. A middle aged Indigenous woman and I stand as the procession filters in, setting off a chain reaction of people rising for their entry. I sense ripples of hesitance and uncertainty as to which – or whose – protocols apply in these
moments when we come together as Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, in the disputed territories that make up the contested nation-state of Canada. I feel a sense of grief as the residential school survivors walk forward, wondering about the stories that live behind these stoic old faces, and often in these events I feel anger and shame too – “reconciliation” seems a feeble rejoinder to colonial dispossession, in which we remain unequally, itchily entangled. The processions are solemn and yet triumphant, although in a muted and circumspect way – the regalia worn by Indigenous dignitaries and the honour songs performed in Indigenous languages seem to epitomize what Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor (2008) called “survivance”: a merging of survival, endurance, and resistance, a “we are still here” in spite of ongoing assaults.

Figure 2.1 – Awaiting the Grand Entry, Vancouver National Event, September 2013
Photograph by the author

At the spatial heart of each national event is a central hall or auditorium where the Commission’s most official activities take place, beginning with the Opening
Ceremonies (the Grand Entry of Survivors, remarks delivered in the Commissioners’ Welcome and the Welcome to the Territory from local Indigenous dignitaries), weaving through Honorary Witness Ceremonies, Expressions of Reconciliation, the Commissioners’ Sharing Panel, and the Call to Gather, where the Commissioners, TRC staff, and honorary witnesses reflect on and recapitulate the day’s events, including the presentation of a video spliced together with clips from the event. This hub in the TRC’s activities is the Commission at its most formal and choreographed. The Commissioners’ Sharing Panels form the centrepiece of events, with public statements from former students which are restricted to twenty minutes – with varying degrees of success – to allow time for other speakers and the other aforementioned events that give this hub the character of centre stage.

Figure 2.2 – “Centre Stage”, Edmonton National Event, March 2014
Photograph by the author

Meandering through the corridors that lead away from this hub to the TRC’s other navigable spaces, you pass a variety of people moving in different directions – young
students, solemn church representatives, other members of the public who have found their way here. And then there are also former students of residential schools themselves: scenes of joy, support, or grief spontaneously erupt as they bump into former classmates not seen in many years. One overhears the recounting of old memories from residential school days, sad tidings shared about community members and the ever-growing number of classmates who have since passed on. Sometimes former students just look tired, as they slip in and out of TRC events. Most have their families with them – their children, who often identify as intergenerational survivors of residential schools, and often their children too, small children who may be periodically reminded by their mothers or fathers as to why they are here.

The smoky smells of smudging sage, sweetgrass, and cedar are never far, and they seem to sacralize the Commission space as they wisp through the corridors – they originate in the Cultural Support Area for Survivors, where former students or anyone else can come to be smudged by one of the Health Support Workers, which Health Canada has contracted to the Commission. In national events attended by Inuit, such as the one in Montreal, a separate Cultural Support Area was provided for Inuit former students. There are also spaces within the Commission where people can simply hang out – the Survivors’ Lounge seem to perform this function for former students, while in another darkened room, Indigenous-themed films are projected, providing an opportunity for distraction and disengagement from the intensity of the public statement taking.

The Commissioners’ Sharing Panels are not the only space in which statement taking goes on. Aside from the private statement taking, which is done at a remove from the Commission’s proceedings, there are also Sharing Circles conducted by the 10-
member Survivor Committee that acts as an advisory body for the Commission. These small and comparatively intimate circles offer the opportunity for more open-ended and informal statements from former students, without the time constraints and large public audiences of the Commissioners’ Sharing Panels. Some of the same individuals speak in both settings. Elsewhere on the premises, break-out sessions are being conducted: panel discussions, keynote speeches, events catered to elementary and high school classes in attendance, as well as the “It Matters to Me” town halls on reconciliation, which became a new feature of TRC programming with the regional event in Victoria in April 2012.

![The Learning Place, Vancouver National Event, September 2013](image)

People flock in and out of these various events, some congregating in the Learning Place (Figure 2.3), which hosts educational displays on the residential schools, cheek by jowl with artisans selling clothing, art, jewellery and other handicrafts. Here in this space too are the Church Archives and Listening Area – renamed during the Vancouver event the “Churches Listening to Survivors Area”, perhaps to clarify who
needed to do the listening – where former students can speak to church delegates about their residential school experiences, and also consult the vast archives of residential school photos to identify images of themselves and their classmates, and to request copies.

At Canada’s truth commission, the spaces to visit are many and the days are long, beginning as early as 6:00 A.M. with sunrise ceremonies at the Sacred Fire, which is kept alight by firekeepers outside the Commission during the entire proceedings, and of which ashes are later taken and entrusted to a Survivor Committee member, then thrown into the fire to initiate the Sacred Fire at the subsequent National Event. Days typically end at 6:00 P.M. but often extend well past that point as the Commissioners’ Sharing Panels inevitably run over time. During the four days of each National Event, a Talent Night is held on one evening, showcasing Indigenous musicians and dancers from the region, while a second evening hosts a free concert boasting a line up of more well known and nationally, sometimes internationally, acclaimed Indigenous performers and acts.

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I argue in this chapter that the various spaces and events that make up the work of Canada’s truth commission on Indian residential schools are not just emotive spaces. In studying and navigating the Commission, I have come to observe that the work of the Commission hinges powerfully on particular forms of affective labour – and the management of this labour – in order to choreograph and construct a particular kind of emotive space, which I argue has significant implications for Canadian politics of memory surrounding Indian Residential Schools.
In the following sections of this chapter, I explore how this choreography is constructed and enacted in the work of the Commission. First, I explore what I see as a *discursive temporalization of affects* in the Commissioners Sharing Panels. Survivor testimonies on residential schooling are usually chronologically ambiguous, since the trauma experienced in those schools often reverberates in the present and, furthermore, connects to other ongoing experiences of colonial violence. The Commission, however, rejigs survivor testimonies into a choreographed, highly scripted, and sequential timeline: a linear chronology in which survivor pain and outrage are assigned to the past and curtained off from the hopeful reconciled future that is purportedly made possible by their catharsis.

Second, I examine what I refer to as *economies of affect*, and explore how they take form in the Commission’s Expressions of Reconciliation. These Expressions of Reconciliation, which are performed by representatives of government, churches, Indigenous organizations, and other groups or individuals, constitute the most natural venue, within the architecture of Commission events, for *responses* to the outpouring of survivor affect in the Commissioners Sharing Panels. Many residential school survivors deliver their testimony as a gift, a gift of affective labour – for themselves, for their families and communities, even for Canada. Their collective testimonies seem to open up an invitation to a gift economy – a relationship of exchange – and in that manner they hearken back to the original spirit and intent of the historic treaties that Indigenous peoples signed with the Crown. And yet, as with the treaties, the economies of affect at play in the Commission can be seen as a largely unreciprocated or failed exchange relationship. Survivors express frustration with the affective opacity and insincerity of
state performances of contrition. Even more troublingly, I suggest, is that the state appears to appropriate survivors’ affective labour, garnering moral capital for itself as a sorry and repentant state. This moral capital, I suggest, is critical for attracting global capital and securing economic investment, subverting the economies of affect it rests upon into a form of theft.

Finally, I close this chapter by reflecting more broadly on the risks inherent in affective appropriation and in the Commission’s choreography of sentiment, as well as their implications for the politics of memory surrounding residential schooling in Canada, a subject that I first introduced in the previous chapter.

**CHOREOGRAPHING THE CHILD: COMMISSIONERS SHARING PANELS AND THE “LITTLE PERSON IN THE SCHOOL”**

In a typical day at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, public statement-taking from former students of residential schools forms the central activity and heart of daily programming, but it almost invariably follows and is followed by some of the most important ceremonial bookends of a day at the Commission. After the sunrise ceremonies outside the Commission’s venue, the day’s proceedings will begin in the central auditorium with opening remarks from the Commissioners, an Honorary Witness talking circle or Expressions of Reconciliation – and sometimes all of the above. Following the Commissioners Sharing Panel in which former students give testimony to their residential school experience and its consequences, the official activities of the day will conclude with the Call to Gather: the postscript to the day where the Commissioners and Honorary Witnesses give closing remarks and reflections, accompanied by a
recapitulation of the day’s events with a video presentation, and sometimes the presentation of additional Expressions of Reconciliation.

In this section, I explore how affect is invoked, interpreted, and often discursively repurposed in the Commission’s affective choreography of truth and reconciliation, focusing particularly on the figure of the Indigenous child that surfaces in Commission proceedings as a highly visible but contested “nexus of ambivalent affect” (Napolitano 2009: 99), which Napolitano defines as a “heightened circulation,” and a “field of force in the social imaginary” (emphasis original). I focus my analysis on the events of one day in particular – June 22\textsuperscript{nd}, 2012, the second day in the Commission’s fourth National Event, in Saskatoon – but which are emblematic of the affective labour that the figure of the child performs in the work of the Commission. In the Commission, to borrow from Sara Ahmed’s (2004b: 11) analysis, the figure of the child is an “object of emotion” that becomes “sticky, or saturated with affect, as sites of personal and social tension.”

Testimonies from former students and the “intergenerational survivors” of the residential school system vary in terms of the experiences recounted and the way they are delivered, although there are recognizable thematic similarities. Typically, individuals are accompanied to their panel on stage by a Health Support Worker, as well as one or two, or sometimes a few members of their family for their public statement. One or two, or occasionally, all three Commissioners sit on a separate panel across the stage, taking copious notes during the statement taking. The ends of these panels furthest from the stage tilt slightly toward one another, forming a reversed V in which both statement providers and Commissioners partly face the audience and include us as the third side of a triad.
A few statement providers will burn sage in an abalone shell on the panel as they deliver their statement, and some also will hold an eagle feather to give them strength as they recount their life experiences. Some testimonies are raw and extremely emotional, with speakers breaking down to cry as they recount horrific experiences of physical, sexual, and psychological abuse sustained in residential schools. The speaker will be comforted by family members or their Health Support Worker, and often these testimonies will evoke tears in the audience as well, from family members of the speaker, or other former students who know them or shared similar experiences, and often enough too from non-Indigenous members of the audience overtaken by repeated stories of the victimization and defilement of children.

Other statements are delivered with composure, with clear narratives and directives to the audience and even the government, often from former students who have spoken out many times both publicly and privately about their residential school experience. Some make eloquent use of remembered stories, poems, and even songs that they have prepared and brought to their presentation. Often, speakers spin a wry joke into their narratives, eliciting laughter from the audience and offering a temporary salve for the intensity of the proceedings. Confining testimony to the residential school experience itself is impossible when its legacies are lived and present: former students may speak of difficulties finding employment, alcohol and other substance abuse, the challenge of giving love to their own children when love was so foreign to the harsh assimilatory ethos of so many residential schools. Often enough too, former students will emphasize the importance of reconnecting to cultural teachings and spirituality, the relearning of their Indigenous language, the reweaving of tattered family ties. Many will
link the abuse suffered in the residential school system to other experiences of everyday colonial violence.

The public statements offered by former students on the second day of TRC hearings in Saskatoon more or less spoke to these themes. Phillip Ledoux, from Mistawasis First Nation, recounted a story of meeting a nun who had slapped and knocked him against the wall when he received his first communion at residential school. Years later, they recognized one another at a nursing home where the nun was wheelchair-bound. Ledoux chatted with the nun as he pushed her around in her wheelchair, recollecting his time in residential school, and pushed the wheelchair to the edge of a long flight of stairs, where he confronted the nun over this incident of physical abuse many years past. The nun denied it and screamed, to which he replied that he had already forgiven her for it years ago. The nun wept copiously and kissed his hand.

A more atypical testimony was delivered that day by the Quewezance family. Although it is not uncommon for former students to refer in collective terms to a shared community of residential school survivors, or even more broadly to the struggles of Indigenous peoples in Canada, the Quewezance statement was unusual in identifying the family itself – rather than the individual residential school survivor – as the speaking subject. Some one and half dozen members of the family, representing four generations, assembled and seated themselves behind Ted Quewezance as he delivered the collectively prepared statement (which I take liberty to abridge here while preserving the essential spirit and context of the testimony):

We, as a family, will be speaking about the effects of residential schools on four generations that attended residential schools from the 1900s to 1996 and the transfer of trauma to the subsequent fifth generation. We, as a family, researched the origins of residential schools in Canada and concluded that Canada’s
education policy constituted outright genocide. The major intent of the Quewezance family presentation and our personal testimony is to give hope, Mr. Commissioner, for our family and other families, and to leave a legacy for our children. Our abuse, Mr. Commissioner, is not just a historical fact but a present reality. Genocide is defined by the United Nations in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide. Many people are unaware that Canada is a signatory to this agreement, which means they made a covenant that they would do all they can to protect people. Canada has tried to hide and minimize what they did to the children under their care. When they forcefully removed us as little boys and little girls from our homes and our communities, they made genocide legal, Mr. Commissioner, by passing, in 1920, federal legislation [that made] it mandatory for every Indian child to be sent to residential schools upon reaching the age of seven years old with the threat of imprisonment of our grandparents and our parents.

After articulating the residential school system as a crime of genocide, Ted Quewezance continues, explicitly linking Indigenous experiences more broadly to the criteria listed under Article 2 of the United Nations Convention on Genocide:

Our children are the most vulnerable, our children are the most innocent, they are the most defenceless, and they… and we… we were all alone. Genocide includes the killing of members of the groups, meaning families, the premature deaths within our family, the infant deaths within our family and many families across the country. The murder of many of our women across this country, and the suicides within our families and within our communities. Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part. You don’t have to be dead to be a victim of genocide. We, as individuals and families and communities, are living that today. Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group like the Indian Residential School. The Sixties Scoop. High rates of First Nations children in care. Adoption of First Nations children. Imprisoning our youth. These events are not historical, they continue to happen in our family’s lifetime. Our perpetrators are not here. Where are they? All the perpetrators have representatives. This is why us, as a family and individuals… we’re going to start forgiving ourselves.

In the Quewezance family testimony, the affective figure of the child recurs and threads through the recounted experiences of genocide; for the Quewezances, the Indigenous child was/is “innocent,” “defenceless,” “alone,” but crucially, the child is a politicized figure bearing evidence of settler state genocide. The child is also an
affectively fraught figure, uncertain and temporally ambiguous. Ted Quewezance refers to a “little sister missing here today,” apprehended from their mother and taken away by train, to which brother Aubrey responds later, “Our youngest sister, we haven’t seen her. She was taken away in the 70s and I don’t know if she’s… Ted says she’s alive. I hope she is.” Uncertainty and temporal ambiguity reappear when Ted Quewezance refers to the vulnerability and innocence of children, with a false start and repair that blur the past and present, the boundaries between victimized children and Elder survivors – “and they… and we… we were all alone.” It is a temporalization that troubles linear chronology, one that seems to defy the Commission’s attempts to extract a tidy historiography of the Indian residential schools. Anthropologists and other social scientists have been conscious of the ways in which this temporality of violence defies linear chronology (e.g. Das 2007; Das et al. 2000; Gómez-Barris 2008; Scarry 1985). In Edkins’ (2003: 40) analysis, “trauma and traumatic memory alter the linearity of historical, narrativised time, time which has beginnings and ends,” creating a kind of “parallel existence… [where] [e]vents from the period of the trauma are experienced in a sense simultaneously with those of a survivor’s current existence,” in ways that often elude narration. As Das (2007: 46) notes, “a fractured relation to language has been documented for many survivors of prolonged violence,” where the very “ordinariness of language… divides them from the rest of the world,” given that “language for the inexpressibility of pain is always falling short” (40).

In the case of residential school survivors, the ambiguous temporality of violence plays out not only in the reverberations of the residential school experience in their daily lives, and in their families and communities. Importantly, it also intersects with other
ongoing experiences of colonial violence – experiences like the apprehension of Indigenous children by child welfare agencies, missing and murdered Indigenous women, police brutality, or threats to their lands and livelihoods, subjects that many survivors raise and either explicitly or implicitly link to residential schooling in their testimonies.

The Commissioners face a problematic, even impossible task – “an almost unbearable burden,” as Commissioner Sinclair put it at the Atlantic National Event in October 2011 – of producing some semblance of evidence of “truth and reconciliation” for the Commission’s final, as yet unreleased, report. Nonetheless, the Commission’s choreography of survivor sentiment attempts to salvage a linear chronology, curtaining off trauma and outrage as vestiges of the past to make way for a hopeful national futurity. This should become clearer as I return to the day on which the Quewezance family gave testimony, the second day of the Saskatoon National Event.

The figure of the child continued to resurface on that day – as it does in all Commission events – often in new guises, affectively reworked in different ways. On this particular day, the Commissioners Sharing Panels recessed to make room for a Circle of Reconciliation, composed of individuals representing the parties to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA): the federal government, the churches, national Indigenous organizations, and legal counsel for residential school survivors (in this case, residential school survivors themselves). Phil Fontaine, former National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, sat down on stage with Ms. Looee Okalik, representing Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami; the Rev. Dr. John Vissers, Moderator of the Presbyterian Church of Canada; Mr. Fred Sasakamoose, Cree residential school survivor and first Indigenous player in the National Hockey League; the Hon. John Duncan,
Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada; Mr. Clément Chartier, President of the Métis National Council; Ms. Myrna Whiteduck, social worker and residential school survivor; Bishop Don Bolen of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Saskatchewan; National Chief Shawn Atleo of the Assembly of First Nations; and Eugene Arcand, Cree residential school survivor, and member of the Commission’s Survivor Committee.

Bringing together representatives of the parties to the IRSSA, to which the Commission is ultimately accountable in its final report, provides the Commission with an opportunity to choreograph an enactment of reconciliation, a way of simulating the future reception of its work upon the completion of its mandate in 2015. Here, the Commission and other parties return to the figure of the child as a crucial crutch, upon which the ambivalent and highly questionable outcome of reconciliation can be endlessly deferred into the horizon of a vague but hopeful future. Here, in the sampling of remarks that follows, the figure of the child is stripped of the effects of colonial trauma and present pain that characterize so many survivor testimonies, and affectively refashioned into a figure of hope, promise, and youthful futurity:

“Thank you to everyone, a prayer for all survivors, and an honouring moment to bid farewell for the missing children and also to greet the newest generations of our Inuit, First Nations and Métis children.” (Looee Okalik)

“I met a wonderful woman. We have three wonderful children. They all have status. They are First Nations children. So I think I know… I know a lot. I know about your culture, I know about your pain. I think society has come a long way. Our society needs to move forward to progress, and I believe we are moving in the right direction.” (John Duncan)

“How great was it to see those kids here? To hear about this being taught in the schools up north. It’s becoming mandatory curriculum. And those kids were here listening to you. I was so encouraged by their presence. A young man has written a rap song for you survivors. Maybe you don’t all like rap music, but be
assured that the young people are paying attention increasingly. I reminded them, ‘You’re not the leaders of tomorrow like you’re told so often, you’re the leaders of right now. Reach out to your Elders. Support the survivors.’ Let us grasp this moment and make a major lurch forward especially for the children. To the survivors, thank you very much for leading the way for us younger people.” (Shawn Atleo)

“We’re all at home within the circle together. And isn’t it nice to be in a place where there’s passion and tolerance and commitment and kindness and bravery for everybody within your home? Isn’t that the kind of home that you want for you and your kids? So guys, let’s go home. Let’s go home and let’s make reconciliation a reality.” (Emcee Stan Wesley)

A curious retemporalization occurs here, demanding our attention to “lurch forward” – to repurpose National Chief Shawn Atleo’s uncanny and aptly awkward phrasing – away from the child that is the ambivalent we/they in the Quewezance testimony, the injured Indigenous child that is both past and present, inhabiting the bodies of those residential school survivors who are still living. Here instead, the child is divested of colonial injury and abstractly sentimentalized, put to use as the beacon of hope for an eventually reconciled Canadian nation. In so doing, the abstract figure of the child provides the affective glue for what Lauren Berlant (2000: 34) calls “national sentimentality” – “a liberal rhetoric of promise… which avows that a nation can best be built across fields of social difference through channels of affective identification and empathy.” Echoing a central insight from the anthropology of children and youth (Cole and Durham 2008; Malkki 2010; Rutherford 2013; Sargent and Scheper-Hughes 1998; Stephens 1995), the figure of the child, here as elsewhere, is a densely meaningful social and political symbol, one that condenses a vast and often antagonistic array of social anxieties and aspirations, even while forming a seemingly naturalized receptor for affective identification, empathy, and love. The Commission actively draws upon the
tremendous symbolic power of the figure of the child in order to recast a salvific veil of innocence over its proceedings.

As Rosalind Shaw (2014: 307) argues, institutional interventions in the aftermath of political violence – of which the truth commission is an exemplar – are fundamentally “projects of retemporalisation, their power naturalised as power over time through claims of prediction, projection and prevention: a future at risk, a timeline presumed to cycle back to violence, and a course of action that will redirect these.” In such contexts, the children are affectively and rhetorically significant as the “ultimate personifications of hope” (Shaw 2014: 308), frequently evoked to mobilize and naturalize future-oriented projects. Here, the history of residential schooling evoked in survivor testimonies can be retemporalized and reinserted into dominant Canadian settler chronologies and mythologies. The nation is reconstituted, unscathed, hopeful even. “We’re all at home within the circle.”

The Commissioners Sharing Panel resumed later that day, this second day of the Commission’s Saskatchewan National Event, and Commissioner Wilton Littlechild in his closing remarks for the day returned to the theme of the child, addressing the audience and speaking directly to the they/we of the Indigenous child-turned-Survivor of the Quewezance testimony:

This was about little children and what happened to them in the schools when they were little. And it seemed like many of the speakers relayed their lived experience from that perspective as a little person in the school. And yet, through all of that, you could see the courage and the resilience of our people when they come up here and [are] able to say, ‘I learned how to forgive.’ ‘I forgive those that hurt me.’ So yes, I think we focused today a lot on little children. And that really grounds us to the centrepiece of our work and what happened to children. And now that we know what happened to children in these schools, what can we do to make things better? We heard some good suggestions by the speakers, and I think one of the strongest messages was to learn how to let go. And more than
one said to forgive. To forgive. And I think that’s the message I would leave with all of us. If we’re still harbouring some pain or anger from a hurt, that we be able to let go and forgive and ask for forgiveness where we’ve hurt others. Very powerful messages through the voices of adults, but about little children and what happened to them.

The Indigenous child as figure and living subject of colonial genocide, invoked by the Quewezance family earlier that day, is not taken up here in Commissioner Littlechild’s closing remarks. Indeed, the question of genocide is seldom raised by Commission staff, nor does the word appear in the Commission’s interim report in reference to the residential schools (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2012a). Commissioner Justice Murray Sinclair has himself gone on the public record calling the residential schools a form of genocide, while noting that the TRC is not mandated with “the authority to declare Canada’s treatment of aboriginal students in Indian residential schools as an act of genocide” (Sinclair and Murray 2014). The TRC has, however, invited comparisons with genocide in subtler ways: Robbie Waisman and Éloge Butera, a Holocaust survivor and a Rwandan genocide survivor respectively, are carefully chosen and conspicuous Honorary Witnesses, who have both delivered keynote addresses at TRC events.

The Commission’s diluted power to publicly recognize genocide and release findings that could make Canada indictable on such count has the effect of neutralizing the political potential in the Quewezances’ invocation of the child as witness to and evidence of a genocide in need of redress. Instead, the residential school survivor who embodies that “little person in the school” is exhorted to shed the affects of pain and

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12 As I note in the conclusion to this dissertation, the TRC would later commit to a conclusion that the Indian residential school system amount to “cultural genocide” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015b: 5), a position it would take during the official release of its findings at its closing ceremony in Ottawa, in June 2015.
anger through labours of affect and “techniques of the self” (Foucault 1993), forging hurt into the higher alloy of forgiveness. This formula for appropriate residential school survivor affect, however, has a distinctly pedagogical tone that is uncanny in the context of a commission dedicated to exposing violence perpetrated against Indigenous children in the name of education. I found these pedagogical echoes deeply disquieting, and I was able to learn in follow-up interviews that some survivors shared similar qualms. I will return to this interplay between testimony and pedagogy in the following chapter, in which I explore how dominant, pedagogical ideologies of language in the work of the Commission essentialize – and to some extent depoliticize – Indigenous testimonies, by validating them as purely or at least primarily therapeutic speech acts.

For now, however, I wish to underscore the extent to which the Commission’s work hinges upon the management of affect and the (re)working of affectively charged symbols. The figure of the child is one such symbol that is laboured upon in the Commission. In the Commissioners Sharing Panels, survivors narrate the life experiences that aged the innocent, violated children of the residential schools into adult survivors, many of them citing journeys of individual, family, and community healing that intertwine in ambivalent and difficult ways with both ongoing psychological sequelae and continued experiences of racism and colonial violence. In the work of the Commission, however, the figure of the innocent and violated Indigenous child undergoes a sort of affective transubstantiation, “lurching forward” across temporal frames to become the emblem of a national future. The Commission’s motto for its work, “for the child taken, for the parent left behind” (emphasis mine) performs an uncanny doubling (Freud 1919) here, where the figure of the Indigenous child is (re)taken and
affectively put to work in service of the Commission’s mandate of “establish[ing] a renewed sense of Canada that is inclusive and respectful, and that enables reconciliation” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2012a: 2).

As Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) has observed, settler colonial govermentality relies much on the management of tenses and temporalities (which are mapped onto, I argue here, particular affects). The settler state, whose relations with Indigenous peoples hinges on a problematic “governance of the prior” (Povinelli 2011: 23), manages colonial history through a “catachresis of the past perfect, in which [the state’s] undecidable practice will have been resolved” (96). As Povinelli argues, harms perpetrated against Indigenous peoples disappear through the cracks between that past tense and the “future perfect, the redeemed end of a perfected social field” (167-168), a “future from whose perspective their present suffering has already been buried” (61). The politics of memory and memorability surrounding Indian residential schools in Canada are not only impacted by the management of temporalities, but also the discursive temporalization of affects. In the work of the Commission as well as broader public discourses on the Indian residential schools, the innocent, violated Indigenous child is frequently consigned to a past “dark chapter,” occluded by the hopeful, futuristic youth that are the bearers of reconciliation, and thus an unhappy object is replaced with a happy object (Ahmed 2008) that risks fewer direct challenges to the settler state’s national project.

The following section of this chapter builds upon these arguments, suggesting that the Commission’s reliance on the elicitation and retemporalization of affective labour on the part of survivors has a further effect. Furthermore, I suggest, the work of the Commission enfolds this affective labour into unequal economies of affect, where the gift
of survivor testimony, an invitation to exchange relationships, is subverted and converted into moral capital for the state – a form of theft.

A SORRY STATE?: EXPRESSIONS OF RECONCILIATION AS ECONOMIES OF AFFECT

The daily rounds of Commissioners Sharing Panels generally come to a close with the Call to Gather, in which closing remarks from the Commissioners are typically accompanied by the performance of Expressions of Reconciliation. Expressions of Reconciliation have formed a staple of TRC programming since the very first National Event in Winnipeg in June 2010. An occasion for public apologies, offerings to the Commission, and public promotions of reconciliation initiatives or new policy decisions, the Expressions provide an important platform for both the performance of good and bad feeling (see Ahmed 2005, 2008), as well as public commitments on the part of various institutions toward making policy changes that might conceivably address some of the legacies of Indian residential schooling.

The central focal point of the Expressions of Reconciliation is the Commission’s Bentwood Box. Bentwood boxes – constructed by steaming cedar planks to form a lidded chest, then elaborately carved – were widely used among Indigenous peoples of the Pacific Northwest, and had everyday uses such as storage of foodstuffs as well as ceremonial purposes, in the burial of human remains (Krmpotich 2014: 60-61). For the Haida, bentwood boxes signify yahgudang – “the transmission of cultural ideas... and the abilities of the deceased to remain active in the world of the living” (Krmpotich 2011: 151). For the Commission, the bentwood box is the recipient for a variety of offerings presented as Expressions of Reconciliation, which will eventually be housed in the future
National Research Centre on Indian Residential Schools at the University of Manitoba. Offerings have included works of art, statements, poems or other creative works by residential school survivors, sacred medicines, historical documents and printed commitments to policy change on the part of various organizations. These expressions have been made by all manner of people and organizations, ranging from church and government representatives to police and municipal officials, church groups and community organizations involved in Indigenous solidarity work.

In designing the bentwood box commissioned for the TRC, Coast Salish artist Luke Marston adapted the significance of immortalizing the deceased in the world of the living by carving First Nations, Inuit, and Métis symbols to commemorate residential school survivors both living and deceased, while also engraving his own family history in the form of a front panel figure with crooked fingers, in memory of Marston’s own grandmother, who had broken her fingers in residential school after being pushed down a flight of stairs by a nun (Niezen 2013: 65).

The symbolism of the Commission’s bentwood box, however, risks being resignified and repurposed in important and problematic ways. In a standard Expression of Reconciliation, an individual or group, representing an institution, will offer either an apology for their complicity or silence around Indian residential schooling, a public commitment to institutional policy change, a showcasing of Indigenous-settler collaboration or solidarity work, or an expression of support for the work of the Commission. These gestures are almost invariably accompanied by the offering of a token to the bentwood box. The individual or group making the offering will then join with Commissioners and members of the Commission’s Survivor steering committee,
and everyone takes part in gingerly lowering the token into the bentwood box, each touching a corner of the item (see Figure 2.4). Ronald Niezen (2013: 67) aptly calls these ceremonial conclusions to each expression of reconciliation “rituals of deposition,” in which the expression of reconciliation is “bracket[ed]… within a kind of ontological invulnerability” and “sacralized truth,” and is seemingly closed for questioning. These depositions are customarily concluded with the shaking of hands or the exchanging of hugs, a performative enactment of reconciliation, good feeling, and a happy ending that enacts or even mimics the desired linear chronology I identified in the previous section. Trauma and violence are boxed up, safely enclosed, and packed away in preparation for a hopeful national future.

![Figure 2.4 – An Expression of Reconciliation, Vancouver National Event, September 2013](image)

Photograph by the author

Ultimately then, the Commission’s expressions of reconciliation seem to perform a resignification of the bentwood box. What is enacted departs significantly from the
Haida *yahgudang* – which would have us dwell on our co-presence with deceased residential school survivors within webs of ongoing moral obligation, a nonlinear temporality that mirrors the nonlinear temporality of colonial violence. Here instead, the bentwood box is resignified so as to adhere more closely to a linear chronology, and a more generically North American settler lexicon. The ceremonial, happy deposition of tokens of regret or reconciliation often seems to be more a performance of boxing up these offerings in preparation for storage, and future archiving within the National Research Centre on Indian Residential Schools. Alternatively, perhaps, for a settler public, these depositions may more readily conjure up associations with a “black box,” or even “Pandora’s box,” and in such a manner conveniently relegate these relics to a sealable past of Indigenous-settler and Indigenous-state relations, remystifying this shared history as overcomplicated, incomprehensible, ultimately unknowable – and therefore best entombed in the interest of a hopeful national future.

It is not my wish to suggest that these expressions of reconciliation are unimportant, or that these choreographies of affect are devoid of any genuine feeling or significance. To the contrary, I argue that the Expressions of Reconciliation repurpose affective labour in important ways for the Commission, and even more particularly, for the state. Many of these public performances are indeed deeply moving: as an academic, I recall being impressed by an Expression of Reconciliation presented at the Atlantic National Event in Halifax in October 2011 by the University of Manitoba. In a tearful and often haltingly delivered apology, University President David Barnard acknowledged the University’s “failure to recognize or challenge the forced assimilation of Aboriginal peoples” that were manifest in the province’s seventeen federally funded residential
schools, the last of which closed its doors only in 1988. Barnard apologized to Indigenous students of the University, past and present, Indigenous faculty, and community members more broadly for this sin of omission, and committed the University, if somewhat vaguely, to “take the next step in advancing Indigenous scholarship and the success of Indigenous people.”

Much later on, during my research in Labrador, one Inuk woman who had attended residential school and had also been present at the Halifax event singled out to me this apology as having been personally significant to her. Though she had no connection with the University of Manitoba, she referenced this Expression of Reconciliation as an example of what federal recognition of Labrador’s residential school survivors should feel like:

When that Chancellor from [the] University got up, ohh, I cried. And I cried and I cried. And I thought, this is what we need. It was so sincere. It was so… humane. He was crying. And I thought, why can’t that happen for us? Why can’t the federal government sit here and say the same thing to us? Why can’t we have that same experience? I felt it. The fact that he was so genuine. That he was so honest. And that he took responsibility. And that’s what the Labrador Inuit need. Do it and let us move forward. And give us the support and the resources that we need in order for us to do that. [And] let us use our knowhow of what we need to move forward.

What I wish to underline here is the way my interlocutor couples the affective performance of genuine regret with the need for federal reparative action and resources, all to be delivered in decolonizing ways that respect Labrador Inuit “knowhow”: their own expertise, self-determination, and sovereignty. She also touches on a theme that often recurs as a source of nagging frustration in survivor testimony: a felt need and demand for affect on the part of the government: for some display of vital signs, of a visceral vein of real feeling that could link the settler state – a vague and totalizing
abstraction – to the actual, animate architects and instigators of colonial policies, whether living or dead, from the Indian residential schools to the present. My interlocutor’s question – “why can’t that happen for us?” – implicitly asks what is to happen after the tremendous outpouring of affective labour on the part of survivors. Then what? What will be the response to this invitation to reciprocation?

Often survivors will emphasize the significance of their testimony for their own personal healing, or note its importance for the healing of their families, and in that sense, perhaps, consider it “affectively necessary labor” (Spivak 1985: 80; cf. also Suzack 2010). Indeed, the “work of exposure” (Ahmed 2004b: 200) entailed in summoning up memories of residential school abuses demands a tremendous investment of affective labour, but many survivors express uncertainty and sometimes outright scepticism that the government or Canadian settler society will be impacted by their testimonies in any meaningful way. Hence there is very often a tendency for testimonies to turn back inward, where many survivors feel action is likely to be most productive: toward the healing of the individual, or to managing the everyday aftershocks of residential schooling within Indigenous families and communities – “we’ll start forgiving ourselves,” the Quewezance family concluded in their statement. This should not be conflated with the Commission’s call for therapeutic management and individual healing discussed earlier in this chapter. It is instead a turning back from a partner in negotiations deemed unlikely to reciprocate the gift of their affective labour, their invitation to a relationship built on exchange, in a worldview where affective sincerity and political accountability are not seen as confused categories, but as necessary counterparts.
The Commission, in its proceedings makes extensive use of the Seven Grandfather Teachings, which are prized qualities of traditional leadership and form an important pillar of the political and legal orders (Napoleon 2013) of Nishnaabeg peoples. In each of the Commission’s national events, one of the Seven Grandfather Teachings – respect, honesty, truth, wisdom, bravery, love, and humility – is used as the particular motto for the event, which Commission staff, Honorary Witnesses, and other participants will frequently reference. “It’s about love,” the program for the Atlantic National Event prominently indicated. Yet this retooling of the Seven Grandfather Teachings decontextualizes them in problematic ways: these virtues borne of affective labour are, as Mississauga scholar Leanne Simpson (2008: 32-33) has argued, the “foundation of good governance in a collective sense,” crucially underpinned by “practiced relationships” and “reciprocity” – precisely the kinds of reciprocation and exchange that fail to obtain in the Commission’s economies of affect.

The disjuncture between the outpouring of survivor affect and the ultimate inscrutability of the state was phrased especially clearly by Isabelle Knockwood, a Mi’kmaq residential school survivor and author of a book on her residential school experiences (Knockwood 1992), during the community hearings in the Atlantic region prior to the October 2011 National Event:

> Our experience is our evidence, our experiences are our truth. The church members haven’t told us about their experiences. The pedophiles, the clergy pedophiles haven’t told us about their experiences… The government is not telling us how they felt when they put us on Indian reservations and how happy they were to build Indian residential schools in order to kill the Indian in the child. When are they gonna tell us how that felt like? (quoted in Niezen 2013: 70)

Knockwood’s comment lays bare a fundamental affective asymmetry that operates in the work of the Commission: an imbalance between the outpouring of
emotion and experience that is encouraged and expected in survivor statements to the Commissioners Sharing Panels, and the ultimately unsatisfying reciprocation of that affect in the Expressions of Reconciliation, which form plausibly the most logical venue within the architecture of the Commission for such a public recognition and reciprocation. The TRC lacks the subpoena powers to force perpetrators of residential school abuses\textsuperscript{13} – the “clergy pedophiles” in Knockwood’s terms – to speak at the Commission, and while church representatives do attend in abundance, the absence of the voices of direct perpetrators forms a cavernous, echoing silence at the Commission (see Niezen 2013 for an extensive discussion of this issue), and a fundamental irresolution.

Isabelle Knockwood’s frustration with the elusiveness of the state finds an echo in the writings of anthropologists and other social scientists, although analytical vexations are different in kind from the sequelae from lived experiences of colonial violence. The state is a notoriously difficult (Abrams 1988) – even “maddening” (Aretxaga 2003) – object of analysis: it has been variously conceptualized as a “fiction” (Fortes and Evans-Pritchard 1940: xxiii), an abstraction, perhaps even a “mask” (Abrams 1988), an “effect” (Trouillot 2001) of discourse or governmentality (T. Mitchell 1991), a “fetish” (Nelson 1999; Taussig 1992; 1997), or even a “fantasy” (Aretxaga 2003; Navaro-Yashin 2002).

If the state is an abstraction perhaps best recognizable through its effects, this is also to say that we can perhaps best apprehend the state (and state power) through the social, political, and, I argue, affective relations in which it plays a dominant role. Although government policies are articulated through the language and discourse of

\textsuperscript{13} It is important to note here that during the negotiations toward the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, the Assembly of First Nations pushed for the TRC to be granted legal powers, but was opposed by the federal government and church entities, who cited a concern for “restorative justice”, and a “blame-free strategy” (Nagy 2014: 210-211).
bureaucratic reason, the “political rationalities” of the state have as much to do with the “management… of affective states” and with “fashioning techniques of affective control” (Stoler 2004: 5). Colonialism, Athabascan scholar Dian Million insists (2013: 46, emphasis original), is “a felt, affective relationship” (see also Rifkin 2011), and produces a particular “psychic life” (Butler 1997; Stevenson 2012, 2014). Accordingly, I am interested here in how the state “become[s] a social subject” at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission through “performances and public representations of statehood” and in “discourses, narratives, and fantasies” (Aretxaga 2003: 393, 395), even when these performances of affect are ultimately opaque.

There have been calls within the social sciences among scholars of apologies and reconciliation processes to move “beyond sentiment” and toward studying “the redistribution of political authority and economic resources” (Nobles 2008: 112). I would caution against such hasty analytical partitions. Rather, I seek to explore how the affective labour of survivors may be converted into political or economic capital for the state within the uneven economies of affect that take form within Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission. To do so, I first refer back to an Expression of Reconciliation presented at the Halifax National Event in October 2011 by the Honourable John Duncan, who then occupied the perpetually reshuffled cabinet post of Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC). Within the context of Commission events, the Minister of AANDC also occupies the position that serves as the closest proxy for the state.

It is my privilege at this time, on behalf of the Government of Canada, to make an offering of a copy of the Prime Minister’s June 11th, 2008 apology to former students of Indian Residential Schools to be placed in this symbolic Bent Box [sic]. On that date, thousands of Canadians from across the country joined former
students and Aboriginal leaders as the Prime Minister and the House of Commons acknowledged the abuse experienced by many who attended Indian Residential Schools and the impact this had, and continues to have, on Aboriginal people, language and cultures. Since the apology, in addition to ensuring the effective implementation of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, Canada has continued to support opportunities and gestures to strengthen efforts towards reconciliation between Aboriginal people, their families and communities, and all Canadians. To further build upon this journey, on October 27th, just a couple of days ago, I was honoured to announce that the Government of Canada will create a gesture of reconciliation in respect of the legacy of Indian Residential Schools through the permanent installation of stained glass artwork prominently in the Centre Block Building on Parliament Hill… The knowledge of our shared history is an important basis for a new relationship with Aboriginal people. The installation of this artwork will encourage parliamentarians and visitors for generations to come to learn about and engage in the history of Indian Residential Schools and Canada’s reconciliation efforts… In addition, two weeks ago we announced that 23 partner organizations across the country will receive funding from the Advocacy and Public Information Program. These projects aim to promote a better understanding of the legacy of Residential Schools and build new partnerships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples. These projects, with their focus on youth, will promote reconciliation through educational resources and curriculum, cultural arts programs and development of strategies that focus on youth and reconciliation.

In this expression of reconciliation, Minister Duncan offers to the Bentwood Box a copy of the federal government’s 2008 Statement of Apology to Former Students of Indian Residential Schools, a token intended to index the goodwill and benevolence of the sorry state. The gesture creates a temporal bridge between the official apology, as historical product, and the new and ongoing initiatives, such as the stained glass window I discussed in Chapter One, which are dutifully and diligently recited as exemplars of the government’s earnestness and repentance. This expression of state reconciliation, although purportedly a kind of affect by proxy, is ultimately, however, affectively withholding, inscrutable, opaque. The settler state, in Minister Duncan’s words, acknowledges. It strengthens efforts. It supports opportunities. It develops strategies. The expression of reconciliation extracts language from a deeply neoliberal lexicon,
where therapeutic registers of *acknowledging* and *strengthening* pair neatly with the entrepreneurship of *supporting opportunities*, and can be tidily packaged in a bland bureaucratic statement devoid of concrete commitment, specificity, and – importantly for many survivors – affective sincerity.

Of course, this kind of performance invites serious scepticism from many survivors and at least some audience members. The sorry state is, after all, not so easily reconciled with the “happy” state, in Isabelle Knockwood’s words, that “buil[t] Indian residential schools in order to kill the Indian in the child” (in Niezen 2013: 70). Beyond the confines of the Commission, however, such state expressions of reconciliation may have far broader and more consequential implications than whether individual survivors or audience members believe the “sorry state.” Indeed, I argue that performances of regret and rhetorics of progress at the Commission generate a moral and affective capital that the federal government can then “cash in” for political and economic capital. As Elizabeth Povinelli (2002: 42) has noted, “cultural intolerance [is] a market matter,” and in the context of late liberal capitalist democracies, apologies and expressions of reconciliation are a form of currency: they help “provide the symbolic and affective conditions necessary to garner financial investment in the new global conditions of late modern capital.” Henderson and Wakeham (2013: 13) aptly observe that the federal government’s enthusiastic appropriation of the discourse of reconciliation echoes earlier uses of “official multiculturalism” as a mechanism of “social repair” and international public relations management. In their analysis, expressions of reconciliation help to frame the Canadian settler state as a beacon of civility, tolerance and “planetary moral leadership,” an affectively branded marketing that is highly conscious of a “global
context of shifting expectations of modern liberal-democratic nation-states… that requires demonstrations of historical reckoning, if not the overcoming of history itself, as a criterion of admission to the international civil society of free-trade zones and corporate investment.”

In such a context, settler state performances of contrition and benevolence are not just empty or innocent platitudes. In their way, they too perform a crucial form of affective labour, though not the labour of affective sincerity and reciprocity of exchange many survivors envision. It is not the form of affective labour these survivors envision because it is not directed to them. The sorry state’s performances of contrition are, I argue, designed with an entirely different audience in mind: they interpellate transnational corporate actors, and are, not coincidentally, delivered in a shared neoliberal lexicon. The state has acknowledged its past, and it supports opportunities, an avowal that carries an altogether different ring in this context. The federal government’s expressions of reconciliation help to generate the fantasy of a repentant, reconciled, even virtuous state; in this way, they are labours that strive to alleviate fears of Indigenous activism and resistance. Furthermore, they seek to guarantee conditions for transnational investment and partnership in resource extraction and megadevelopment projects such as the Northern Gateway Pipeline, Northern Ontario’s Ring of Fire, and Alberta’s Tar Sands, seeming to promise a stability that glitters with the promise of Indigenous healing and reconciliation. Wrongs have been acknowledged, opportunities have been supported, strategies have been developed. Reconciliation here is transported to a past perfect tense (cf. Povinelli 2011), stepping over the irresolutions of contemporary settler colonial Canada to pave the way for a prosperous resource-rich futurity. This subversion and
conversion of the affective labour of residential school survivors, in the interest of the moral and economic capital of the state, responds to an invitation to reciprocity with a form of theft, a kind of theft that provides a useful complement to other thefts – of lands and resources, both past and present.

A CLOSING NOTE: ON CELEBRATIONS AND APPROPRIATIONS

And so what of the affective labour that residential school survivors offer us here, within the Commission, and their painstaking, instructive testimonies of intimate colonial violence? Beyond the state’s interest in consolidating its own moral capital, I worry about other ways in which the affective labour of survivors may be devalued, neutralized, or retemporalized in order to reassert dominant settler Canadian chronologies, evading the call implicit in these testimonies – to dwell in memory and temporality in more complex ways, in ways that urge for broader social and political change. As I suggested earlier in this chapter, dominant discourses on the history of Indian residential schooling deploy an affective temporalization that curtains off an injurious colonial “past” from a hopeful national futurity; here, the affective present – in which survivors labour to narrate to us the continuities between residential schools, their ongoing experiences, and their own aspirations for the future – disappears\textsuperscript{14}. A second consideration requires attention to power relations: the state accrues moral capital from its performances of reconciliation, which, I have argued, create subsequent exchange-value for other forms of capital. Residential school survivors may also hope that their testimonial labour will eventually generate exchange-value of a sort: that calling attention to the ongoing effects

\textsuperscript{14} As Wolfe (2006) has argued, settler colonialism, as a project of land dispossession, is founded upon a “logic of [Indigenous] elimination”. The discursive temporalization of affect that I describe here performs a disappearing act that may also be understood within this logic.
of residential schooling and other experiences of colonial racism may provide an invitation to reciprocity, to exchange, to spurring social and political transformations of memory and the status quo. But in testifying to the violence of residential schooling as well as its continuities, survivors confront “essentialized modes of expectation” (A. Simpson 2014: 20): within settler Canadian cultural politics, a dominant template has long been established for relegating Indigenous peoples to the subject position of “traumatized Aboriginal[s]” (Waldram 2004: 212), a form of victimhood that typically prompts responses of pathologization and biopolitical forms of care, rather than restitutive political action (see Fassin and Rechtman 2009; Million 2013; Stevenson 2014; Ticktin 2011). Given the realities of colonial power dynamics, in this regime of value the affective and testimonial labour of residential school survivors does not carry the same currency as state performances of regret with the Canadian public, the international community, and transnational corporate capital as intended audiences.

I wish to raise a third and final concern here: the risk of affective appropriation of survivor testimonies at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – an appropriation of the telling of truths that prematurely paves the way for a celebration of reconciliation and national healing. Celebration, too, has a place in the “affective geography” (Navaro-Yashin 2012) of the Commission. Indeed, every National Event closes with a Survivor Birthday Celebration, designed to atone for and commemorate all the birthdays of survivors that were not observed or celebrated in residential schools. At one such celebration I attended, at the Montréal National Event in April 2013, volunteers sang “Happy Birthday” in five Indigenous languages as well as English and French. Others distributed pieces of cake to everyone in attendance, which had been baked by children
from churches in the Ottawa-Montréal corridor, but were unfortunately “not confirmed to be gluten or nut-free.” Birthday cards were passed around for the audience to sign and somehow distribute to survivors. We were all also given glow sticks, which we were instructed to snap to in order to light them and hold them aloft. “Vous allez être une étoile [you will be stars],” we were told, as the audio speakers played the refrains of Hawaiian singer “IZ” Kamakawiwo‘ole’s mellifluous medley cover of “Somewhere over the Rainbow/What a Wonderful World”. While many survivors visibly enjoyed this recognition and the general “collective effervescence,” to use Durkheimian terms, I left this celebration and prepared to return to my Labrador fieldwork feeling uncomfortable and disquieted in ways I could not then articulate.

Celebratory discourses and performances are prominent in bringing daily events at the Commission to a close. In the Calls to Gather in which Expressions of Reconciliation are performed, Commissioners offer some closing remarks, and Honorary Witnesses comment on what they have seen and heard over the day, many comment on the strength and resilience of residential school survivors and the intergenerational survivors who testify. Indeed, there is much to honour in this, just as the talent night and musical performances that close off two evenings of each National Event demonstrate the continued vibrancy of Indigenous cultural traditions – and there is so much to celebrate in that too. But there is a risk of slippages in this celebratory mood; as Sara Ahmed (2004b: 113) has noted, “the recognition of what is shameful in the past” far too easily glides into a permission for “the nation to be idealised and even celebrated in the present,” a hasty conversion of national shame into national pride that ought to be a moment for critical pause (118-119).
On this topic, I close this chapter by returning to an expression of reconciliation presented at the Commission’s Saskatoon National Event on June 22nd, 2012 – the same day as the Quewezance family testimony to the Commissioners’ Sharing Panel presented earlier in this chapter. In this particular expression of reconciliation, the Honourable Carolyn Bennett, Member of Parliament and Liberal Party Critic for Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development\(^\text{15}\) made an explicit plea for affective sincerity and reciprocity directed to the non-Indigenous public, and to Canadian settler society more broadly:

The Prime Minister’s apology must affect every single Canadian. They all must be implicated in it. They all must have their hearts go out to the survivors and their families. They all must feel part and ashamed of this terrible chapter and redouble their efforts to make a difference. (emphasis mine)

But in the context of the Commission and broader discursive formations around the Indian residential schools, I have argued in this chapter that the temporalization and economies of affect at play in the Commission create forms of nonrecognition, where dominant historical memory and chronology are challenged, but ultimately reasserted. So, to return to Carolyn Bennett’s Expression of Reconciliation, urging the Canadian public to be affected, “that we must have [our] hearts go out to the survivors and their families,” there is a critically important and wrenching rejoinder to be posed: how precisely are we to be affected? In thinking about how to engage with the raw feeling of survivors at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – “all these [shared] feelings inside,” in this chapter’s epigraph from my Labrador Inuit interlocutor – and on the question of the hearability of Indigenous testimony that will form the basis of the following chapter, I have found myself moved by a reflection of Sara Ahmed’s (2004b: 35-39, emphasis original):

\(^{15}\) In October 2015, as a draft of this dissertation was being completed, the Hon. Carolyn Bennett was sworn in as the incoming government’s new Minister of Indigenous and Northern Affairs.
[T]o hear the other’s pain as my pain, and to empathise with the other in order to heal the body (in this case, the body of the nation), involves violence… Our task instead is to hear what is impossible… The impossibility of ‘fellow feeling’ is itself the confirmation of injury. The call of such pain, as a pain that cannot be shared through empathy, is a call not just for an attentive hearing, but for a different kind of inhabitance. It is a call for action, and a demand for collective politics, as a politics based not on the possibility that we might be reconciled, but on learning to live with the impossibility of reconciliation, or learning that we live with and beside each other, and yet we are not as one.

Indeed, “fellow feeling” is not what many survivors hope to elicit and have reciprocated at the Commission, as far as I have been able to hear. What they invite instead, by encouraging us to dwell with them in the ambiguous and painful temporality of their memory of residential schools, is a form of reciprocity where affective sincerity is an inescapable partner of social and political accountability.
CHAPTER THREE

“HOW TO SHARE YOUR TRUTH”: THERAPEUTIC SCRIPTS AND INTERRUPTIONS AT CANADA’S TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION

“For the child taken, for the parent left behind.” The motto of Canada’s truth and reconciliation commission implicitly invokes the intergenerational character of Indian residential schooling. Children sent away to Indian residential schools, whether willingly in some cases or by force, were removed from the guiding influence of their families during their most formative years, creating ruptures in kinship networks, and by extension, communities. It is in recognition of these intergenerational and communal dimensions that Canada’s TRC invites statements from, as its Commissioners often put it, anyone who believes they have been impacted by Indian residential schooling. As most of the “parents left behind” – oftentimes residential school survivors themselves – are now deceased, in practice this means that statement providers who did not attend residential school are, for the most part, the children of “the children taken.”

Translators are on site in booths located at the back of the auditorium, tasked with rendering statements provided in Indigenous languages into English and French and from English or French into the dominant Indigenous languages of the region in which the TRC event is being held. Headsets are provided for audience members to select the appropriate channel translating Commission proceedings into their language of expression, but in practice the headsets are fairly infrequently used. While numerous
residential school survivors preface their testimony with greetings and self-identification in their Native language, most deliver their statement in English or French – Canada’s official languages, and importantly, the languages of the residential school. While some residential school survivors elect to use English or French as a way of explicitly including a national or settler audience, others use English or French because of a loss of fluency in their mother tongue, itself a poignant entextualization of the cultural losses to emerge from residential schooling.

Often the children of “the children taken,” now grown adults, refer to themselves as intergenerational survivors of the Indian residential school system. In their public statements to the Commission, many chronicle their own often disruptive or difficult childhoods, growing up with parents who may at times have been abusive, withholding, substance-dependent, or simply incomprehensible to them as children. It becomes clearer, over the course of their narratives, that many intergenerational survivors have themselves come to better understand their parents, and their own earlier bewilderment, through the emergence of a shared understanding and public discourse about residential schooling (Darnell 2006). They articulate how abuse and the harshly “‘disciplining’ affective technologies” (Million 2013: 50) of the residential school environment reverberated in family violence – or family distancing – experienced in their own childhoods. Some go on to share journeys of healing and mutual understanding that they have painstakingly traversed with their parents, stories of reconnection and of rediscovery – of cultural traditions, language, or spirituality.

During the Saskatchewan National Event in June 2012, I heard one such statement provided to the Commission by Marcia Mirasty, a middle-aged health director
from the Kenosee Lake Cree First Nation, who acknowledged her mother, mother-in-law, and aunties present at the event who had attended residential schools. Instead of presenting a referential account of her childhood, however, or narrating concrete personal details, her statement served a more conative function (Jakobson 1960: 355), outlining a series of imperatives where residential school survivors constituted the primary addressees. “My purpose of speaking today is to encourage you all to heal,” Mirasty told the audience, in a statement I abridge here:

How do we reconcile? Reconciliation comes from truth, and reconciliation is also a change of behaviour. The first step towards healing is breaking the silence, taking about our experience, the good, the bad, and the ugly. As we talk about our negative past, the deep-rooted shame and the pain will begin to lose its power over us. And we are only as sick as our secrets. The final step is putting closure to the experience. There has to be a moment where we recognize that the destructive way of life does not reverse what has been done to us or what we have done to others. It does not benefit anyone and we need to choose to close this door of this pain before it destroys us. Forgiveness is a choice to set a prisoner free, and that prisoner is you and me. And it’s also setting our grandchildren free. The question becomes how long will we weep and mourn over the past? How long will we wait for everyone to heal? Some people say they will get well when their leader is healthy or their spouse or their children. The truth is, it’s up to each and every one of us. It’s up to you and me individually to get well and to heal. The choice sounds like this: healing or suffering? Happiness or stuckness? Forgiveness or blame? My generation needs your generation to heal and to move forward.

This particular statement was singled out for recognition that day at the Commission. “That was one of the most significant presentations we’ve ever had,” Commissioner Justice Murray Sinclair told Mirasty, “I congratulate you.” This was a highly unusual remark from a Commissioner, and was thus itself significant: in Canada’s TRC, one rarely hears Commissioners make such direct, pointed commentary following a public statement. Statements are seldom interrupted – except to remind survivors that they are nearing or exceeding their allotted twenty minutes – and Commissioners busy
themselves during testimony by industriously jotting notes, to which they refer back, at
times, in their closing remarks after a day of statement-taking. Likewise, very little is
said after a statement is delivered – Commissioners will typically simply thank the
speaker. Very occasionally, they might praise the speaker for their courage or particular
words of wisdom.

For the most part, then, at Canada’s TRC, there is respectful silence during
testimonies, and only sparing commentary between statements while Commissioners
Sharing Panels are in session. In this way, Canada’s TRC appears to offer a permissive
environment for residential school survivors to relate their experiences – or “share their
truth,” to use the Commission’s own preferred language, particularly when compared
with South Africa’s more overtly linguistically interventionist Commission. In the South
African TRC, as anthropologists have detailed (Anthonissen and Blommaert 2006; F.
Ross 2003a; Verdoolaege 2006; R. Wilson 2001), Commissioners frequently interrupted
statements with prompts or questions of clarification, even to the point of asking speakers
whether they were “prepared to reconcile” (Verdoolaege 2006: 64). Narratives of
Apartheid experience were subject to reframing in multiple stages: of the 21,298
statements received, only roughly 10 per cent were selected for the TRC’s public Victims’
Hearings (F. Ross 2003a: 13), amidst an elaborate assembly line where statement-taking
led to registration, data processing that broke narratives down into 48 categories of
human rights violation, followed by corroboration by investigators in order to produce
regional pre-findings and the ultimate national findings (R. Wilson 2001: 40). In many
respects, the Commission’s stated aim of giving victims of Apartheid violence a voice
proved starkly different in practice, eliding volumes of life experience as it “translated narratives of pain into ‘data’ about human rights violations” (F. Ross 2003a: 14).

I explore in this chapter how Canada’s TRC, although in initially subtler ways, plays host to a structuring context and discursive interactions that similarly trouble its stated objective of enabling residential school survivors to “speak their truth,” inviting the question, following Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (2010a[1987]), of whether residential school survivors can indeed truly “speak” through the forum that the Commission provides. The mission statement of Canada’s truth and reconciliation commission is, in its own words, to “reveal the complete story of Canada’s residential school system, and lead the way to respect through reconciliation… for the child taken, for the parent left behind” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2012a: 2).

“This is our story and Canada’s story,” the Commission tells us in an interim summary of its findings, “a painful story,” “a story of loss,” “a shameful story,” “a story about the response to a sacred call… to spread the Christian faith,” “a story about Canadian colonialism,” “a complicated story,” “a story of humility and the possibility of change.” It is “a tribute to Aboriginal resilience: a determination not just to endure, but to flourish,” “a story about how, in crucial ways, our schools failed all of us,” “a story of destruction carried out in the name of civilization,” and – we are reminded – “This story is not over,” but merely part of the “ongoing task of coming to grips with our nation’s past and charting a future in which we can all take pride” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Canada 2012b: 1-3).

Canada’s truth and reconciliation commission, in its meticulous recording of public and private statements from residential school survivors, is engaged in
fundamental ways in an act of *storytelling*. At least part of its task is to attempt to renarrativize the history of Canada by grappling with the colonial legacies of Indian residential schooling, collecting public and private statements from residential school survivors, and educating the Canadian public.

One of the major ingredients in any act of storytelling is the development of a *plot*. The Commission’s task of telling the story of Canada’s Indian residential schools is no exception. It plays host to and must contend with a polyphony of voices: residential school survivors, intergenerational survivors, government and church representatives, honorary witnesses, the attending public, and Commission staff themselves. Then, too, are the intertextualities that come into play through news media reporting on Commission events, social media commentary, statements from government, churches, and Indigenous political organizations, scholarly analysis. How does the Commission then orchestrate these voices, in its attempt to tell a story of Indian residential schooling?

Contrary to the Commission’s stated endeavour to “reveal the complete truth of Canada’s residential school system,” I explore how its engagement in truth telling produces a highly partial story: a situated account of Indian residential schooling, and a very particular morality tale about what Indian residential school survivors – and Canada more broadly – should do about it. In this chapter, I examine the discursive resources that the Commission uses in plotting its story of residential schooling: contextualization cues, expectations of iconicity, and language ideologies insisting on the necessarily healing nature of Indigenous speech are all of use in producing a resolutely therapeutic script by which the TRC can provide textual and testimonial evidence of reconciliation, and thus appear to fulfil its contentious and contradictory mandate.
Marcia Mirasty’s statement, described earlier, received reinforcement from the Commission as a “most significant presentation,” I would argue, because it exemplified the TRC’s preferred therapeutic script and what Foucault called *therapeusis*, which as McFalls and Pandolfi (2014: 173) have glossed, urges subjects to “[take] charge of [their lives] through a panoply of practices of the self.” Foucault contrasted *therapeusis* with *parrhesia*, a concept he drew from ancient Greek philosophy that signified “the right and duty of the citizen to speak freely before the assembly” (McFalls and Pandolfi 2014: 174), and in the contemporary moment, can be understood as a “courageous practice of speaking truth to power in an act of subjective affirmation and resistance” (173).

Parrhesia, in Athabascan scholar Dian Million’s (2013: 89) reading, forms “a self-talk that [is] not confessional… [and] allows for external attachment to larger social-political meanings rather than self-disclosure as narrative leading to diagnosis in a psychological truth.” Acts of parrhesia, particularly when they are delivered with indignation, interrupt the preferred therapeutic script of the TRC, and as such they often prompt attempts at rescripting, and re-contextualizations where they are reshaped as testimonial evidence of reconciliation. In the sections that follow, I explore how the politics of speaking weaves through several venues within TRC events, and seek to link the microinteractions of language at TRC event to the broader macropolitics of Indigenous-state relations in Canada.

“HOW TO SHARE YOUR TRUTH”: THERAPEUTIC (PRE)SCRIPTING AT THE TRC

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission ensures that residential school survivors are briefed upon their arrival at a National Event as to the options and resources
available to them if they wish to make a public or private statement. Survivors who wish
to testify are directed to the registration desk, where TRC volunteers provide them with
registration forms.

Informative pamphlets are made available to survivors. The TRC’s *Statement
Gathering Frequently Asked Questions* (see Figure 3.1) includes a list of possible
questions for survivors to consider as they “collect [their] thoughts” in preparation for
their statement such as, “How has residential school had an impact on who you are
today?” “How can Canadians and Aboriginal peoples establish new relations with one
another based on mutual understanding and respect?” and “What does reconciliation
mean to you? How will we know when reconciliation has taken place?” While phrased
in the form of open-ended questions, rather than directions, the questions follow a
teleological trajectory that prompts survivors to recall “life before residential school,”
residential school experiences and their aftermath, then invitations to reflect on how to
achieve “reconciliation” and “new relations” between Canadians and Indigenous peoples,
implicitly tasking survivors with a responsibility for achieving “mutual understanding
and respect.”

Another leaflet from the Health Canada-funded Indian Residential Schools
Resolution Health Support Program orients survivors to the health supports available to
them at Commission events: cultural support, such as “Elders for traditional healing,
ceremonies or teachings,” emotional support, where Resolution Health Support Workers
(RHSWs) “listen, talk and provide support,” and professional counselling, with a
“Psychologist or Social Worker for individual or family counselling.”
• What do you recall about your life before residential school?
• When did you first hear about Indian residential schools?
• What would a typical day at residential school be like for you?
• Were there specific tasks that you were responsible for at the school?
• Do you have any particular memories of people, events, or experiences that stand out in your mind, either good or bad?
• What was it like when you left residential school?
• How has residential school had an impact on who you are today?
• What impact has having family or friends attend or work at a residential school had on you?
• What does Indian residential school mean to you?
• How can Canadians and Aboriginal peoples establish new relations with one another based on mutual understanding and respect?
• What does reconciliation mean to you? How will we know when reconciliation has taken place?

After Your Statement is Provided

What will the TRC do with my statement?
The TRC will keep the statements it receives in a secure database and record office. Information from the statements will be used by the TRC to research and write a report about the history of the schools and the impact the schools had on people and communities.

The TRC may use some of the statements in books, films, videos and audio clips to educate the public and raise awareness about residential schools.

What will happen to my statement when the TRC closes?
At the end of its mandate, the TRC will create a National Research Centre (NRC). The TRC will give all of the statements it receives to the NRC where they will be safely stored in accordance with modern archival standards.

On the first day of a National Event, before the Commissioners Sharing Panels begin, the TRC typically offers two one-hour presentations for Survivors, where RHSWs
are on hand to brief survivors and respond to any questions that Survivors may have prior to delivering their statement. These presentations are entitled, “How to Share Your Truth.” I attended one such presentation at the Saskatoon National Event in June 2012. As the RHSW proudly informed those of us assembled for the presentation, Canada’s TRC is the first to offer health supports on site during Commission proceedings. The RHSW explained that it was the job of health supports to brief survivors on what they might expect prior to giving their statement, or what sort of topics they might wish to address – “It’s important to think about what it is you want to say publicly,” survivors were told. Survivors were reminded of the kinds of resources that were available: cultural and health supports, professional counselling. Survivors were also encouraged to brief their “support person(s)” – usually family members who accompany them on stage during their statement – on what they were planning on sharing during their statement, since a support person too “can start crying or get upset.”

At another “How to Share Your Truth” presentation that I attended, during the Montréal National Event in April 2013, one segment of the presentation was a section entitled “Why Share?” It is a decision that takes a lot of courage, the RHSW avowed, but she reminded us that the TRC provides a supportive environment for sharing experiences. The bullet points in the sleek PowerPoint presentation listed the following reasons for sharing: 1) “you have a voice” – (“and each story is like no other story”); 2) “you have a responsibility” – for future generations, family, your communities; 3) “you have an opportunity”; and 4) “sharing is a part of healing,” or a “sacred act,” the RHSW declared, referring to a comment often made by Commissioner Sinclair. The RHSW then reminded survivors that the TRC’s mandate was to tell the truth about the Indian
Residential Schools, honour current and former Indian Residential School students, and create a permanent record of the legacy of Indian Residential Schools. “The TRC cannot do this without your sharing!”

Toward the end of the presentation, the RHSW was explaining how health supports check in with survivors who have made statements at the TRC, within a week to a month. Indeed, RHSWs are resident in many Indigenous communities in Canada, but as one RHSW confided in me, they are often extremely short staffed, and may be tasked with serving complex mental health needs in multiple communities. Furthermore, Health Canada funding for the Indian Residential Schools Resolution Health Support Program is only thus far earmarked until the end of the TRC process, as well as the adjudication of claims under the Independent Assessment Process. As for the Aboriginal Healing Foundation that preceded it, program funding for psychosocial health supports for residential school survivors and their families is severely time-limited and uncertain in the future. As the RHSW concluded her presentation with a question and answer period, two middle-aged Algonquin survivors protested that there wasn’t even regular access to a RHSW or psychologist in their community. “The government can’t give me my life back!” one of the women said, with tears that seemed to draw as much from indignation as from grief.

An unbridgeable chasm opens up between this survivor’s evocation of a life lost – even as she continues to inhabit that life – and the insistently therapeutic paradigm she will encounter in the TRC, where her “sharing is part of healing” and a “sacred act” needed for the TRC to produce its work. This therapeutic paradigm weaves repeatedly through the speech acts of Commission staff, Honorary Witnesses, and is often taken up
by survivors themselves. The point, however, is that it is the Commission’s most
dominant script in its emplotment or telling of the story of residential schools, and the
script is also a prescription for ways of speaking to enable healing. While perhaps only a
minority of survivors attend the presentations, the Commissioners bookend each day of
testimony with opening and closing remarks that provide repeated cues as to what a
testimonial speech act ought to look like if you, as a survivor, are “sharing your truth.”
Consider these two statements from Commissioner Justice Murray Sinclair in his opening
remarks at the TRC’s National Event in Saskatoon, in June 2012.

For many generations, we see the impact of the schools compounding upon itself
such that now many communities are almost in a state of social chaos and they
need a great deal of help in order to come to terms with the impacts of those pasts,
of that experience, of those issues. And you will hear that in the words of the
survivors who talk to us. You will hear that pain, you will see those tears, you
will hear about the love that they have not been able to share with their
children... And through this process and other processes like this, maybe they
will be able to come to terms with that past, to reconcile with it, and to be able to
move on with the assistance of all others. (emphasis mine)

This first statement, addressed primarily to non-Indigenous attendees, instructs
the audience on what we can expect to hear. But indirectly it also addresses residential
school survivors, and provides cues or “expectations of iconicity” (Blommaert et al.
2006: 44) that signal what kinds of speech acts belong in the testimonial genre.
Expectations of iconicity, as Blommaert and colleagues (2006: 44-45) suggest, constitute
“expectations about mappings of style and content, correspondence between ways of
speaking and topics or domains,” where the failure to meet such expectations results in
“the story not being memorable or hearable.” In this way, telling the audience what we
should expect to hear is also a way of telling survivors what they should expect to tell us.
These cues are made even more explicit in a second statement addressed more directly to survivors in attendance:

We must ask you to put aside your sense of shame, put aside your sense of guilt, put aside your sense of victimization and stand up and take charge of your life beginning today. And we will give you that opportunity… I want you all to know that you will see and feel tears, but do not feel sadness, do not feel grief. Feel the strength of those tears, because that’s what they’re there for.

Commission staff will seldom neglect to announce explicit daily reminders that contextualize the TRC as a therapeutic space, directing the attention of former students and other audience members alike to the availability of health support workers. The RHSWs circulate along the rows of the audience in unmistakable brightly coloured vests embroidered with Indigenous iconography, periodically proffering glasses of water and boxes of tissues. These tissues, the commissioners often tell us, are to be saved, collected by the health supports so they may be burned in the Sacred Fire that is kept ablaze outside the commission in order to honour residential school survivors and encourage healing.

As Ronald Niezen (2013: 5) has noted, Canada’s TRC is “unusually active in its involvement with mental health intervention, and hence with promotion of the ideas and categories associated with mental illness and recovery.” It is, of course, quite right that former students and their families should have access to mental health and cultural supports to alleviate distress in a context where the reliving of traumatic memories is inevitable. It is not my wish to deny the critical importance of these supports. What I wish to underscore here, instead, is how these frequent reminders of the availability of health supports, of tissues even, form a repetitive orienting discourse within the Commission’s choreography, conveying to survivors that their feelings are matters of
therapeutic management and individual healing – a discourse that is problematic on several levels. As Robyn Green (2012: 129) suggests, Canada’s TRC, like other commissions in the past, frequently conflates redress with therapy, replacing the need for political accountability with a kind of therapeutic governmentality. For Métis scholar Jeremy Patzer (2014: 178), emphasis original), “Canada’s current TRC is particularly reliant on mobilizing the trope of healing. In this way it is also able to have its work seen to coincide with traditional Aboriginal notions of healing, the implication being that it is more culturally appropriate and more restorative.”

Building on these analyses, I suggest that one of the TRC’s most important resources for marshalling evidence of the therapeutic or healing outcome of its work is language, or, to paraphrase J. L. Austin (1962), doing things with words. This doing, for the TRC, is re-scripting an entire polyphony of survivor testimonies into a therapeutic textual archive that might be seen – by the public, by the government, by survivors, by the parties to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement – as incontrovertible evidence of a step toward reconciliation. The TRC’s frequent reference to healing, most notably its insistent coupling of healing with the sharing of one’s “truth,” has less to do with Indigenous understandings of healing – whether essentialized or not – and more to do with its own mandated mission, under the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, to “reveal the complete story of Canada’s residential school system, and lead the way to respect through reconciliation” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2012a: 2). This imperative to produce some measurement of success, some semblance of evidence of a “truth and reconciliation” achieved, however fragile or fragmentary, means that the TRC must demonstrate evidence of doing something.
One of the TRC’s most critical junctures for “doing things with words,” and setting the therapeutic script firmly in place, is in the opening remarks Commissioners provide to inaugurate a day of statement-taking. For Niezen (2013: 67), opening remarks help to create “templates… clearly recognizable in the opening meetings, speeches, and early stages of the Commissioner’s Sharing Panel in which the organizers are ‘setting the tone,’ or more instrumentally trying to establish thematic and behavioural patterns.” As Goodwin and Duranti have argued, the use of language itself must be understood as a crucial factor in setting the context for speech acts that will follow it – in other words, “talk itself both invokes context and provides context for other talk” (Goodwin and Duranti 1992: 7). Consider these two selections of Commissioners’ opening remarks, the first taken from the TRC’s National Event in Halifax, the second from a TRC community hearing in Hopedale, Labrador:

“Survivors… we need you to think about something very important, and that is that the legacy of residential schools that we are living with today now falls upon the shoulders of your children, and your grandchildren, and your great-grandchildren, and those left to come. Those who are coming to us in the future, those who are going to inherit this legacy are going to inherit your anger if we do not do something about it.” (The Hon. Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, October 26th, 2011)

“It’s a good day to cry, you know. There’s nothing wrong with speaking from our hearts, and sometimes the language of our hearts comes out in tears, so I don’t want anyone to feel awkward or embarrassed about that. We do a lot of crying in this work.” (Commissioner Marie Wilson, September 22nd, 2011)

These two statements are typical of the tone set by Commissioners in their opening remarks, and they provide critical “contextualization cues” (Gumperz 1992) to the audience about the types of statements that are expected at the Commission. In the Commission’s prescription, “speaking from our hearts” is embracing of tears, grief, and mourning, while angry speech is discouraged, even framed as dangerous to residential
school survivors and their successive generations. As Gumperz (1992: 231) has argued, “the communication of emotion and generalized attitudes” is one critical way that speakers can shape a linguistic context. In the case of the TRC, opening remarks help to contextualize the Commission and its work as primarily therapeutic in nature. In so doing, they help to solidify the Commission’s “expectations of iconicity” (Blommaert et al. 2006: 44) – in this instance, the ways that testimony should be spoken and delivered in order to correspond with the Commission’s accepted definition of the testimonial genre.

Anthropology has been surprisingly inattentive to the politics of therapeutic language, particularly given its ubiquity, especially within North America (Illouz 2008), and even more significantly, because of its importance to neoliberal regimes of governance that are increasingly salient in many parts of the world (Rose 1998, 1999). Medical anthropologists have long taken interest in narrative, and its therapeutic role in mediating the phenomenological realities of sickness and healing (Becker 1998; Kleinman 1988; Mattingly 1994, 1998; Mattingly and Garro 2000). Often however, this body of literature has tended to take the therapeutic function of narrative for granted (cf. Shohet 2007), a reification that calls for more systematic analysis of the linguistic context in which narratives (or testimonies) are performed, and especially, of the politics that shape that context in the first place. There is a precedent for such forms of analysis in earlier anthropological work that has “addressed the role of language and narrative in socializing people to both treatment milieus and ‘healthy’ identities” (Carr 2011: 5), but E. Summerson Carr has been particularly vocal in calling for a more “concerted, critical

\[16\] It is important to acknowledge here, of course, that some therapeutic modalities indeed encourage the expression of anger as part of a process of catharsis. This point only serves to further underscore the TRC’s investment in a therapeutic grammar of trauma, healing, and reconciliation, where anger or indignation are made to seem structurally out of place.
attention to the political as well as the cultural dimensions of therapeutic language” (Carr 2011: 5).

If, as I have argued earlier, opening remarks at Commission events play an important role in contextualizing the TRC as a therapeutic space for therapeutic speech, this is equally true of the closing remarks with which Commissioners – and sometimes Honorary Witnesses – conclude a day of statement-taking. As Blommaert and colleagues (2006: 44) have noted, concluding remarks have important rhetorical functions in wrapping up and synthesizing a variety of speech acts in order to generalize a particular perspective. The importance of concluding remarks in reaffirming the TRC’s preferred therapeutic script was vividly demonstrated in a Commissioners Sharing Panel in the TRC’s National Event in Montréal in April 2013. I will first provide an excerpt from the statement provided by Édouard Chilton, an Atikamekw residential school survivor, which Commissioner Willie Littlechild referred to prominently in his following closing remarks. Chilton spent twelve years in two residential schools in Québec, and as he told the audience, “Twelve years, twelve years of residential school and fifteen minutes to tell it, well, that’s really too… too condensed, too difficult.” He therefore chose to begin his statement by relating experiences that were a source of particular shame – the sexual abuse of young boys in the school during their nightly shower by one of the priests, and the guilt he felt still years later for having been one of the bigger boys able to push their way out of the shower afterwards, leaving the smallest boy behind to suffer the most egregious sexual abuses. As Chilton stated,

“You know, me, I don’t think I can come to a reconciliation right now. Why? Because there are so many things that tell me that we are not ready yet to reconcile. Only just this morning, when I woke up, I turned on the TRV, and I
listened to the news on RDI\textsuperscript{17}. It so happened that there was a report on the sunrise ceremony [at the TRC]. A girl did the report and she was respectful toward our ceremony. She was asked to not come too close to the place of the ceremony. She stood back. And she talked about what we’re doing today, what we’re doing this week. She, I found respectful. But after, when the report was finished, the anchor said, ‘Hang on there, ladies and gentlemen, these are people you’ll be hearing that are already heard. Expect to get the same thing again for many years to come.’ You know, when I heard that, I said to myself, oh no, I’m not capable of reconciling myself right now. I can’t. I’m sorry, but I can’t. Because we hear things, things like that. I can’t reconcile with those sorts of people… To eliminate the Indian Problem, children had to be taken from their parents, because these people were savages, and backward. These children, which means me, I received a bad influence from my parents. That’s why they took me to school. You know that… I don’t accept that. I still have a certain thing here inside me that hurts. Seeing these kinds of things, like that, I can’t. I can’t say I can forgive. And I tell myself, it’s those other ones who need to come to me, who need to say Édouard, forgive me.” (my translation from French)

Chilton concluded his statement by expressing his grief over the belief that he had passed on what he lived in residential schools to his children, and that for a long time, he had not been able to tell them that he loved them. Tearfully, he apologized to his wife, sitting beside him on stage, and apologized to her in front of everyone assembled, for having made her suffer, and for having been violent. “I love you, my wife,” he said, and expressed his shame for crying, which he said was not a manful thing to do. It was some of these latter points that Commissioner Littlechild addressed in his closing remarks, after commenting selectively on the statements of some of the survivors who had preceded him in that day’s Commissioners Sharing Panel:

Thank you very much to all of those brave individuals who have just come forward with their lived experience, to share with us a bit of their pain but also to encourage us, in many different ways. And we also witnessed strength, from the survivors, the former students, either as they talk about it or as they show us their own strength. That’s very encouraging to each of us. I know that the first speaker really put the question to us right off the bat when she asked us what is reconciliation? Because as for her, she said it was to be able to live in peace from now on, from this day forward. Then a very courageous, courageous individual

\textsuperscript{17}ICI RDI (Réseau de l’information), a news channel owned and operated by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.
who was able to dig deep enough to show, or shed some light on... on some incest in the family. Very courageous individual to take it on like that. So these were very brave, brave individuals. Then, a comparison about residential school with prison. As [one survivor] said, it destroyed many of us as children. No love at all. Only hurt. But yet, she too was able to dig within her own past to be able to say, what wasn’t taken away was my spirit to survive. The spirit to survive, to get out of here alive. But also, a very important reflection I think from her and others who have lifted up their children, have uplifted their children because of the power of children... because this is a story about children. But also she concluded by saying, I’m now stronger because of my healing journey. And we’ve heard about strength, haven’t we? Over and over again, through these last four days. And Édouard, Édouard. He said, I don’t know about this reconciliation, because I’m not ready. But yet, he showed us reconciliation! He showed us reconciliation in two ways. He said that I couldn’t tell my children that I love you. ‘I couldn’t tell them before but now I can, now I can tell my children I love them.’ But even more courageous I think in a way, to in front of us ask, ‘in front of you I want to ask forgiveness here from my wife.’ Now that’s reconciliation, I would think! At least, a part of reconciliation. And he didn’t need to apologize for shedding a tear. He said, man is not supposed to cry. So I thought that I would share a story with him, Édouard. I heard a story once about a young woman who was contemplating suicide over and over again but couldn’t do it. ‘Because one day her grandfather noticed something was wrong,’ she said. ‘My grandfather saw me and he knew something was wrong.’ And he said to her, ‘Come here my child and sit beside me.’ ‘And it was raining outside,’ she said, and he was sitting under the pump house, under the roof. And there was a garden in front.’ And he said to her, ‘Look at the rows of potatoes here. And look at the leaves. As each raindrop hits the leaves, they’re dancing. See, the leaves are dancing. Because the raindrops are washing away the dirt from the leaves of the potatoes, in each row.’ So she said, ‘I looked. And I could see the leaves were dancing. And he looked at me,’ she said. ‘You too need to cleanse yourself sometime, and the pain that you’re hiding within yourself, that you’re suppressing within yourself, the anger has to be cleaned away. The way we do that,’ my grandfather said, she said, ‘was to be able to cry. Because when you shed tears, you’re washing away the pain from your heart. And he said it causes your heart to dance.’ So, Édouard, wherever he is, thank you for showing us about the dancing heart in front of us. That too is reconciliation.

Édouard Chilton, in his testimony, made repeated assertions that he is not ready to reconcile, and, more broadly, that “we” are not ready to reconcile, noting a racist attitude within Canadian settler society that treats Indigenous people as “already heard” – as in the RDI news report he referenced – “already heard,” complaining about old grievances that we can “expect to get... again for many years to come.” He could not reconcile, he
said, because no one had asked for his forgiveness. And yet in Commissioner
Littlechild’s closing remarks, Chilton’s testimony is re-entextualized as a testimony of
reconciliation – “Édouard, Édouard. He said, ‘I don’t know about this reconciliation
because I’m not ready.’ But yet he showed us reconciliation!” Testimonies are
“alienable products,” as Fiona Ross (2003b: 333) reminds us in her ethnography of the
TRC in South Africa, and subject to “processes of entextualization in which ‘testimony’
becomes text.” Brigittine French (2009: 100) makes a similar point about Guatemala’s
truth commission, where “survivor testimonies [were] disciplined into particular
institutionally supported forms that further erase ways of meaningful knowing and telling
among structurally subordinated groups, further re-inscribing their marginalization.”

If in South Africa’s TRC, the preferred institutionally supported testimony was of suffering
(Blommaert et al. 2006: 45) and the necessity of reconciliation (Verdoolaege 2006: 64),
often at the expense of recognizing the agency of speakers, particularly women (F. Ross
2003a, 2003b), the preferred testimony at Canada’s TRC is, as Niezen (2013: 68)
suggests, “themes of loss and suffering,” redeemed by a “positive story of healing and
rediscovery of that cultural heritage once slated for destruction in the schools.”

I would argue that ethnographic studies of truth commissions must take yet a step
further beyond identifying their dominant narratives, and that interrogating the language
ideologies that underpin those narratives can further elucidate the power relations that are
at play in the context of a truth commission. In Paul Kroskrity’s (2010: 192) helpful
definition, language ideologies are “beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language

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18 Since I do not frame my project as a comparative analysis of truth commissions, I cannot devote more
space here to probing the similarities and differences in language use at various TRCs. My intention is
simply to briefly illustrate that there have been broadly similar dynamics at play elsewhere in structuring
and re-entextualizing survivor testimony, and to ethnographically render these dynamics in my own
account as a contribution to this and other literature(s).
structure and use which often index the political economic interests of individual speakers, … interest groups, and nation states,” and represent “attempts to rationalize language usage.” While dominant narratives may appear to be coming simultaneously from everywhere and nowhere in particular, the study of language ideology, as Susan Gal (1998: 318) reminds us, allows us to explore macropolitical significance as it plays out in real-time microinteractional encounters and negotiations of language use. As the powerpoint from the TRC’s “How to Share Your Truth” workshops makes clear, the language ideology underpinning Canada’s TRC is that “sharing is a part of healing,” further buttressed by the directive that survivors have a “responsibility” to produce healing speech for the sake of future generations, even for Canada.

As Carr (2011: 4) has argued, the scripting of talk as therapeutic borrows extensively from a dominant North American ideology that privileges the referential or denotative functions of language, in order to produce what she calls the “ideology of inner reference” – the presumption that “(1) ‘healthy’ language refers to preexisting phenomena, and (2) the phenomena to which it refers are internal to speakers.” While Carr’s explication of this ideology draws from her ethnography of social work and talk therapy in the context of addiction treatment in the United States, she argues that this ideology has broader currency in North America at large, and indeed, I see it as salient in the work of the TRC.

For mainstream drug treatment in the US, suffused with notions of “addicted denial,” therapy hinges on the presumption “that addicts suffer from the inability to read their inner states and render them in words,” meaning that therapists associate the sobriety of their clients with the sobriety of their speech, and see the production of
“‘healthy’ referential talk” as a critical outcome of treatment success (4). There is an assumption that language is used “to reference preexisting psychic and social facts,” in spite of the labours required to "produce, protect, and patrol such highly naturalized – or commonsensical – ideas about language,” a kind of “metalinguistic labor” (Carr 2011: 15). Similar metalinguistic labour can be observed at the TRC: while the outpouring of survivor emotion would seem to imply that testimonies are raw and unmediated, the Commission encourages therapeutic testimony in numerous ways that I have recounted here, and frequently toils to reframe and re-entextualize testimonies as therapeutic when they fail to adhere to the Commission’s “expectations of iconicity” (Blommaert et al. 2006: 44). This particular ideology of language imposes critical stakes: an insistence on a therapeutic re-entextualization of inner states neutralizes survivors’ political critiques and broader social commentary. Problematically, as Sara Ahmed (2005: 83) has noted, dominant assumptions about testimonies of suffering also presuppose “that the act of putting feelings into speech is an overcoming of the social relations that shaped such feelings.”

This insistence on Indigenous speech as necessarily therapeutic is comparatively new and requires some historicization. After all, “beliefs and feelings about language and discourse… vary dramatically” in Native North America (Field and Kroskrity 2009: 4) and speaking or “sharing” should not be so hastily equated with healing, as the TRC’s model would presuppose. As Regna Darnell (2006: 151-152) has observed over decades of fieldwork, Indian residential school narratives have shifted from “whispered, cryptic revelations” to “a more forthcoming mode of discourse,” as early stories shared in reserve communities were often tentative, particularly where church authority was still
strong. In the broadest possible terms, “First Nations narrative conventions” may “privilege understatement and indirection” where the “hearer must read between the lines… because of having shared already the experience” (Darnell 2006: 15), but because of the aggressively Christianizing discipline of Indian residential schools, survivors can be expected to be intimately familiar with dominant North American language ideologies. But where Darnell (2006: 149) sees Indigenous “public discourse about the residential school experience… standardized around a generic form,” it is important to specify the role of powerful institutional contexts such as the TRC in standardizing testimonies through (re)scripting.

Yet another angle is worthy of exploration in making sense of the insistence on healing Indigenous speech. In scrutinizing how testimonies become standardized into a particular genre, a Foucaultian analysis would highlight the place of distinctly Western, Christian practices of (and assumptions about) confession – ancestors in the moral genealogy through which the elicitation of testimonies through truth commissions has become thinkable. Indeed, Foucault, as Carr (2013: 35) puts it, “famously argued that confession is a ‘ritual of discourse’ central to the making of the modern, Western subject.” While Carr centres her analysis on theological texts, I suggest that her reading has broader import for the study of truth commissions. At the most fundamental level, there is perhaps inescapably a confessional element in testimonies of abuse, but what is noteworthy here is the extent to which the legacy of the Christian confessional appears to suffuse TRC notions of what constitutes a successful testimony, or, otherwise put, a “felicitous confession” (Carr 2013: 37).

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19 These echoes may be familiar and instinctively resonant for residential school survivors, given that Christianization was one of the central objectives of residential schooling.
Carr (2013: 34) identifies three semiotic processes at work in the production of a felicitous confession: “the figuration of the penitent memory as the storehouse for sin,” “the management of ritual time into discrete stages of ‘private’ meaning-making and ‘public’ pronouncement,” and “the erasure of the social scenery of the confessional utterance,” all of which together “naturalize confession as the cathartic revelation of inner truths, already constituted as such.” These three semiotic processes are strikingly reflected in the TRC’s production of testimonial truth. In Canada’s TRC, the dominant therapeutic script presumes that memories of residential schooling can be fairly unproblematically – aside from the emotional toll – transformed from private pain into public texts. As with the presumption of sin lodged in a penitent memory, the TRC’s work hinges on the appearance of transforming memories of painful abuse into – if not exactly penitence – accounts of *therapeusis* and redemption. As I discussed in Chapter Two, and further echo here, the TRC plays host to a discursive temporalization of affects in which private pain and attempts to reconcile with abuse are reconfigured and re-entextualized as public pronouncements of healing and reconciliation, as the interchange between Édouard Chilton and Commissioner Littlechild so vividly demonstrates. Finally, the erasure of the social scenery of the confessional utterance – the TRC hearings – is accomplished through a nonrecognition of the agency of the Commission itself, in contextualizing and rescripting survivor statements so that they are read as testimonies of healing and as indexes of reconciliation.

It is here that I find troubling echoes of Indian residential schooling reverberating in the work of the Commission. Athabascan scholar Dian Million (2013: 50) notes a parallel between the “‘disciplining’ affective technologies” of the residential school era
“that ‘silenced’ with the [contemporary] technologies to produce productive ‘well’ affect.”

In Million’s (2013: 46, emphasis original) analysis, there is a “record of emotional management in residential schooling,” primarily through the disciplinary inculcation of “shame,” and she argues that we need to understand the management of affect as central to the assimilatory thrust of the Indian residential schools, rather than epiphenomenal. Here too, the management of affect is central to the work of the TRC, and its enjoinder for survivors to produce healing speech is a clear exemplar of the proliferation of “psychological technologies” that Million (50) describes, that purport to “suggest how we [Indigenous peoples] ‘should’ feel.” I will return at length to the social and political stakes of these psychological technologies, embodied in paradigms and pedagogies of international trauma, but for now, it is sufficient to note the distinctly pedagogical tone of these affective enjoiners: “Survivors… Those who are coming to us in the future… are going to inherit your anger if we do not do something about it,” but yet conversely, “There’s nothing wrong from speaking from our hearts, and sometimes the language of our hearts comes out in tears.”

In my analysis, therefore, the work of Canada’s TRC, within the parameters accorded to it under the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, risks perpetuating a kind of “reschooling” of residential school survivors as to what constitutes an appropriate testimony, and by extension, proper emotional comportment and civility. Whereas once the disciplinary and abusive context of the Indian residential schools may have sought to assimilate Indigenous children by fostering shame and hatred for their indigeneity, we now see directives for residential school survivors to perform a “‘well’
affect” (Million 2013: 50) by enacting *therapeusis* through testimony, a form of affective management that is very different in tone, but no less pedagogical.

It is critical to note here that not all residential school survivors accept the TRC’s rescripting of their testimonies as healing speech for themselves and, ultimately, for Canada. I will devote the remainder of this chapter to exploring encounters where the TRC’s therapeutic script fails – or at the very least, falters. A Labrador Inuit survivor of residential schools would later comment to me on how Commissioner Wilson responded to the statement that she had delivered during the TRC community hearing in Happy Valley-Goose Bay in September 2011, alerting me to the fact that even in instances where the TRC’s therapeutic script is not publicly resisted, it may yet be privately resented.

I wanted her to hear my story. And I spoke with her, and I said, ‘I’m going to show you me.’ And I sat there, by myself at first. And I was talking to her, and every time she started writing something down, I stopped. Because ‘I’m talking to you!’ You know? So I showed her me. And what she said afterwards was… what she got out of all that was, ‘you know, there’s help available for you.’ All kinds of bullshit. She didn’t get it! It’s about time somebody else started to be real back to me. Because they’re giving words to me that aren’t truthful words! It sounds good saying that and it looks good on TV! And then they get all these witnesses who are saying that the healing is beginning. No! The honesty is out there! Because that’s what they need to speak about, the honesty is out there. The reconciliation has not begun! But they’re giving the illusion that it is. Because they think because I speak the truth that I’m reconciled. I’m not. Because… there’s no because, it’s simply I’m not. The government does not acknowledge that I was in a residential school. How do you reconcile that? And the TRC think that because I speak the truth, I’m on the step to healing. No. No. It doesn’t go like that! And it takes a whole lot more than talking. I’ve been talking for years. It still stays in there! And they think because I spoke that I’m

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20 Ironically, I was myself scribbling a steady flow of notes when I interviewed this survivor, as I have always done in interviews, finding that busying myself in writing keeps me occupied in a way that also appears to minimize the distraction and awkwardness of my own physical presence for interviewees. Such activity, however, does not preclude empathic listening; my interlocutor’s criticism of the Commissioner for taking notes rather than truly hearing and registering her story, while apparently absolving me of such indifference, seems to point more to the public and formalized context of hearings as creating a sense of rote repetition and recording of the TRC experience that may be alienating and depersonalizing for survivors such as this interlocutor.
on my way to healing! It’s not healed because this is always in here! I always have to fight, with myself, that I’m not this small little person. That’s a constant battle.

This woman’s retelling of her statement of the TRC, some two years later to me, vividly crystallized for me the ways in which some survivors may feel a sense of failure at the TRC, or of being failed by the TRC. For her, the TRC’s therapeutic script and the optics it helps to generate were evident and, from her perspective, unconscionable, although she and I have used different language to make similar points. She both recognizes and refutes the TRC’s dominant ideology of the healing power of survivor speech, but also confounds that ideology in a startling way. If, as Carr (2011: 4) has argued, language ideologies of therapeutic talk rely on an “ideology of inner reference,” where the sharing of the inner self through speech is an unmediated act, this residential school survivor attempted to do just that – “I’m going to show you me” – all the while firmly rejecting the TRC’s therapeutic script and its premise that “sharing is a part of healing.” There is ultimately, then, a profound irony at the heart of the TRC’s enterprise of storytelling about Indian Residential Schools: the fact that when survivors share their truths, their truths may not be heard at all. It is no doubt expedient for the TRC to stress the healing power of speech, to call attention to its health supports, and to hastily medicalize survivors’ statements rather than dwell within the politics and the messiness of the lived experience that Indian residential schools and interrelated genocides have left behind for their survivors. After all, the TRC is wrapping up a short six-year mandate with limited funding, one of the questionable outcomes of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement. But the tone-deaf insistence on a therapeutic script may fail survivors nonetheless.
I want to dwell further on failure in the following two sections, although in a different sense, by examining how the TRC’s therapeutic scripts fails or falters, even when attempts are made to reinscribe it. In this pursuit, I acknowledge Audra Simpson’s (2014: 33, emphasis original) invitation to anthropologists to analyze “colonialism’s ongoing life and simultaneous failure,” through being mindful of the “fundamentally interrupted and interruptive capacity of [Indigenous] life within settler society.” While I scrutinized in this section the private resentment some survivors may feel over the TRC’s prescriptions that “sharing is a part of healing,” I next wish to explore some of the most overt public resistance to this script that I have witnessed at TRC events, as a way of thinking through, with a nod to Spivak (2010a[1987]), how or whether the residential school survivor can truly speak through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

Figure 3.2 – “(Official Denial) Trade Value in Progress” – an ongoing interactive project by artist Leah Decter and curator Jaimie Isaac inviting participants to sew or write responses to Stephen Harper’s 2009 statement denying Canada’s history of colonialism, exhibited here at the TRC National Event in Edmonton, March 2014

Photograph by the author
THERAPEUTIC INTERRUPTIONS: ON REFUSING AND DEFUSING IN TRC TOWN HALLS ON RECONCILIATION

During its regional event in Victoria in April 2012, and the next subsequent National Event in Saskatoon that June, the TRC instituted a new kind of forum. Entitled “It Matters To Me: A Town Hall on Reconciliation,” these town halls were explicitly instituted to create a space for the interaction of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples at TRC events, and they have since remained a core component of all subsequent TRC events. The town halls are open mic sessions, most often moderated by one of the most conspicuous Honorary Witnesses at TRC events, national radio broadcaster Shelagh Rogers. Usually a second Honorary Witness is present, as well as one of the TRC Commissioners. Either by Rogers’ influence or by virtue of the format, the town halls have absorbed much of the flavour of talk shows. In an ethnographic study of talk-show therapy, Gaik (1992: 274) has observed a distinct “ritualized structure,” where the conversation “turns therapeutic” with the identification of a “need” or “problem”: questions are asked “to elaborate on the problem and to elicit background information before a diagnosis is made,” and “[i]t is… obligatory that the conversation achieve closure” because “the therapist must seem competent, effective, and influential.” Similarly, the town halls start with opening remarks from the moderator, designed to spark reflection on what reconciliation might mean or entail. In the context of TRC town halls, lack of reconciliation is the diagnosed problem, and open mic comments are therefore implicitly steered toward theorizing reconciliation, the prescribed cure. However, to extend the metaphor, patient responsiveness to the prescribed treatment varies, and the moderated dialogue at TRC town halls may take unpredictable turns.
The talk-show therapeutic ethos that infuses the town halls – as well as resistance to that therapeutic ethos – came most vividly into relief at a town hall I attended during the TRC’s National Event in Montréal in April 2013. In this case, the town hall moderator was Dennis Trudeau, another national radio broadcaster, in the company of the Hon. David MacDonald, a former federal government minister and former United Church minister, who now serves as the United Church of Canada’s Special Advisor on Residential Schools. TRC Commissioner Justice Murray Sinclair slipped in partway through the town hall.

Beginning the town Hall, MacDonald provided opening remarks that supplied unmistakable “contextualization cues” (Gumperz 1992) helping to mould the town hall into the talk-show therapeutic genre. He began by identifying an unclear problem, or pathology, in need of diagnosis and treatment – “We need to be healed from the damage that has been done to all of us.” The appropriation of genocidal violence perpetrated against Indigenous children, as a shared national pain that victimized an undifferentiated collective “we,” was more than curious. And it quickly sparked a number of indignant responses that threatened to seriously derail the therapeutic scripting of this town hall.

An Anishinaabe man argued that reconciliation takes two people, and the truth was not being completely told. “I’m not ready to be a Canadian,” he said, “I’m from a First Nation of Turtle Island.” He stated that there are five elements of genocide, all of which have existed in Canada, recounting sterilizations, starvation, the infection of blankets delivered to Indigenous peoples by clergy. “I don’t mean to offend anybody, but that’s the truth!” Moderator Dennis Trudeau attempted to, in his words, “interpret” and “summarize” this presenter’s remarks, but a Mohawk man subsequently took the
microphone and was similarly unwilling to contribute to theorizing the reconciliation cure. Prime Minister Harper’s apology for the Indian Residential Schools was “wrong,” he stated, “like putting shoes on the wrong feet,” and he proceeded to critique the restorative justice model that the IRSSA and TRC exemplify, insisting that it exonerates criminal conduct at the highest levels of government and the churches for which they cannot thereafter be charged. “Reconciliation is after you fix everything done to our people,” he said, and noted the government and churches’ responsibility to ensure Indigenous peoples had access to funding to regain their languages. “We will see if you are civilized enough to sit at our table.” He stated that Native peoples had now been absorbed into Christianity, but that the religion was evil, and that they needed to move away.

The moderator announced that his time was up – while someone in the crowd shouted, “let him speak!” – and said to the Mohawk man, “You have painted a picture of evil. We are talking about truth and reconciliation. Do you see any hope, anything satisfactory?” “NO,” the man retorted, and proceeded to cite Plan Nord as an exemplar of one of the most recent colonial transgressions, an economic development strategy the Québec provincial government proposed in May 2011 for natural resource extraction in the north of the province, in the absence of adequate consultation of Nunavik Inuit, James Bay Cree, and Innu peoples in whose traditional territories the proposed resource extraction would take place. “I don’t think the response to violence is violence,” the moderator suggested, returning the dialogue back to the therapeutic management of affect, “It’s just an easy way to deal with emotion.” A Mi’kmaq man countered that the Prime Minister’s apology for Indian Residential Schools on June 11, 2008 had been followed by
$8 million in federal budget cuts to organizations serving Indigenous women and children the very next day. These commentaries provide examples of what Audra Simpson (2014: 11, emphasis original; see also A. Simpson 2011a) has called “refusal,” a “political and ethical stance… [that] comes with the requirement of having one’s political sovereignty acknowledged and upheld, and raises the question of legitimacy for those who are usually in the position of recognizing.”

These acts of refusing, however, are often countered with attempts at defusing. It was at this point in the town hall that the moderator intervened and invited non-First Nations people to speak. The atmosphere in the room was palpably tense but, I felt, the listening non-Indigenous public seemed more receptive to the statements that had been delivered than the moderator appeared to allow. One Anglophone woman, a teacher, suggested the need to lobby the Québec provincial Department of Education to get the history curriculum right. A Francophone woman agreed. The system is colonial, she said, and noted how Indigenous peoples disappear from history textbooks after the 1800s, only to reappear in crisis later. The truth is hidden and deformed by the media and corporations, she asserted, and commented on the feeling of indignation in the room. “The government is inhuman.” Another Francophone man recounted how police officers had come to put a stop to Indigenous fires and full moon ceremonies in Montréal’s Parc du Mont-Royal. “Go back and have your ceremonies in your own home,” a police officer had stated, in ignorance of non-colonial cartographies in which Indigenous traditional territories have always been “home.”

At this point, Shelagh Rogers, who had also slipped in the room late, thanked people “for speaking with anger and passion,” suggesting that this was “deeply
uncomfortable, but when is growth not? Thank you for making me uncomfortable. Let’s do something with that discomfort.” Rogers noted how her own family history made her complicit in colonialism, as a descendant of Hudson Bay Company traders, but this quickly articulated pairing of discomfort and growth seemed to offer yet another prescribed treatment to re-establish a therapeutic script.

As the town hall wrapped to a close, a baby could be heard gurgling in a corner of the small crowd. Commissioner Sinclair seized this moment to offer some closing remarks of his own. “It’s not about you anymore,” he declared. “The little kids making noise in the room – what do we do for them? Thank you for speaking with anger, passion, love. We will talk about all of it in our report. But at some point we’ll have to agree. At some point we’ll have to agree, even if it’s not today. The relationship will continue, and we will leave turmoil and war for our grandchildren without an agreement.”

With these closing remarks, Commissioner Sinclair reiterated the inevitability of therapeutic (p)rescripting, albeit in a more tentative way, allowing for its deferral while maintaining its ultimate necessity. His statement leaned heavily on the abstract figure of the child, as the beacon of a hopeful futurity that must not be beggared or compromised by unresolved anger in the present. As I argued at length in Chapter Two, this abstract figure of the child does very important affective and political work for the Commission, providing one of its most frequently used rhetorical devices for managing the tensions, contradictions, and impossibilities of the TRC’s mandate to produce textual and testimonial evidence of progress made toward reconciliation. But what is crucial to point to here is the slippages that occur through the rhetorical invocation of the figure of the child, slippages that are productive for the purposes of the Commission. In the
interactions I have described, the life stories and pains of real Indigenous children, now grown adults, are displaced through the projection of the abstract children of a hopeful Canadian future, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, a process that further unmarks the racialized nature of the original Indigenous child abuse in question. These abstract future children of Canada stand in for the nation, and indeed their very invocation serves to reproduce the nation, and dominant ideologies of the nation, as harmoniously multicultural, and fundamentally innocent. Again, this invocation demands an affective labour on the part of residential school survivors, as in the instances I analyzed in the preceding chapter, that is an asymmetrical and unequal one: the ethical injunction that former students of residential schools relinquish anger and reconcile – for the sake of the nation, and its abstract, unborn children – does not acknowledge that this burden of forgiveness ultimately falls on the shoulders of Indigenous violence survivors alone.

The series of encounters that I have described in this particular town hall provides a stark illustration of how the irruption of anger in TRC proceedings often prompts attempts at defusing, summarizing, or reinterpretation, warnings on behalf of unborn generations of children, and, as we saw in the previous section of this chapter, rescripting into textual evidence of reconciliation to preserve the integrity of the Commission’s dominant therapeutic script.

Cree-Métis scholar Emma LaRocque (1990: xvii) offers an especially lucid rebuttal to dominant representations of, and responses to, Indigenous anger:

Our anger, legitimate as it was and is, was exaggerated as ‘militant’ and used as an excuse not to hear us. There is little comprehension of an articulate anger reflecting an awakening and a call to liberation, not a psychological problem to be defused in a therapist’s room... We were psychologized as ‘bitter,’ which was equated with emotional incapacitation, and once thus dismissed we did not have to be taken seriously.
LaRocque’s analysis is directed toward mainstream criticism directed to works of fiction by Indigenous writers beginning in the late 1960s, but the applicability of her insights to current expectations of Indigenous speech in Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission, several decades later, is obvious: “we [are] directed just to tell our ‘stories’ (and the more tragic the better) not, in a manner reminiscent of archival descriptions reflecting earlier colonial attitudes, to be so ‘arrogant’ or so daring as to analyse or to call on Canadian society for its injustices” (LaRocque 1990: xvii). Indeed, the corollary of the TRC’s evocation of tears, healing speech, and a therapeutic script is its corresponding pathologization of anger, all of which, I argue, are distinctly pedagogical and effectively “reschool” Indian residential school survivors as to appropriate affect and testimonial language. The TRC pedagogy, I argue, seriously imperils the legibility or audibility of Indigenous critiques of ongoing colonial injustices, and risks further miring Indigenous peoples in dominant public representations as pathological, damaged, and in need of healing. For Cree-Métis scholar Jo-Ann Episkenew (2009: 11), this particular paradigm of healing and its attribution of pathology are deeply problematic, and in fact ought to be inverted:

‘Healing’ does not imply that Indigenous people are sick… Colonialism is sick; under its auspices and supported by its mythology, the colonizers have inflicted heinous wounds on the Indigenous population that they set out to civilize. Although Indigenous people understand their need to heal from colonial trauma, most settlers deny that their society is built on a sick foundation and, therefore, deny that it requires a cure.

While at first appearing to faintly echo David MacDonald’s opening remark at this TRC town hall, that “we need to be healed from the damage that has been done to all of us,” Episkenew’s argument must instead be read as a targeted critique. MacDonald’s position defuses responsibility for the violence of Indian residential schools by diffusing
its damage as somehow collective, for Indigenous and settler societies, suggesting that both are in need of healing in some ill-defined way. Episkenew, on the other hand, firmly locates pathology in the systemic structure of settler colonialism, and makes it clear that the salient remedy is not so much therapeutic as political in nature.

This dichotomization of pathological anger and therapeutic healing reaches to the heart of one of the deepest contradictions in Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission: its rendering of some testimonies as “most significant presentations,” as Commissioner Sinclair noted after Marcia Mirasty’s statement, described earlier in this chapter, and its re-contextualization of others as evidence of reconciliation in order to be recognizably heard, as in Commissioner Littlechild’s response to Édouard Chilton’s statement, as we saw earlier as well. The dichotomization of healing and anger speaks in important ways to Foucault’s distinction between therapeusis and parrhesia: the former, as McFalls and Pandolfi (2014: 173) have argued, is a “therapeutic mode of government” that has become deeply intertwined with neoliberal governance, which “legitimates its authority with claims of benevolence, of expertise, and even of empowerment of those whose conduct it guides,” forming subjects that “[take] charge of [their lives] through a panoply of practices of the self from self-help and self-reliance to self-marketing and self-governance.” Speech acts that crystallize therapeusis are recognizable in the Commission, while those that exemplify parrhesia, “the courageous practice of speaking truth to power in an act of subjective affirmation and resistance” (McFalls and Pandolfi 2014: 173), cannot be heard as such. Can, then, the subaltern (here Indigenous) subject speak through the Commission, to return to Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak’s (2010a[1987]) famous question? In a later revisitation of her original essay, Spivak (2010b: 228)
clarified that her “point was not to say that [the subaltern] couldn’t speak, but that, when someone did try to do something different, it could not be acknowledged because there was no institutional validation.” These are precisely the conditions of possibility that are missing at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: institutional validation is available for speech acts that produce *therapeusis*, and contribute to the TRC’s therapeutic script, while speech acts that approximate *parrhesia*, and interrupt the therapeutic script, are often subject to re-entextualization, and perhaps ultimately unheard in their intended form.

I turn now, in closing this chapter, to a final ethnographic exploration of interruptions of the TRC’s dominant therapeutic script. In doing so, I attempt a kind of reading that Spivak (2010b: 229) has advanced: to “look at the ‘marginal’ moment that unravels the text” and that “paradoxically… gives us a sense of what is ‘normal’ for the text, what norms the text.” In doing so, I link the TRC’s textual scripting of *therapeusis* to the broader politics of a specifically neoliberal form of settler colonial governance, exploring neo-colonial forms of natural resource extraction, as well as entrepreneurial, even criminal forms of legal conduct in the IRSSA’s Independent Assessment Process. In so doing, I attempt to peer beyond the TRC’s therapeutic text, and examine the ways that it, along with other social and political processes, creates deeply problematic double binds for residential school survivors.

**ON HEALING, DAMAGE, AND NEOLIBERAL DOUBLE BINDS**

The opening ceremonies of the TRC’s Vancouver National Event, in September 2013, did not go entirely as planned. Several things happened that, momentarily,
interrupted the preferred therapeutic script of the Commission. The Grand Entry of residential school survivors, Commissioners, and dignitaries into the stadium of the Pacific National Exhibition proceeded in its typically ceremonious way, accompanied by a group of male singers performing a deep, bellowing drumming song. The Commissioners opted to open the proceedings by replaying a video clip from the previous day on the two big screens installed in the stadium. The clip featured the All Nations Canoe Gathering held the previous day in which the non-profit organization Reconciliation Canada, in support of the Commission, coordinated a flotilla of cedar dugout canoes, which Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants paddled through Vancouver’s False Creek. Stopping in the waters outside the Telus World of Science Museum, where an awaiting crowd was assembled, TRC Commissioner Justice Murray Sinclair stood up in one of the canoes, loudspeaker in hand, and, following cultural protocol, asked traditional leaders of the Musqueam, Squamish, and Tsleil-Waututh First Nations for permission to hold the TRC gathering in their unceded territories. “Canada itself must heal from its own shame as well,” he averred.

Following the screening, First Nations, Inuit, and Métis Elders offered opening prayers, in what is one of the most essential opening rituals for any TRC event. One Elder’s prayer, however, stood out from the rest, an altogether different kind of prayer than any other I had heard. It was the day’s first intimation, seen in retrospect, that in this particular National Event, the Opening Ceremonies were to deviate significantly from the TRC’s usual script in several key moments.

Tsleil-Waututh Elder Amy George provided one of the opening prayers, but it was not only a prayer, it was also a poignant lament.
My government name is Amy George. Today, I ask Great Creator, Grandmothers, and Grandfathers, to put a white light of love and protection on all of us who are residential school survivors. Creator, Grandmothers, Grandfathers, we have had a hard life. Living without our parents’ love and taken from our families when we were just little children. And that stayed with me my life. I keep thinkin’, I was asked by a newspaper person about this coming week and they said, ‘are you ready to forgive?’ And I said, ‘I don’t know, because would I have to say I forgive tomorrow again?’ Because the murder of our people is still goin’ on today. I walked the tar sands in Alberta and our people are getting eye infection, ear infection, throat infection, and they’re dying from cancer. The whole area looks like a big nuclear bomb dropped there. The animals are dying, the fish are dying, their arms are just hanging limp. I think that the murder of any living thing is wrong, the murder of our Mother Earth is wrong, so I ask you Great Creator, to bless us. So I’m asking in some little way, in some little hope, some healing, some feeling of peace in my heart. I’m a great-grandmother, Great Creator, I’m asking for a little bit of peace in my heart before I go home. Don’t forget us, we are your grandchildren too. We’ve suffered. But we’re your grandchildren too, so take care of us in a kind and gentle way today. Thank you for all the beautiful songs and the support. Huy ch q’u, huy ch q’u, huy ch q’u, siem21. Thank you Grandmothers and Grandfathers, all my relations.

This prayer – and lament for the land – was unusual in that it did not guarantee an unconditional blessing or endorsement of the TRC’s work. Elder Amy George asked for blessings for the residential school survivors and their families present at the event, but her prayer was also cautionary, pointing to the ongoing destruction of environments and Indigenous territories – “Would I have to say I forgive tomorrow again?” In the news interview she references, from earlier that week, she was even more explicit about her misgivings, which can be heard between the lines of her opening prayer. In her interview with Linda Solomon Wood for the Vancouver Observer (Wood 2013), George noted that Kinder Morgan, the fourth largest energy company in North America, was a corporate sponsor of the TRC’s National Event in Vancouver, which “corrupts the entire effort.” At this time, Kinder Morgan was aggressively promoting its proposed Trans Mountain pipeline expansion from Alberta to Vancouver for market exports, cutting through Tsleil-

21 “Thank you, thank you, thank you, respected people” in the Halkomelem language.
Waututh and numerous other Indigenous territories, all the while significantly overestimating economic benefits and dramatically underestimating environmental and social costs (Goodman and Rowan 2014). The TRC National Event also coincided with an announcement that a delegation of federal ministers would be travelling to British Columbia to attempt to “win First Nation opponents over on pipeline proposals” (Wood 2013), a darkly ironic coincidence during a week devoted to reconciliation.

This is a troubling juxtaposition, where it is clear that the urgency of the therapeutic script is a partner to the urgency of natural resource extraction and capitalist accumulation. Athabaskan scholar Dian Million, in her important (2013) genealogy of the discourse of healing in both Indigenous communities and in broader Indigenous-state relations, parses this juxtaposition at length. Within Indigenous communities, healing has come to articulate with projects of cultural and political resurgence; as Million (2013: 96, emphasis original) suggests, “Healing as a concept gave… individuals and their families not only a language but an actual set of practices that could effect positive change… [and] act on their historical situation.” Conversely, the discourses of healing and reconciliation espoused by state and corporate actors are inflected with the “biopolitical imperative for healing as reconciliation with capital” (Million 2013: 179). As Million (2013: 12) argues, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission partakes in this neoliberal economy of therapeutic self-management and reconciliation with capital, in “ask[ing] for a reconciliation between a victim and a perpetrator in the same moment that any actual political power for Canadian Indigenous peoples is continually deferred.” It is precisely these maddening incongruities that Elder Amy George laments in her opening
prayer – “would I have to say I forgive again tomorrow? Because the murder of our people is still goin’ on today.”

Interruptions to the TRC’s dominant therapeutic script – and reminders of broader processes of colonial dispossession at work outside the TRC space – are often brief, allowing the TRC to resume its preferred course. On this particular day, the cautionary, almost discordant chord struck in Elder Amy George’s opening prayer was, in a sense, brought back into harmony in a succeeding presentation, when a representative of the Musqueam Nation invited the gathered audience of roughly 5,000 people to recite the words “we are all one heart and mind” in the Halkomelem language, in an atmosphere that was quickly roused into a feel-good pep rally.

This presentation was followed by greetings from National Chief Shawn Atleo on behalf of the Assembly of First Nations, which listed the AFN’s priorities of negotiation and advocacy with the federal government, noting how the Prime Minister’s apology for Indian Residential Schools on behalf of all Canadians “committed the government to walk with us on our healing journey, and we will hold him to his words.” His statement was punctuated by an outcry from a male residential school survivor, who called out to the stage saying, “He’s not my chief! You’re in my territory, this is my land! You want to come and talk to me over here, I’ll talk to you over there! Come on! Right now! You talk to me right now! Who are you? I’d like to talk to Atleo also. I don’t believe what this government says!” “We can set some dialogue,” Nuu-chah-nulth emcee Michael McCarthy said nervously. Another Elder took this man’s hand, and he was quickly encircled by health support workers, receiving a hug from one of them. “Yes it is, this is the time to do it!” the man continued. “You want the truth? You want to have truth?
You can have truth! They’re not going to be talking politically. I happen to be a survivor, so I know what it’s all about. I don’t believe in what you’re doing here!” No more was heard from this man, and he was not invited onstage to share his dissenting perspective.

The morning’s most striking interruption came during the opening remarks of British Columbian Premier Christy Clark. During her remarks, approximately eight individuals, Indigenous and of mixed ages, came forward hoisting a banner, on which the words “We Are Walking Dollars” were emblazoned (see Figure 3.3). Two cloth bags, each marked with a dollar sign, were tossed unceremoniously on stage at the foot of the podium at which Premier Clark was speaking. TRC staff members on stage were visibly discomfited, a couple whispering among themselves. The protesters stood silently just under the stage, holding their banner silently, and whether accidentally or by intention, their action was not recorded in the TRC video footage. The emcee took the microphone after Premier Clark’s presentation, saying “now what I’d like to do is also acknowledge that we’ve had some people present as well. The TRC allows that space to be open, but what we really want is things to be done in a very good and positive way as well, and, um, there is a place for that as well. I’d like to move on with our schedule.”

After a few minutes, it appeared from my vantage point that the protesters were asked to move further into the back corner of the stadium, and eventually I did not see them. An indigenous man circulated throughout the rows of the audience, disseminating informative pamphlets about the British Columbia chapter of Idle No More, a broad-based grassroots protest movement that ignited in December 2012 in support of Indigenous sovereignty, protection of the environment, and nation-to-nation diplomacy.
with Canada (see The Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014). Multiple, loosely connected political actions are ongoing since Idle No More, creating a renewed wave of Indigenous political activism and resurgence, and the movement appears to offer an emergent counterdiscourse, a disrupting alternative to the TRC’s therapeutic script.

Figure 3.3 – “We Are Walking Dollars”: protest at the TRC National Event in Vancouver, September 2013
Photograph by the author

This particular protest action was organized by the Indian Residential School CART (Critical Analysis & Radical Thoughts), an activist movement and support group for residential school survivors. Members of the group often reject the subject position of “residential school survivors” and rename themselves Survivor Warriors, and they likewise reframe Indian residential schools as prisons, in which they were the prisoners. In the weeks leading up to the TRC National Event in Vancouver, CART’s Anishinaabe
founder Betsy Bruyere explained the reasons for her group’s indignation over the TRC and the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, in a radio interview with Kla How Ya FM. Although organizations such as the Indian Residential Schools Survivors Society exist to represent survivors, no such organization is a party to the IRSSA. Instead, it is the legal counsel for residential school survivors that are parties to the IRSSA. In Bruyere’s assessment, survivors were inadequately consulted in the drafting of the IRSSA, resulting in a “process that brokered forgiveness and removal of criminal responsibility from the churches and the Canadian government,” and engendered “financial exploitation and demonization” of residential school survivors (Kla How Ya FM 2013). Indeed, the IRSSA’s Independent Assessment Process (IAP) for claims of serious physical and sexual abuse, which has proceeded in parallel with the TRC, has been tarnished by a series of high-profile scandals involving legal misconduct. Farrow (2014: 609-611) provides a useful summary of numerous instances of malpractice, which have included loan schemes for IAP claimants at criminally high interest rates, “misleading approaches to client solicitation,” manipulation of IAP application forms, failure to file IAP forms, legal fees that have at times exceeded allowable amounts under the IRSSA, all within the context of “high-volume” legal practices that have taken the Indian Residential Schools legacy as an opportunity for “entrepreneurial lawyering.” Indian Residential Schools litigation, for some members of the legal profession, has been taken as a niche market and an opportunity for venture capitalism. One Labrador Inuit survivor of residential schools described IAP cases to me as “blood diamonds” for such entrepreneurial lawyers.
The “demonization” of residential school survivors – as Bruyere puts it – points to a parallel process through the IAP that seriously troubles the TRC’s production of a therapeutic script. Numerous survivors, in their public statements to the TRC, have articulated how the IAP is retraumatizing and even dehumanizing, in contrast to the Commission’s cajoling for evidence of healing through speech. Jillian Harris, a residential school survivor and former chief of the Penelakut First Nation, told the TRC at its National Event in Vancouver that a family member had hung himself the day before his IAP adjudication, and that over the course of the IAP, it was “like the spirit of suicide roared through our community.” In her own experience with the IAP, she recounted how a lawyer told her, “You’re gonna have to tell a better story than that. You were only raped once, you’re gonna have to beef it up a little.” Harris explained that she had since switched to a different legal practice, and that her current lawyer had instead helped her understand that her experience was not simply a story, but evidence of a crime. As I was sitting during a pause in one of the Commissioners Sharing Panels in Vancouver, a Nuu-chah-nulth woman sat down next to me. She struck up a conversation with me about her own experience, where her IAP claim had been denied by a lawyer who did not believe she had experienced sexual abuse in residential school, largely, she said, because she had pursued higher education and had a successful and highly active career in multiple levels of government. Her claim was not believed, she told me, because she had become a workaholic, she stated, an addiction that she had used to escape from her memories of residential school abuse, but which was seen to invalidate her experience of violence.

Anthropological scholarship has become attuned to the ways in which settler colonial statecraft appears to increasingly rely on the production of double binds for
Indigenous subjects (Blackburn 2012; Cattelino 2008, 2010; Povinelli 2002; Samson 2009). In this case, while residential school survivors are expected at the TRC to perform healing through speech, they are also required to demonstrate damage in numbers through the IAP process. The TRC’s therapeutic script falters profoundly here, as residential school survivors navigate a parallel process that quantifies their pain in often deeply dehumanizing ways.

As Henderson and Wakeham (2009: 11) have noted, the IAP uses a “point-based scale that calculates monetary value via the reduction of traumatic experience to itemization within a clinical taxonomy of injuries… rais[ing] questions about the ‘reconciliatory’ potential of such a juridical tabulation of suffering.” The IAP also imposes a burden of proof on survivors that may be exceedingly difficult to supply decades later, particularly when even records of their residential school attendance may be missing – some of this, in part, due to the federal government’s intransigent refusal to supply the TRC with the full contents of its archive of residential school documents.

Within this schematization of suffering, the Indian Residential Schools Independent Assessment Process (2013) distinguishes, for example, between five levels of sexual abuse, ranging from the mildest, “SL1,” which can include “One or more incidents of fondling or kissing,” “Nude photographs taken of the Claimant,” adult self-exposure, or “Any touching” which “violates the sexual integrity of the student.” Conversely, at the other end of the spectrum, “SL5” requires “Acts Proven” of “Repeated, persistent incidents of anal or vaginal intercourse” or “Repeated, persistent incidents of anal/vaginal penetration with an object.” Many survivors have publicly stated that this
kind of mechanical and numerical distillation of their lived experiences of violence is retraumatizing.

To illustrate how grave a miscarriage of justice the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement is in the eyes of many survivors, and to scrutinize the TRC’s therapeutic script even further, I close this chapter with an act of *parrhesia*: an eloquent statement of powerful oratory that Mi’kmaq residential school survivor Katherine Sorbey delivered at the TRC National Event in Montréal in April 2013. In doing so, I hold a mirror back to the public statement with which I opened this chapter, an exemplar of *therapeusis* that received strong positive affirmation from the Commission. Here then, perhaps, I show my own editorial hand, my own tactile and tactical shaping of the events I have witnessed at the Commission, in my own act of storytelling. But what I want to underscore is the extent to which Sorbey’s statement galvanized one of the strongest reactions I have seen at a Commissioners Sharing Panel: not just the occasional tears and solemn applause, but vociferous *yeahs, nos*, laughter, cheers, whoops and ululations of agreement, most especially from the Indigenous audience in the room. Sorbey’s statement tapped into, I think, an important counterdiscourse murmuring through – and beyond – Commission events:

I’m here as a proud Mi’kmaq person, an Aboriginal person. And I’m to relate my story. It’s quite long, but I only have 14 minutes and 40 seconds to tell you. *[laughs]*. I believe that if this truth and reconciliation is to be recognized, we must acknowledge the goings-on of the politics of Canada. And in my fifty years, I have witnessed many injustices. In all departments of the Canadian politics. From social services to justice, to education, to health, to housing. I can go on and on. Now I went through so many programs in 50 years. I have been categorized, I have been numbered, I have been sometimes accepted, most of the times rejected. But I’ve dealt with many agencies and the worst one I’ve dealt with so far was this Residential Schools Settlement. You know, Canada patted itself on the back for givin’ the Indians 2 billion something. And I’m still pissed off about it! *[loud “yeah!” from the audience, some laughter]*. You know?
Because nobody wants to mention the results of this. I went through
the process. It was not a nice process. I believe the Canadian government made
in years one of the biggest job creations for all Canadians [loud “yeah!” from the
audience] out of this residential school money. And then the lawyers. Oh my
god! What they got out of it. We’re the ones who went through the system and
live it daily, and we will live with it for the rest of our lives. And they get paid!
Millions! You know? That money could have went to the homeless. I don’t care
if I’ve got any money! I’ve got money! They awarded me, I’ll tell you, I was
supposed to keep it a secret but the hell with them! [loud laughter from the
audience]. I received 104 thousand point something. And of that, the lawyer was
kind to me, he claimed he only took 20 per cent. Which he was supposed to take
30 per cent. Then the government took the rest, almost 25,000 dollars in taxes. I
was left with like 80, 81,000, something like that. And the other injustice is that
the people who have not spoken up yet, who are still silent about their pain and
about their experiences, that haven’t come forward, who are now just comin’ out
and wanting to get their CEPs, they’re not allowed to get ‘em! There was a
deadline! They missed the deadline! It’s like they died, they were supposed to
have died before their deadline! So they don’t get nothing! And then those who
went and applied for [IAP], some shyster lawyers got a hold of them and some of
them literally got money. One got disbarred and another one took off for the
States! With the money they got for these poor survivors, and survivors got
nothing! And that’s a fact! Now, these survivors cannot reapply! Their lawyers
already settled for them. So there are so many injustices going on, and ignorance
by our people and trusting, they’re too trusting! Actually, sir [she addresses this
comment looking directly at Commissioner Sinclair]. They’re very trusting. And
this is the truth of the matter. And then our own lawyers, in my case, just because
I didn’t come out with my sexual abuse for a while after, at my adjudication
meeting, my lawyer actually turned to me and said [in a simpering voice], ‘oh! I
didn’t hear about your sexual abuse for so many years!’ I said, ‘you never looked
in my file where I wrote it.’ He sends me to another lawyer. So I start to tell him
my story and he starts laughing! So naturally I get very angry. I know I’m not
supposed to use words like pissed off I guess, but I really was, you know?
Speaking English, that’s the word that comes to me, pissed off [laughs from
audience]. You know? So I got so pissed off, I lifted the desk that he was sittin’
on, and I said, ‘you think my life is a joke?! You think my life is a joke?! You
don’t understand,’ I says, ‘you’re dealing with our people. Our Aboriginal people.
You don’t think we have feelings, a heart, a mind? And you’re my attorney?’ So
I wanted to address that because it’s still going on. There were so many survivors
refused under the IAP program, because they called me personally. I have a list
of 345 people. That were not accepted under the IAP. And they don’t know what
to do about it. Because, simply because their colonial lawyers told them they
weren’t eligible under the conditions of this, what is this, 19 steps that you have
to have suffered? How much pain you went through, how many degrees of pain
you went through? Honest to God, that’s what all this thing was about! Degrees
of everything. Degrees of sexual abuse. It’s like if you had five or ten vaginas.
Or rectums. To how many degrees you were degraded! And if you weren’t
degraded enough, if you only fell into a certain category, you only got so much! Does that make sense? [series of loud ‘no!’s from audience]. No it doesn’t, does it? [even more ‘no!’s from audience] And I’m still pissed! [laughter] Then another thing was the amount of abuse, not just sexual, but physical, emotional, and it was done in degrees. It’s like taking a temperature, if your temperature is so many degrees of fever. Well how high do your feelings have to be hurt? How deeply? To be compensated. That’s how they did the charts. You know that, most of you went through that system, and some of you think I’m talkin’ bullshit. But I’m not, because a lot more didn’t make it. A lot more didn’t settle for that. Since they didn’t want to settle for the way of their thinkin’, they were rejected. And it’s for those people that I’m speaking, that I dared to come up here today and mention this. And on top of that, the Canadian government turns around after apologizing, talkin’ about truth and reconciliation, and then at these meetings they send strongarm lawyers. Strongarm lawyers to refute what you’re sayin’. And to doubt it. And to make light of it. And to cut down the cost it’s gonna cost the government. Now, do you think that’s fair?! [“no!”’s from the audience] Well I’m telling you, it’s going on. And is that the truth and reconciliation of this country for our Aboriginal people? [“no!”’s from the audience]. No it’s isn’t. Not at all. Has never been, and I’m sorry to say, it’s gonna take a lot more of us speaking out to make these politicians become humane! [“yeah!” from the audience]. Shame on them is right! [whoops and loud applause from the audience]. [Sorbey looks at the timer] I got one minute and seven seconds [laughs, laughter from the audience]. You think I’ve said enough? [laughs; “no!”’, “say it all girl!” from the audience] Fifty-five seconds! [more laughs]. Ok. So anyway, those are my beefs. We have to speak out. We can no longer have our hats in our hands with our head bowed. I’m telling you [points to hat on her head], this hat was placed and it’s gonna stay there and nobody’s gonna knock it off! [whoops, whistles, applause and ululation from the audience] I love you all! I love you all so much. And I would just love for the rest of Canada to learn from us. To learn the peace and gentleness that we can have and how we were before they came off the boats [applause]… Thank you, wela’liok, wela’liok [“thank you all” in Mi’kmaq language]. [standing ovation]. Wela’liok. Now I’ll stand for you [stands for audience, claps]. Wela’liok, and I thank everybody. And take to heart, just be who you are. Accept who you are. Respect who you are. But don’t forget to respect others. This is our Aboriginal way. Okay? Any colonialism you’ve learned, try and unlearn it. [laughter] Thank you! [loud cheers and applause]

Ultimately then, as I have sought to illustrate in this chapter, Canada’s truth and reconciliation commission urges residential school survivors to “share their truth,” even as it musters discursive resources that have the effect of re-entextualizing those truths in order to support a therapeutic script, and to provide textual evidence of some progress
made toward reconciliation. As I have attempted to demonstrate, these enjoinders that “sharing is a part of healing” also create double binds for residential school survivors, who are simultaneously expected to demonstrate damage in order to receive a form of compensation and recognition toward their healing, a process that many survivors have found dehumanizing and an actual impediment to healing as they may variously define it.

As the last statement from Katherine Sorbey illustrates so vividly, the therapeutic script of the TRC is far from unanimously accepted: survivor speech may defy the Commission’s urgings to produce healing speech. Survivor speech, in Sorbey’s statement, is not “sharing [as] a part of healing,” but “speaking out.”

To return then to Spivak’s question, survivors do speak, and in a polyphony of voices that I lack space to illustrate with fully representative justice – they speak sometimes haltingly, stammering and sobbing out pains still raw from residential schooling, and sometimes, as in the previous statement, they speak with empowered oratory, and even a measure of parody, or critique. This diversity of voices is nonetheless to a significant extent subsumed – perhaps even suffocated – under the TRC’s mandate to establish and even institutionalize a particular truth that can be reconciled. Katherine Sorbey’s statement above exemplifies a parrhesia that can occasionally be witnessed at the TRC in “act[s] of subjective affirmation and resistance” (McFalls and Pandolfi 2014: 173), that interrogate the TRC’s dominant established truth of therapeusis. But drawing Spivak’s (2010b: 228) analysis, the lack of “institutional validation” for hearing that resistant, subaltern subtext, threatens to muffle those voices and render them unmemorable, unhearable, because of their inability or unwillingness to iconize or exemplify the TRC’s expectations of what constitutes “truth” (cf. Blommaert
et al. 2006: 44-45). And the TRC’s truth has been a fairly conservative one, a truth of residential school survivor pain that has seemed to hinge to a large extent on survivor responsibility for healing and emotional self-management, rather than a more radical or decolonizing truth that might indict Canada for genocide and point to the need for broader, transformative political action (although the TRC’s recommendations, released much later in my research, do begin to gesture toward the need for such political action, as I discuss in the conclusion to this dissertation).

Nonetheless, some residential school survivors have had limited access to even these problematic vehicles for reparation and justice, afforded by the TRC and the IRSSA. I turn now in the following two chapters to the case of Labrador Inuit, and their exclusion from the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement, attempting to show how their perspective, from the margins of Canada’s “truth and reconciliation” process, may offer yet a different vantage point for exploring the role that colonial history plays in the politics of memory in Canada.
CHAPTER FOUR

INTIMATE INTERVENTIONS:
RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS, RELOCATION, AND CHILD
WELFARE IN INUIT LABRADOR

The town of Happy Valley-Goose Bay, where I was based for the majority of my fieldwork in Labrador, is a place of contradictions. It is something of an artificial community, or a patchwork of communities, hyphenated and awkwardly stitched together in an unlikely place that locals often just call “Goose.” Goose Bay was settled in 1942 during the Second World War, on a large sandy plateau in Central Labrador where the Churchill River empties into Lake Melville, far from the traditional Inuit communities in the bays and headlands of the Northern Labrador coast that are still only accessible by air travel. Goose Bay was chosen as a site for a military airbase, jointly sponsored by the Canadian and American governments, and it sprang up amidst a construction boom that now feels something like a ghost town left behind, with vast military barracks lying empty over sprawling distances, now seldom used, except for the occasional influx of squads of young German men, on their year of obligatory military training, using the Goose Bay barracks for cold weather training exercises.

Happy Valley, closer to the water and only tangentially connected to Goose Bay by the main drag of the Hamilton River Road, is a collection of squat, wide bungalows, settled at the same time as Goose Bay to provide a residential area for families who came to the area for work and helped construct the airbase, primarily Settler families from Labrador’s coastal communities of Hopedale and Makkovik (Brice-Bennett 1986: 14).
Johnny Hill, a neighbourhood uphill from Happy Valley, is home to newer and larger constructions, houses for Goose’s well-to-do.

Goose Bay is a figurative and literal end of the road, as far as I could possibly drive in a northeasterly direction from Toronto, some 2,300 kilometres away, when I arrived for fieldwork in October 2012. It is a melting pot of settlers (both Labradorians and from elsewhere), Labrador Métis, and Inuit. Some Innu reside in Goose Bay but the majority live in the nearby reserve community of Sheshatshiu. The town covers large, sprawling distances and does not lend itself to walking, or to bumping into people on the street. In more peripheral parts of town, there is the periodic thrum of skidoos and snowmobiles in the winter, and quads and side by sides in the summer, extremely popular recreational activities and topics of discussion. Perhaps revealingly, among the most popular things to do in Goose Bay is “getting out of Dodge,” as I heard people say, not infrequently. There is an active cabin culture where residents with the means will spend weekends in various seasons at rudimentary cabins at a variety of distances from town. Hunting and fishing are popular pastimes, and in the winter, Labradorians equipped with a skidoo and a keen knowledge of ice conditions may travel to any number of hunting and fishing spots not accessible by road. People laugh about folks they know who will get out of Dodge by driving ten hours return down the isolated and sometimes treacherous Trans-Labrador Highway to Labrador City, the region’s only other comparably sized town, to go to Wal-Mart and Canadian Tire and make purchases from box stores that Goose Bay doesn’t have. People know which day of the week each of Goose Bay’s three small grocery stores will receive their produce shipment by truck.
Inuit from coastal communities settled in Goose Bay early on, though some of these migrations were temporary, and indeed, there continues to be a regular cycling back and forth between Goose and the coast for some Inuit: Inuit from the North Coast come to Goose Bay in search of greater employment opportunities, to attend college or access the tertiary health care that is unavailable on the coast, to escape family problems, and sometimes, to do time in correctional services. In the earliest wave of Inuit settlement in Goose Bay, Inuit arrived with little English and typically found jobs in caretaking services like gardening, garbage collection, janitorial tasks, and domestic services (Brice-Bennett 1986: 32). Times have changed – though Goose Bay is home to more Inuit, or Nunatsiavut Beneficiaries (a distinction I return to in Chapter Five), than any of the
coastal communities, by the time of the 2011 census (Statistics Canada 2011), only 40 residents of Goose Bay claimed Inuktitut as their mother tongue, a number scarcely higher than the town’s 25 Tagalog speakers who have arrived in recent years, Filipinos who staff the town’s lone Tim Hortons and other stores, the product of a bilateral labour agreement between Canada and the Philippines.

In its short history, Goose Bay has known boom and bust cycles and the losses and displacements of a typical Canadian resource town. For some time, it was to a significant extent a single-industry community until the decline of the military air base. The cycle appears to be renewing itself with the construction of the Muskrat Falls hydroelectric development on the lower Churchill River, some 25 kilometres west of Goose Bay, a project commissioned by the provincial energy company Nalcor that caused no end of contention among Goose Bay residents during the period of my fieldwork. “Labrador is just a little corner of their so-called province,” one resident complained at a town hall on the development in January 2013, articulating a ubiquitous frustration about the political dominance of “the Island” (Newfoundland), paid for by the resource riches of the otherwise ignored “Big Land” (Labrador). “We’re here to listen, not to debate,” the Mayor told the audience. The project was a done deal, not to be swayed by the concerns that residents itemized at the meeting, such as methylmercury contamination in the river, changes to ice conditions that would impact recreational activities, influxes of workers, strains on facilities, bottlenecks on the road, the loss of a particular way of life. What was not articulated in the meeting, but seemed to have a silent presence of its own, was how these itemized concerns seemed to form a substrate over a much longer history of losses and displacements in the region, amidst economic
gain for some, a history nearly two centuries older than Goose Bay, which began with British colonization of Labrador and the missionization of Inuit by the Moravian Brethren.

The continuity in these compounded losses troubles the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada’s aspirational project of national memory-making, and its singular focus on the subject of Indian Residential Schools, a problem I discussed in Chapter One. The narrow selection of Indian Residential Schools, for national memory and national redress, and its frequent characterization as that “dark chapter” of our history, both at the TRC and in the broader public sphere of Canadian discourse, allows, as Henderson and Wakeham (2009: 2) have aptly noted, “a strategic isolation and containment of residential schools as a discrete historical problem of educational malpractice rather than one devastating prong of an overarching and multifaceted system of colonial oppression that persists in the present.”

This chapter offers one way of contesting the strategic isolation and selective commemoration of Indian residential schools within the politics of Canadian historical memory. I suggest that an analytical focus on colonial interventions in kinship, including but extending beyond the Indian residential schools, instead highlights the continuity of experiences of family disruption within Labrador Inuit and Indigenous communities more broadly, and allows us to rethink settler colonial history in Canada as in part founded on Indigenous family ruptures. Furthermore, I argue here that colonial interventions in Indigenous kinship, and the idiom of kinship itself, provide a crucial yet underutilized vantage point for analyzing and critiquing the settler colonial project and Indigenous-state relations in Canada.
Loss, as Janet Carsten (2007: 15) reminds us, is an inevitability in kinship, and even a constitutive part of relatedness, such that the “continuity of kinship is… in fact, a history of successive disruptions.” Importantly though, family losses often attain a different order of magnitude in Indigenous communities. Assimilatory colonial projects, in multiple guises, have intervened in intensive and intimate ways in Indigenous family lives, obstructing the transmission of kin-based cultural knowledge, and indeed threatening the very social reproduction of Indigenous families, communities, and peoplehood. In this chapter, I will describe in detail three particularly significant colonial interventions in Labrador Inuit family life: the forced relocation of Inuit communities, residential schooling, as well as the ongoing apprehension of Labrador Inuit children under the provincial Newfoundland and Labrador Child, Youth and Family Services. Perhaps most importantly, these narratives point to continuities between these three colonial projects in the ways they have impacted Labrador Inuit families. In Labrador, child apprehensions by Social Service agencies fed directly into the residential school system, as in other parts of Canada (Blackstock 2009: 30), and agencies continue the work of removing Indigenous children from their communities on the basis of exogenously derived definitions of the best interests of the child, long after the closure of the residential school system. These disruptions echo the family ruptures and alienations that followed from the forced relocations of Labrador Inuit communities, the most recent of which occurred in the late 1950s. Some Labrador Inuit families have experienced all three of these waves of colonial intervention, a compounded triple burden of loss.

As Pauline Turner Strong (2001: 470) has rightly noted, colonial assaults on Indigenous families in North America have “received surprisingly little attention within
anthropology, despite a long-standing disciplinary concern with Native American kinship that extends back to Lewis Henry Morgan’s *League of the Iroquois* ([1851]1962).” Although Native American kinship was a foundational area of study in early anthropology, on the whole much of the literature on change and disruption in Indigenous families originates in other disciplines, such as history, sociology, legal studies, and particularly, social work.

Within anthropology, new directions in kinship studies lend themselves particularly well to a politicized analysis of the entanglements of kinship within the context of Indigenous-state relations. Notably, Susan McKinnon and Fenella Cannell’s (2013) recent landmark edited volume offers a provocative interrogation of the “domaining practices” that have tended to cordon off the study of kinship from the broader politics of life in self-styled “modern” societies. As McKinnon and Cannell (2013: 3-4) argue, this “domaining” of kinship reflects a particularly Euro-American dichotomization of the public and private spheres, and is freighted with the lingering baggage of an evolutionary paradigm that presupposes “that within modern state-based societies, kinship has been relegated to the domestic domain, has lost its economic and political functions, has retained no organizing force in modern political and economic structures and processes, and has become secularized and rationalized.” Drawing on this insight, this chapter explores the ways in which Labrador Inuit kin relations have been entangled in and disrupted by colonial projects, and it scrutinizes the ways in which kinship has come to serve as an idiom in, and technology for, settler colonial governance and statecraft. In order to illustrate the continuities in family disruption that a myopic focus on the Indian Residential Schools precludes, I organize this chapter into the
following sections. First, I begin with an ethnohistorical account of colonial interventions in Labrador Inuit families during the period of Moravian missionary governance, beginning in the late 18th century, and explore how the Moravian Mission sought to create new forms of “family surrogacy,” in ways that connected with and supported the economic and religious aims of their mission. Second, I turn in more detail to the history of residential schools in Labrador, and its living legacies in the experiences of my interlocutors. I explore how residential schooling and its intervention in Labrador Inuit kinship was compounded by other colonial projects that intensified in mid-twentieth century Labrador, notably the forced relocation of northern Labrador communities, and the beginning of child welfare apprehensions by provincial Social Service agencies. In the third and final section, I explore in further detail how residential schooling intertwined with child welfare apprehensions in Labrador, and how ongoing apprehensions of Labrador Inuit children by the province perpetuate its work in significant respects, while also raising important questions about residential school memory and the risks of homogenizing that memory under the universalizing rubric of the residential school “survivor.” I close by opening questions about the implications of these arguments for Labrador Inuit sovereignty, a subject that will be a central focus of the next chapter.

CREATING FAMILY SURROGATES: MORAVIAN MISSIONIZATION AND RESISTANCE, 1771-1949

Labrador Inuit experienced European colonization and missionization well before these processes took hold among the Inuit of other nunaat (homelands). In the late 18th century, missionaries from the predominantly German-speaking Moravian Church
(Unitas Fratrum) acquired extensive land grants from the British Governor of Newfoundland and established permanent settlements or mission communities in Labrador beginning in 1771. The land grant secured them a virtual monopoly over trading in Labrador, and while Christianization was the avowed goal of Moravian settlement, it was deeply intertwined with Moravian economic interests, and in many respects proved secondary to the exigencies of operating what became a *de facto* mercantile colony accruing handsome profits to the Moravian Mission (Brice-Bennett 1990).

While Inuit customarily practised seasonal migration for optimal resource harvesting, their extended time away from mission communities posed a threat to Moravian “spiritual supervision,” and so the Moravian Brethren introduced intensive cod fishing and fox trapping as a means of enticing Inuit into winter residence in mission communities; ultimately, this development would gradually transform Inuit livelihoods, refashioning Inuit into new “commodity producers dependent on an outside market” (Scheffel 1984: 70). The Brethren actively promoted Inuit dependency through the introduction of new technologies such as sealing nets provided on credit at Moravian trade stores, by paying Inuit half the resale value their seal oil, sealskin, fox pelts, cod and other goods would fetch in Europe, all the while charging Inuit double the value of goods imported from Europe so that Inuit incurred both economic and moral debts (Brice-Bennett 1990: 224-225, 233). As Moravian Mission superintendent Rev. F. W. Peacock would himself later conclude in 1947, “It becomes more and more obvious that the White Man’s influence over the Eskimos has been to change them from an isolated,
independent, self-contained race into a semi-dependent labouring class” (quoted in Brice-Bennett 1986: 30)

Traditionally, Labrador Inuit kinship was structured through ilarit, or personal kindreds constituting extended family. The ilarit was the source of economic partnerships, sharing relationships, visiting networks, and often marriages among Labrador Inuit (Ben-Dor 1966: 65-67; Kennedy 1982: 2). With the arrival of the Moravian missionaries, along with gradual Inuit settlement at the Moravian mission stations, Inuit kinship began to undergo a shift from “kin-based band[s]” to “territorially-based community” (Ben-Dor 1966: 139). This social transformation is significant but should not be overstated; Inuit modes of relatedness such as the atitsiak system, in which children are named after recently deceased family members, persisted through Moravian colonial settlement, an illustration of the importance of intergenerational continuities for Inuit families, “link[ing] the existing generations to their antecedents in a vital way” (Brice-Bennett 1999: 27-28).

Alongside the intertwined processes of manufactured economic dependency and conversion to Christianity, the Moravian Mission took a firm hand in its intimate interventions in Labrador Inuit family, domesticity, and sexuality. Converted Inuit were socialized into the Moravian “choir system,” developed in Europe, which organized a mission community into separate groups based on age, sex, and marital status for religious and secular community duties. The choir system was “created and implemented to institutionally replace the family as the primary social unit” (P. Ross 1986: 162) – or to provide “family surrogates” (Brice-Bennett 1981: 106). It offered a means of “explicitly subordinating a Moravian’s familial obligations to his religious duties [to] maximize the
individual’s loyalty to the religious goals of the family” (Gollin 1967: 66). Through church institutions, Moravians established strict prohibitions for modes of relating and creating kin that they deemed illicit, including infant betrothals, polygynous practices of wife-exchange (Brice-Bennett 1981: 98-100), as well as premarital and extramarital sexual relations (Kleivan 1966: 71). Infractions resulted in temporary exclusions from congregation and periods away from mission station that ended with a confession, but the frequency with which these infractions are documented in Moravian archival records suggests that Inuit resented and resisted Moravian interference in family matters and sexual relations (Brice-Bennett 1981: 390-391).

Moravian missionaries also heartily deplored Inuit approaches to childrearing, which they deemed hopelessly liberal. The Moravians felt that Inuit children lacked discipline and morality, and they believed that Inuit seasonal migration undermined children’s education, while sod houses occupied by extended family were presumed to provide indecent exposure to sexuality (Brice-Bennett 1981: 167-168). The exhorted transition from sod houses to wood frame constructions was also, fundamentally, an attempt to reframe affective attachments and kin loyalties, encouraging household composition in the direction of a nuclear family model, with the father as head of household and family representative to the church.

Moravian efforts to institute alternative childrearing practices were, however, met with resistance: in 1865, the Moravian Mission opened an orphanage in Okak Bay, but such an institution was foreign to Inuit, and the orphanage soon closed in 1870 (Davey 1905: 235 quoted in Ben-Dor 1966: 189). Indeed, anthropologists have long noted the ubiquity of adoptions within Inuit communities (cf. Birket-Smith 1936: 146; Guemple
1979), and these adoptions were traditionally governed by Inuit cultural rules. Inuit households were customarily creative, even fluid arrangements that frequently incorporated tiguaq (adoptees). The term tiguaq applies not only to the adoption of children by their extended families, but the adoption of adults, particularly unmarried or elderly women whose own households had disbanded (Guemple 1979: 52-62). Accordingly, orphanhood for Inuit traditionally implied an absence of relatives – or willing relatives – to incorporate the child into a family unit (Guemple 1979: 50). Given the willingness of the ilarit to incorporate orphaned children, Inuit would likely have dismissed the Moravians’ orphanage scheme as a foreign imposition that was ultimately unnecessary.

Within the context of Labrador, it was common for an illegitimate\(^{22}\) child to be raised by his or her maternal grandparents (Ben-Dor 1966: 61), which was simultaneously seen as a way of enlivening the daily lives of Elders, and of providing them with a source of household help (Brice-Bennett 1999: 35). In the wake of the influenza epidemic of 1918, which eliminated more than one-third of the Inuit population in coastal Labrador, the majority of survivors in the hardest hit communities of Hebron and Okak Bay were children, who were subsequently adopted by their extended families in Nain and Hopedale (Brice-Bennett 1994: xxi-xxii). Somewhat more recently, Ben-Dor’s ethnographic study of Makkovik in the 1960s found that 26 of 73 Inuit youngsters were in the adoptive care of extended family members (Ben-Dor 1966: 61), all of whom had been forcibly relocated from Hebron, an episode I will revisit later in this chapter.

\(^{22}\) It bears specifying here that illegitimacy is a social construct derived from Moravian proscriptions surrounding sexuality, and was not therefore traditionally an emic concept among Inuit (Guemple 1986: 20-21).
Rereading the archives of early colonization in Labrador in pursuit of the “trail of kinship relations,” amidst “what are supposed to be the discrete domains of economics, politics, and religion” (McKinnon and Cannell 2013: 15), leads to two main conclusions. The first is that the manufacture of economic dependency, the assertion of political dominance, and the promotion of religious conversion that were inherent to Moravian colonization all required simultaneous attempts to rearrange Labrador Inuit kin relations. This observation underscores the often underappreciated importance of the “intimate domains” in historiographies of colonial rule, where “sex, sentiment, domestic arrangements, and child rearing [all] figure in the making of racial categories and in the management of colonial rule” (Stoler 2006: 23). The development of the choir system and the active encouragement of new, and indeed exploitative, forms of labour and resource harvesting were, in part, predicated on exhorting Inuit to reorient primary affiliations away from the ilarit or extended kindreds, and toward the broader Moravian congregation, along with its prescriptions for respectably Moravian family and sexual lives.

A second conclusion, which will become more obvious in the following section by contrast, is that Moravian interventions into Labrador Inuit childrearing were met with considerable resistance in the early period and were frequently unsuccessful. The Moravians’ attempt to establish an orphanage in the Okak Bay region, for instance, rather quickly failed. The notion of having strangers care for orphaned children would have been bizarre, even anathema, to Inuit, given a ready supply of extended family members who were accustomed, and willing to, adopt orphaned kin or even adults whose household had disbanded and whose economic self-sufficiency was therefore in doubt.
As with the failure of the Okak Bay orphanage, residential schooling was slow to emerge in Inuit Labrador under Moravian colonialism. Moravian schooling of Inuit children was initially limited to the winter months when Inuit families were in residence at the Moravian mission stations. During the remainder of the year, Inuit were away from mission stations harvesting seasonal resources, including summer fishing and the annual caribou hunt (Brice-Bennett 1981: 28), and full year residential schooling was thus impracticable.

Within the twentieth century, colonial interventions in Labrador Inuit childrearing would intensify in several ways. As I will describe shortly, the expansion of residential schooling, and its lived impacts for Labrador Inuit, was intimately interwoven with other colonial interventions in Labrador Inuit kin relations during this period, notably the forced relocation of communities, and the apprehension of Inuit children by newly expanded provincial Social Service agencies. In the following section, I attempt to thread these episodes together as my interlocutors in Labrador recounted them to me: messy and overlapping experiences that created cumulative ruptures and painful disconnects that Labrador Inuit seek to heal and restore.

The narratives that result form a more complicated story, one that challenges dominant representations of the Indian residential schools. While public and state discourses commonly characterize the Indian residential schools as an isolated historical and moral aberration (often through that most hackneyed of tropes, the “dark chapter” of our national past), the narratives I collect and analyze here offer a different perspective, in which it becomes apparent that Indigenous kinship was, and continues to be, a key site
of colonial intervention: a primary focus of the settler colonial project, and an important battleground for the assertion of settler state sovereignty.

DIS/Locations: Residential Schools, Community Relocation, and the (Un)Making of Kin

Full year residential schooling did not emerge in Labrador until the early 20th century, with the establishment of boarding schools in Makkovik in 1902 and Nain in 1926 (Rowe 1964: 184). The enrolment of children began to increase dramatically in the 1930s with the sudden cooperation of Inuit parents, a willingness that appears surprising and certainly surprised the missionaries (Flanagan 1984: 57). While there is historical evidence that Labrador Inuit valued the introduction of literacy provided through early Moravian schooling (Brice-Bennett 1981: 199), “going off on the land” (aullâsimannik23) nurtures a specifically Inuit ecological and cultural literacy in its own right. Harvesting country foods had and continues to have enormous cultural significance for Labrador Inuit – both as a source of communal wellness and renewal and as a mechanism for intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge that is geographically rooted, with lore that is embedded in particular place-names (Anawak 1994; Brice-Bennett 1977; Kirmayer et al. 2009; Maggo 1999), a kind of kin-making through place-making. Over a long period, many Inuit children therefore continued to assist their parents in fishing, sealing, hunting, and trapping, and boarding at schools remained sporadic.

23 I am indebted to Elder Sarah Ponniuk for the Inuktitut translation and her explanations of the significance of this cultural concept.
It was economic conditions and fears of “[e]mpty stomachs” (Flanagan 1984: 58) that compelled Inuit parents to reluctantly concede the education of their children to the Moravian Mission on a more permanent basis, where children could access food and clothing provided by international donations to the Mission while parents migrated for subsistence and resource harvesting activities. The increased enrolment of children in the 1930s coincided with the worldwide Great Depression, but it also followed in the wake of several decades of particularly aggravated economic conditions that were specific to Labrador. In a twist of historical irony, with the expansion of residential schooling, the Moravians’ influence on Inuit childrearing and education would increase, while the economic power of their trading monopoly along the Labrador coast decreased. Indeed, by the early twentieth century, the Moravian trading operations were in a tailspin, resulting from a combination of factors that included increasingly high debts incurred by Inuit on credit at the Mission stores, fluctuating market values and low catches in the cod fishery, as well as rising prices for imported goods (Brice-Bennett 1996: 170). As a
result, the Mission leased its trading interests to the Hudson’s Bay Company (HBC) in 1926, which had long been active in the region, but upon gaining a monopoly, tightened credit restrictions and radically influenced Inuit land use activities by focusing exclusively on the fur trade (Brice-Bennett 1996: 179-180). The HBC encouraged Inuit to pursue intensive trapping over increasingly wider areas, and trapping diverted Inuit from other subsistence activities, notably sealing, and Inuit increasingly resorted to paying for poorer quality food goods at HBC stores, resulting in deteriorating nutrition, health, and general impoverishment (Jenness 1965: 60; Kleivan 1966: 130-132). Ultimately, the HBC itself began running trading deficits and prematurely terminated its trading lease in 1942, forcing the Colony of Newfoundland to assume responsibility over trade stores (Brice-Bennett 1996: 186; Jenness 1965: 67).

While Great Britain had established colonial jurisdiction over Labrador by 1763 and devolved administration of the region to its Colony of Newfoundland (Brice-Bennett 1996: 2), in practice both the Crown and Newfoundland assumed a laissez-faire policy with respect to Labrador, and had been content to delegate most everyday matters of colonial administration in northern Labrador to the Moravian Mission. Newfoundland’s interest in Labrador was however increasing as Moravian power began to wane, prompted in large part by a boundary dispute with the province of Québec in the early twentieth century, which was not resolved until 1927. In its new role, Newfoundland began to administer relief and welfare assistance to Inuit through the trade stores previously operated by the Moravian Mission and HBC (Kleivan 1966: 87) and its jurisdiction over Labrador affairs and Inuit communities would increase dramatically in
the coming years, notably, for the purpose of this discussion, over education and residential schooling.

In the early days of Moravian boarding schools, education had been primarily limited to basic arithmetic and literacy. Singing, scripture, and the recitation of hymns were the pillars of the Moravian curriculum, which prioritized religious instruction and saw the boarding schools as “nurseries of morality” (Flanagan 1984: 51-52). Bible reading and harsh discipline were emphasized, and school maintenance relied on the daily chores of children (Flanagan 1984: 61-62; Macmillan 1951: 65). As one middle-aged Inuk woman reflected to me on her time in Nain boarding school (see Figure 4.3),

It was very stringent. It was still more like teaching us to be labourers rather than learning and education. There was no real focus on goals for the long term to see what we would like to have pursued. We were all given chores. It was horrendous. It was like I said, focused really to teach us to be maids and labourers, eh?
Another interlocutor shared similar reflections about her grandmother’s time in the Moravian boarding school in Makkovik and her pithy but evocative descriptions of that experience:

My grandmother, God bless her heart, she’s one of the older generation and she won’t say much about things. One of my most precious pictures is of her at six years old wearing a pinafore over her clothing with her pair of sealskin boots, standing on the steps of the boarding house. Going to school for the very first time. She won’t speak too harshly, but if you ask her about the boarding school experience, she’d say, ‘my, they was some wicked people.’ And I’ve heard her talk about the Second World War and how they treated the people. And she used the same terminology. ‘My, they were wicked people.’

These accounts echo many other testimonies of the residential school experience throughout Canada. The operation of poorly funded schools often relied in part upon the labour of Indigenous pupils, labour – in keeping with the substandard quality of the education that was delivered – that prepared students primarily for the most menial of occupations, while hindering the transmission of cultural knowledge that had historically safeguarded Indigenous subsistence economies. The early Moravian boarding schools, while emblematic in this respect, were different in others, pointing to a diversity in the Indian residential school experience that is often underrecognized when subsumed under a single national story.

As anthropologist Carol Brice-Bennett (1981: 33) has aptly noted, “[e]very Moravian action had a codicil and often a contradiction,” and perhaps surprisingly, Moravian residential schooling was conducted entirely in Inuktitut, rather than English or the missionaries’ native German. The Moravian Brethren conceived of their mission as a “selective preservation of Labrador Eskimo culture” (Kleivan 1966: 123), and valued the use of the Inuktitut language so long as it was coupled with a professed Moravian faith (and spoke it with a degree of fluency themselves). Indeed, one interlocutor recounted to
me the unusual story of an Inuk family member, Beatrice Watts, who was encouraged by Moravian missionaries to pursue higher education. She eventually obtained a teaching degree and returned to Labrador teach in residential schools, and would later become a prominent advocate of progressive provincial educational reforms.

Elsewhere in Labrador, the International Grenfell Association, a locally founded philanthropic organization with extensive international connections, had launched other residential schools from 1926, including the Yale School in North West River (later Lake Melville High School), the Lockwood School in Cartwright (which replaced the Gordon Orphanage in nearby Muddy Bay), and a mission school and orphanage in St. Anthony, Newfoundland (which some Labrador Inuit also attended). Until the closure of the Yale School dorms in June 1980 completed the transition to day schooling, thousands of children in Labrador attended residential schools. Many children came from Labrador’s north coast communities, where no high school education was available, and boarded at the Yale School in North West River. They were joined by other children from the central Upper Lake Melville Region. Other children from Labrador’s south coast attended the Lockwood boarding school in Cartwright. Children who attended came from Inuit, Settler or Kablunângajuit, and Métis families. Some Innu also attended residential schools, but far more commonly attended Catholic-run day schools where physical and sexual abuse was prevalent (Innu Nation and Mushuau Innu Band Council 1995; Samson 2003b).

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24 Ethnocultural identification in Labrador is a highly complex and contentious subject that would merit an entire dissertation of its own. Labrador Métis predominantly identified as Settlers until the late 1970s (see Kennedy 1997) and have more recently self-identified as NunatuKavummiit or Southern Inuit. In Labrador, the term Settler is widely used to describe the descendants of European fishermen and trappers who settled in Labrador beginning in the 19th century. At least initially, they commonly intermarried with Inuit (but cf. Ben-Dor 1966, Kennedy 1982) and were called Kablunângajuit or “half white” (Ben-Dor 1966: 10) or, as one middle-aged Inuk woman wryly noted to me, those who “live like us but [are] not us.”
Some of the most dramatic changes in residential schooling in Labrador, and indeed some of its most deleterious impacts, occurred after Confederation with Canada in 1949, supporting the allegations brought by residential school survivors in the province in the ongoing *Anderson v. Canada* class action, who have highlighted federal negligence and breach of fiduciary duty to Indigenous peoples. Confederation with Canada in 1949 prompted the province of Newfoundland to take a more directive role in standardizing Labrador school curricula to approximate Canadian standards (Rowe 1964: 184-185) and in enforcing school attendance, assisted by the newly applied federal government policy of withholding Family Allowances from families whose children were not enrolled for an entire school year. This joint federal-provincial policy separated Inuit families, impacting their ability to harvest subsistence resources and transmit cultural knowledge to their children, as the following reflections from an elderly Inuk woman illustrate:

There was some years that I did not want to go to [Nain] boarding school. I was determined to go away with my family for the winter. We were preparing to leave on our motorboat and I think we were ready to travel the next day, and so we were preparing [the house] so that it’d be nice and clean when we come home. And then there was a knock at the door and the only people that knocked on the door those days were the *lablunaak* [white] people, the Inuit people don’t knock on doors, they used to walk in. And when I opened the door there was a whole pile of teachers. I had to interpret to my mother. So I explained to my mum and I said, if I don’t go to school this year, you’re not gonna get my family allowance. And they’re not gonna give you any money the whole time that we’re away. And I don’t know how much I used to get those years, but that’s the only money that she got. Besides selling sealskin boots and stuff like that, that’s how she made money. Even though my father was a really good trapper, we didn’t have a whole lot of money coming in. So she decided that I could stay back so that she don’t lose the family allowance. And that’s when I become almost rebellious with the school, because my parents were not getting any younger anymore and I wanted to look after them. Because in our culture, those years, if our parents took care of us when we were small, we took care of them when they got older.

In significant respects, Confederation with Canada and the expansion of both provincial and federal bureaucracy in Labrador actually *intensified* processes that the
Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015b: 5), among others, have declared cultural genocide. As one male Elder noted to me, referring to the most damaging impacts of colonialism,

I think it started from 1949. I will say that the province, when it joined Confederation, they were given a blueprint to assimilate Aboriginal people. And I could use the term cultural genocide. Take the culture and take it away from the Aboriginal kids.

What is important to underscore here is that the province’s late entry into Confederation did not, in and of itself, make Labrador Inuit experiences of colonial interventions truly distinct or exceptional cases. To the contrary, Newfoundland’s entry into Confederation in Canada meant that developments in Labrador would increasingly resemble – and count as part of – colonial interventions and processes happening elsewhere in Indigenous communities across Canada. The post-World War II era in which the province joined Confederation was a period of large-scale nation-building projects and the development of the welfare state, but the rollout of welfare and social assistance operated rather differently for Indigenous peoples than it did in settler Canadian communities. Indigenous communities witnessed a rapid expansion in the Indian Affairs bureaucracy, and a proliferation of welfare interventions that were premised on the surveillance of Indigenous families and the fundamental requirement that they assimilate to Euro-Canadian norms – as Hugh Shewell (2004: 265) aptly puts it, “[t]he ongoing application of liberal welfare procedures continued to erode First Nations’ collective autonomy… [and] made each individual Indian a dependent object of professional intervention” (see also M. Mitchell 1996).

Within Labrador, this expansion in bureaucracy included the establishment of provincial jurisdiction over residential schooling, although the provincial government
would continue to delegate actual instruction to the Moravian Mission and the International Grenfell Association. A highly consequential change during this period was the 1952 provincial policy decision that required Moravian-run residential schooling, once conducted in Inuktitut, to be provided exclusively in English (Brantenberg 1977: 346-347). This policy was arguably the single most important contributor to Inuktitut language loss in Labrador: as demonstrated in a survey of 2,200 Labrador Inuit conducted in 1999-2000, only 15% of respondents claimed Inuktitut as their first language and an even smaller 9.5% claimed to ever speak the language at home (Andersen and Johns 2005: 197); higher rates of language retention among the older generation at the time of the survey would indicate that this acceleration in language loss is comparatively recent. Language loss, in turn, has estranged many Labrador Inuit from key cultural concepts and their own self-identities, which in turn deleteriously impacted both kin relations and the transmission of cultural knowledge, as illustrated in the following reflections from a bilingual Inuk Elder:

It’s so heavy. The younger generation, take my grandchildren and my great-grandchildren, and the younger generation that are in prisons. They have no knowledge! [Their] parents were from Nutak or Hebron or Okak Bay, you know. But they don’t have no knowledge. We were forbidden to speak our language, and the children, when they became of age, they were sent to North West River. And there they had to speak in English. So when they went back home, a lot of times when they went back, some of them didn’t know how to speak our mother tongue anymore. So there was a lack of communication between the parents and their child. And some of them maybe look at their parents as strangers. They tried to communicate the best that they could. But sometimes some things got lost, I guess. Hm.

The following account of residential schooling from a middle-aged Inuk man poignantly illustrates the impacts of these losses of cultural memory and identity, as he
traverses memoryscapes of friends and family reeling through and enduring, in various ways, the legacies of residential schools:

I’m waiting for the day when the federal government will step up to the plate and apologize for the injustice that we went through. There are people who have lost their language, their culture, their traditions. There are people who became alcoholics, who became drug addicts. There are friends that have committed suicide and all of this stems from the residential schools, from what we went through. I’ve got cousins, I’ve got friends who have kids of their own. And they don’t know how to parent. But they’re trying very hard to be parents. They can’t parent because they were never taught. They were never taught any of those skills or they were never taught how to be a parent because we were took away and we lost a lot of our values. And it’s sad because we never should have. We never should have lost it. When they got home, you know, people were lost. They were totally different people. When people came back home there were like, what do we do? Some people were ashamed of their own parents because of the way they did things – setting up, fixing up sealskins and drying fish and all the traditional things. They were ashamed of it when they got home because they got used to a different type of lifestyle. They got used to the white lifestyle that they were living at the time. And when they got home, they were like, “I don’t want to do this! Can I still be that Inuk that I used to be?” It was like they had to be retaught again how to be an Inuk.

This intensification of cultural losses and ruptures in kin relations coincided with and was compounded by another series of dislocations in mid-twentieth century Labrador. Although these did not explicitly target Indigenous child removal, like residential schooling they engendered dramatic ruptures in Inuit family life, sociality, and household economies. While the most traumatic relocations or “evictions” (Brice-Bennett 1994) in the living memory of Labrador Inuit were the forced closures of Hebron and Nutak in the late 1950s, several other Inuit communities had been closed by the Moravian Mission and Hudson Bay Company in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, treated as little more than “commercial stepping-stones” (Brice-Bennett 1994: xx) in their efforts to dominate trade in coastal Labrador. With the closures of these communities, many Inuit had regrouped in Hebron, which became the northernmost Inuit community in Labrador. Here too,
forced relocation was not an experience that was unique to Labrador Inuit but affected numerous other Indigenous peoples throughout Canada (see e.g. Bussidor and Bilgen-Reinart 2000; Marcus 1995; Samson 2003a; Shkilnyk 1985; Tester and Kulchyski 1994). Forced relocations were a major focus of Canada’s Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996), which concluded that although government actors typically rationalized relocations as “address[ing] the perceived needs of Aboriginal people” (414), these displacements more were more frequently carried out to make colonial administration more convenient – or as the RCAP pithily puts it, “To Make Things Easier for Government” (416).

As noted earlier, the ultimate decline in fur trade prices and consequent collapse of the exchange economy and credit system led to an unprecedented wave of government involvement in Inuit affairs in the 1950s in newly confederated Labrador and elsewhere in Inuit Nunangat (Tester and Kulchyski 1994: 4; see also Marcus 1995), alongside the expansion in Indian Affairs bureaucracy that I described above. In Labrador, the Newfoundland provincial government largely disdained the Inuit harvesting economy and promoted an industrial development strategy based on centralization and wage employment, constructing the new military airbase in Goose Bay as well as radar sites that were to form part of the Cold War’s Distant Early Warning (DEW) line. This agenda converged with the Moravian Mission and IGA’s interests in reducing their operating expenses by concentrating Inuit in fewer communities (Brice-Bennett 1994: 66). These institutions collectively withdrew their services from Nutak and Hebron in 1956 and 1959, effectively forcing Inuit to relocate against their will to communities
further south in a chaotic resettlement scheme where promised housing was not immediately available.

While Nutak families were primarily relocated to Nain, the new northernmost community in Labrador, Hebron Inuit were resettled by quotas in Nain, Hopedale and Makkovik, severing established networks and family ties (Brice-Bennett 2000: 11) as well as the intergenerational transmission of traditional knowledge. Host communities were not notified prior to these arrivals and some resented Hebron Inuit for substantially increasing their population and placing strains on local resources. The relocation impoverished Hebron Inuit, rupturing families who had previously enjoyed a measure of self-sufficiency through resource harvesting in established economic networks, and fostered a dependence on welfare – what anthropologist Robert Paine (1977: 3) has termed “welfare colonialism.” These traumatic changes demoralized Hebron Inuit and sparked a dramatic rise in alcohol abuse, family violence, accidental deaths, and criminal offences that would further contribute to a breakdown in family relations (Brice Bennett 2000: 11-13). Relocation remains a living intergenerational legacy, and many Inuit I interviewed told me that descendants of relocatees remain overrepresented in the justice and child welfare systems.

Forced relocation was not a colonial decision based on purely economic agendas; given the interrelatedness of family and livelihood, this disruption in Inuit self-sufficiency has corresponding destabilizing effects on families. If, as theorists have argued (e.g. Corntassel et al. 2009; Coulthard 2014; Wolfe 1999, 2006), settler colonialism’s distinctive feature and raison d’être is the dispossession of Indigenous lands, this dispossession is underwritten by an intervention in Indigenous kinship that
must be understood as fundamental for settler colonial administration. The following reflections from an elderly relocatee from Hebron help to illustrate this point:

I remember just before we were relocated, that they had a meeting up in the church. [We] were told that [we] were never gonna be separated. They were gonna keep the families together. But once we were leaving, when we got down the dock, that person got told, ‘you’re going to Nain,’ and that family was told, ‘you’re going to Hopedale,’ and our other family was told, ‘you’re going to Makkovik.’ So that’s how they separated everybody. I think they had an idea that if all these families stayed together, they would have been stronger, you know? Something like maybe they would be able to move back to Hebron if they help each other. But a lot of people were separated. There were a lot of people who hadn’t seen each other for so many years. I started to notice that people are different than they were, from before? There was a lot of violence and there was a lot of drinking, and a lot of children got took away from their families. Some of them never to return. People basically all along the coast started to lose their children. Some of those children never came back. I always want to do something for those children because some of them are out in Newfoundland, some of them are all across Canada somewhere. (emphasis mine)

I find a striking historical parallel here between the expansion of provincial and federal bureaucracies in Labrador in the post-Confederation period, as occurred elsewhere in Canada, and the corresponding intensification of interventions into Labrador Inuit kin relations, through increased enrolments in residential schooling, forced community relocations, and (as I will detail more fully in the following section) the beginning of a wave of child welfare apprehensions with the expansion of the provincial Department of Social Services. The strength of Labrador Inuit kin relations threatened the expansion of colonial jurisdiction, as the previous quotation intimates, because, I would argue, extending provincial and federal authority required establishing legitimacy that was itself in part derived from logics and idioms of kinship. Anthropologists have long noted how state interventions in Inuit societies are frequently justified through paternalistic discourses that posit the state as a father or elder brother, and that infantilize Inuit by insisting upon relationships of “tutelage” (Paine 1977: 78; cf. also Parsons 1970:
The following quotation from the first Director of the provincial Department of Northern Labrador Affairs, an excerpt from the DNLA’s 1951 Annual Report, offers a particularly vivid illustration of this paternalistic, kinlike rationalization for colonial governance:

I was impressed by the desire of the Eskimo to take on more and more of our civilization. Perhaps this may be aptly expressed by comparing him to a younger brother holding out his hand to us and saying ‘May I come with you?’ If we try to drive him back he will go his own way, and perhaps be lost in the storm, and perish. On the other hand we may take him by the hand as an older brother ought to do, if he stumbles, as he is likely to do, we must patiently help him to his feet so that we may go forward into the future together (quoted in Kennedy 1977: 283).

As Janet Carsten (2007: 25-26) has argued, state ideologies commonly legitimize themselves through rhetorics of kinship and community, “co-opt[ing] the language of kinship” in ways that “constrain the forms of familial life.” In Indigenous contexts, the state’s attempt to suppress alternate forms of kinship is also an attempt to eradicate Indigenous forms of sovereignty (McKinnon and Cannell 2013: 25-26) and nullify traditional social and political orders by replacing them with an enmeshment with and dependency upon the paternalist state. Intervening in Indigenous families, and securing control over the “care” of the Indigenous child, are thus not mere by-products of settler colonialism, but in fact necessary foundations for the establishment of settler colonial governance. In many Indigenous communities, as Barbara Bodenhorn (2013: 140) notes, “governmentality was introduced in textbook Foucauldian fashion: populations were managed for the general public good; parental resistance was discursively interpreted as evidence of a lack of proper care for their children, so their compliance became part of the process.”
Securing dominion over the care of Indigenous children, in assimilatory projects, was crucial to supplanting the role of the children’s parents and families in transmitting cultural knowledge, and ultimately targeted Indigenous nations’ capacities for social and cultural reproduction of themselves as Indigenous peoples. The post-Confederation period in Labrador has, to a great extent, perpetuated Moravian attempts to create new forms of family surrogacy, as discussed in the previous section, but such efforts have intensified due to the proliferation of institutions and policies that take Indigenous kin relations as their focus of intervention. That Labrador Inuit families persist in continuing to navigate these assaults is testament to their endurance and resourcefulness.

As I have argued in this section, increased enrolment in residential schooling, compounded by the disruptions of forced community relocation, both marked an intensification of colonial interventions into Labrador Inuit kinship that continued, but ultimately exceeded, the reach of the Moravian missionaries. In the following and final section of this chapter, I will turn to those “children [who] never came back” and focus on how the ongoing apprehension of children by social service agencies, which also began in the early post-Confederation period, perpetuates colonial intervention in Labrador Inuit kinship in important ways. The interweaving of child welfare apprehensions within and beyond the residential school system illustrates not only a greater diversity in residential school experiences than is often acknowledged in official discourse, but also problematizes the notion of residential school memory as an isolated experience, rather than one that is intermeshed with experiences of other colonial interventions.
“WARDS OF THE STATE”: CONNECTIONS IN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS AND THE CHILD WELFARE SYSTEM

In September 2013, Brown v. Attorney General of Canada was certified as a class action lawsuit, representing some 16,000 survivors of Indigenous child welfare apprehensions in Ontario during the “Sixties Scoop,” named in reference to the decade in which such apprehensions became increasingly commonplace. Certified six years after the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, the Sixties Scoop lawsuit inaugurates a new struggle for reparations between Indigenous peoples and the state. Separate actions on these two issues might appear to compartmentalize Indian residential schools and child welfare apprehensions as two separate instances of federal malfeasance, when in fact, as I will argue, they are profoundly interconnected processes. Indeed, apprehensions of children by social services agencies historically fed into the Indian residential school system (Blackstock 2009: 30), and continued its work in important respects.

Apprehensions of Labrador Inuit children by Newfoundland’s Department of Social Services (now the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services of Newfoundland and Labrador) most likely started in the early post-Confederation period, when the provincial government had begun to expand its jurisdiction over social and political affairs in Labrador. The oldest adult survivors of the child welfare system I interviewed in Labrador were apprehended in the early 1960s, a timeline that is congruent with the broader Sixties Scoop throughout Canada25. A female Elder reflected on this period and described the expansion of provincial jurisdiction as a usurpation of

25 Through my research affiliation with the Nunatsiavut Government, I submitted requests for information to the provincial government, and was advised that neither the Department of Child, Youth and Family Services nor the Department of Education possessed statistics on the number of Labrador Inuit children apprehended by Social Services.
Inuit authority, appropriating the roles of Elders and kin more broadly in the governance of communities and social life:

Everything changed when the work of the Inuit or the Elders were taken away after Social Services came in, after RCMPs came in, ‘cause the Inuit in the communities, the Elders, community Elders were the ones who were telling you, if say there was physical violence in the house, they went to that person’s house, and they had a meeting with the family and told them, this is what you’re not supposed to be doing. They worked together to make something work. And then when Social Services came to do children, at the time there were kids who were taken by other families, who were reared up by family members. They weren’t adopted or they weren’t fostered, they were reared up. So they grew up into that family, became an extended family, like my grandfather took a couple of people and they became extended family to my mom, and they always call my mom ‘sister.’ And now you have to go through Social Services to have to be evaluated. Sometimes Social Services doesn’t go about it the proper way.

The Elder in this statement makes an emphatic and critical distinction between adoption or fostering – exogenously derived practices based on colonial definitions of child welfare – and rearing up – the raising of children by extended family members within a community open to fluid kinship and living arrangements, in ways that preserved the transmission of cultural knowledge even in the absence of biological parents. In apprehending Inuit children in the interest of child protection, as they defined it, Social Services extracted children from this readymade, functioning system of childrearing for orphaned or otherwise neglected children. Such practices initiated a process of painful disidentification from Inuit kin, culture, and heritage, and placed such children in a new subject position, as “wards of the state.” This very terminology suggests a relationship of guardianship with almost kinlike connotations, even while this experience of wardship in all cases I was privy to included appalling neglect, as intimated in the following reflections of an adult survivor who endured multiple forms of grave abuse as a “ward”:  

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I was a ward of the state, I believe it was called. Because it was welfare officers who made me a ward of the state. And they supposedly put me in safe places. And in each of those places I was in, I wasn’t in any safe place. And they were supposed to be looking in on me. And they didn’t. They just put me in there and forgot me. I really, really want to get answers from them. There weren’t social workers, welfare officers coming! And asking us how life was!

One of these purported “safe places” in which this informant was placed was the Yale School in North West River, the residential school operated by the International Grenfell Association, and it is at this point that I wish to trace in more detail some of the enmeshments of these two systems – and their differential impacts on the lives of residential school survivors.

While many students who attended residential schools in Labrador experienced abuses and cultural losses, former students of the Yale School impressed upon me that children were differentially vulnerable to abuse within the community of North West River where the residential school was housed. As one middle-aged woman noted, “There was favouritism for some people and there was really strict, even abusive behaviours to some kids.” One Inuk Elder philosophized that for the IGA school administrators, “it [was] easier to work with… those who look more white than brown,” referencing the cultural, racial, and phenotypic variability on Labrador’s north coast, and he suggested that fairer skinned students were able to “learn a trade or be given the support to higher [their] education or to work through the system much more smoothly than others who [were] looked at as different.” The disparities in residential school experience were most clearly described to me by a middle-aged woman who arrived at the school in the wake of a child welfare apprehension:

Some people went through the dorm and they… just didn’t see the underbelly of life here. I guess you had to be a welfare kid, or somebody that nobody cares about. [The worst abuses are] not going to happen to the ones that had family, and
family that are vocal. But check with the little meek families! Check with the Eskimo families. Speak with somebody whose parents didn’t know the language very well, and that maybe not only didn’t know the language very well, they drank a lot! See how they’re believed! Because today people are saying there’s no racism in Labrador. Speak to a little brown person! They can tell you all about the racism.

Another residential school survivor, herself a regular attendee rather than a “welfare kid,” was nonetheless quick to concur that a hierarchy of abuse was apparent at the school, with the welfare kids subject to the worst offences:

I’ll always say that the ones that were hurt the most in the dorm system were the child welfare kids. They had no one looking after them, they were there all year round. They didn’t get to go home for any holidays or anything like that. There was no one there for them, except the whims of the house parents for the most part. Unfortunately when there’s discussions around the dorm system, especially for North West River, it’s not clarified that there was a couple groups of kids and these were the most vulnerable of the vulnerable. So they’re kind of lumped in all together?

This perspective adds a further layer of complication to a problem I discussed in the previous chapter, in reference to the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement’s Independent Assessment Process (IAP) for claims of sexual and serious physical abuse. As I noted in that chapter, the IAP’s reduction of traumatic experiences to a “point-based scale” and “clinical taxonomy of injuries” (Henderson and Wakeham 2009: 11) raises difficult and ethically troubling questions about how to justly recognize the experiences of residential school survivors, in all their diversity, without imposing what Miriam Ticktin (2011: 173; cf. also Fassin and Rechtman 2009) calls a “hierarchy of suffering, where only a few are deemed morally legitimate, worthy sufferers.”

Here a competing but no less compelling problem asserts itself. Differences in residential school experience point to a central tension in the making of memory and meaning in the wake of that experience. In this work of meaning-making, former
students in Labrador revisit and rework memories of residential schooling. Transformations in memory accompany transformations in former students’ own self-concept and subjectivity as *residential school survivors* (Vanthuyne forthcoming).

The new category of identification as a trauma survivor has emerged in the Indigenous community in dialogue with public discourse on the Holocaust experience, Vietnam War, and the feminist movement against spousal and child abuse (Million 2013: 88-91; cf. also Fassin and Rechtman 2009). While the creation of residential school survivors as a community of belonging can help affirm individual experiences and coordinate collective political action (as in the work of the Indian Residential Schools Survivor Society and the National Residential Schools Survivor Society), it also risks homogenizing residential school memory and privileging the memories of particular individuals over others. Some former students I interviewed in Labrador proudly identified as residential school survivors, while others did not. Some claimed that they resented the label and felt that it essentialized and narrowed down their fundamental humanity. Others felt the term had become too closely associated with local residential school survivor “poster children,” and with a triumphalist model of sobriety and cultural recovery that was not equally attainable for all former students, particularly those who experienced residential schools, relocation, and child welfare apprehensions, a triple burden of loss I will soon explore in more detail, in describing the ethnographic scene of North West River as it formerly was, as a residential school community.
The Boarding Cottages

The year before Yale School was opened a school cottage or boarding house was built, this was known as Gibbons Cottage. Most of the money for this building was donated by Miss Martha Gibbons of Philadelphia who was for years hostess at the Grey Nell Hospital Indian Mission. In 1928 another cottage was added, known as the wood Cottage, the money being donated by Mrs. George Wood of U.S. L. Between 50-75 children who live outside of North West Point stay at these cottages which open September 15 and ends June 10.

This is Gibbons Cottages on the left, Cottage at present boarding nineteen children.

Figure 4.4 – Excerpt from a 1945 Yale School yearbook. The lower photo shows the Wood Cottage, which would come to house many of the boarding school’s “welfare kids.” Photograph courtesy of Evelyn Winters.
Indian residential schools have often been characterized as “total institutions” (Goffman 1961), since the schools were often located in isolated areas where students were incarcerated and subjected to intensive surveillance by school personnel (Kirmayer et al. 2003: S17). The IGA’s Yale School operated somewhat differently, as the school was located in a community and divided between several buildings. The Senior Dorm housed older high school students, most of whom came from coastal communities in Labrador with no high schools of their own and who returned home for the summer at the end of the school year. Wood Cottage and later Todd House housed the Junior Dorm, which along with the Infants’ Home held children who had been orphaned or were apprehended by the provincial Department of Social Services and were “year-rounders,” as one middle-aged man put it, staying on in the summer when other students had returned home. As another man called residential school “Ground Zero,” and pointed out that “year-rounders” left behind at school in the summer were often taken on “special trips” by teachers outside North West River which in reality provided opportunities for sexual abuse. One middle-aged woman reflected on the especial vulnerability of these children and shared the devastation of having discovered years later that a family member was sexually abused while in residence at the junior dorm:

I don’t know very much about all the abuse that occurred in Todd House. But it was easier sometimes with those kids. They were young. They did not have anyone to advocate on their behalf. They were isolated, and if they weren’t isolated, whoever was using them found a way for them to be isolated. Especially from their siblings. And although there were some victims that had brothers and sisters, somehow those brothers and sisters did not know because that deception was so deep. Their older siblings didn’t know! And had their older siblings known, some of these would have stood up and done something. Oh yes! Just because we’re Inuit doesn’t mean that we’re always quiet, meek, mild, nice, respectful. I know some of these people very, very well. Oh, they would have done something! As young as they were. They woulda done. But they didn’t know!
Residential school memory in Labrador encompasses a wide spectrum of experiences that hang uneasily together. A partnership between the IGA and Carnegie Corporation made special grants available to more privileged students so that they could pursue higher education elsewhere in Canada and the United States. Some graduates continued on in technical schools, business schools, or nursing schools, in institutions such as the Pratt Institute, Wentworth Institute, and Berea College (Curtis 1963: 56-57; Rowe 1964: 186; Wall 1960: 36). Conversely, as the previous interview excerpts suggest, children who had been orphaned or apprehended and who boarded year-round were disproportionately vulnerable to predation from members of the community and oftentimes, abuse by teachers – or “house parents” as they were locally called, another peculiar deployment of kinship terms – as well as other children.

Many of the residential school “year-rounders” described earlier came from the most visibly racialized Inuit families – rather than Kablunângajuit families – and/or families who had experienced the forced community relocations of the 1950s. A mental health professional helped me to understand that for particular families, traumatic memories of family rupture and child removal were compounded through the cumulative experiences of community relocations, child welfare apprehensions, and residential schooling:

Have to remember too, the ones who are having a really hard time, they’ve been in the welfare system since they were kids. So there’s all that traumatic issues that they have. Like some of their parents was relocated from either Hebron, Nutak or Okak. And they themselves have been in the child welfare system. And

Abuse between students in residential schools is occasionally acknowledged in survivor testimonies – and discussions of such abuse did surface, albeit very infrequently, in my interviews. It remains, however, to at least some extent, a taboo topic, and with good cause – survivors may be concerned that portrayals of violence between children in the schools might contribute to an accounting of residential school history in which Indigenous children are made to share in the blame for the pervasive violence of a structure that was not of their creation. For further discussion of lateral violence in Indian residential schools, see the work of Anishinaabe scholar Amy Bombay (2014).
in the residential school. Like, they’re dealing with three different things for now, plus their own stuff. So like, four different major traumatic issues.

Long after the closure of the “dorm” in 1980, child welfare apprehensions continue in Labrador and perpetuate the work of intimate intervention into Labrador Inuit kin relations and cultural reproduction. In the absence of transparent statistics on the numbers and life trajectories of Labrador Inuit children who were apprehended by Social Services, a detailed ethnographic account of these “children who never came back” is made difficult and the picture of their lives, experiences, and tribulations remains blurry. The following reflections, however, are illustrative of the hardship and confusion of this trajectory for many former Indigenous “welfare kids”; they were shared with me in interview by a female Elder who had once worked in the capacity of a cultural reference point and resource person who helped to facilitate the transition of former welfare kids seeking to return to Labrador as adults:

I was one of the people that was a contact if [fostered children] turned eighteen and [could] go back home. And I’d meet those children up at the airport, explain what to expect when they got to Hopedale, Makkovik, and Nain. That it’s not the same thing as they grew up with in St. John’s or wherever they were grewed up. And some probably still don’t have any running water, some people don’t have telephone, some people have other problems. There was one particular guy that tried to go to Makkovik, oh, I cannot forget that one. I picked him at the airport, he was dressed up in a sports jacket. Shiny shoes, pressed slacks. Trying to go back to Makkovik, trying to go back to his people. He was so much out of place in the people that were going to travel with him? He was looking at everybody, how come everybody’s dressed up this way, how come I’m dressed up this way? I could see it. Anyway, he went there. He tried to go to his dad. I don’t know how long he stayed there, but he was back in no time. He’s still out in St. John’s. Even though he’ll always be Inuk for the rest of his life, he’s just… it’s just gone from him, eh? Like, he knows he’s an Inuk. But that’s all he knows, that he is. There’s nothing he can do and nothing anybody can do. There are other people who tried really hard to adjust. And some of them managed to adjust, but a lot of time more than fifty percent of them couldn’t do it. They couldn’t. There was no more connection. They were really dislocated from their family. They’d lost their language, they didn’t know how to go hunting. It was really hard watching
those children. They tried to come home. I call them the lost kids. There’s still some out there somewhere, they’re everywhere. They’re everywhere.

The former provincial Department of Social Services has undergone multiple bureaucratic restructurings that appear to compound difficulties for impoverished Labrador Inuit families struggling to retain custody of their children. Perhaps the most consequential was the creation of the Department of Advanced Education and Skills, formerly under the umbrella of Social Services, which among other roles is responsible for income support programs. Crucially, this means that income support programs now form their own administrative silo apart from Child, Youth and Family Services, despite the intimate interconnection of these issues, creating new obstructions and forms of red tape for Labrador Inuit families whose primary barriers to retaining custody of their children are typically un(der)employment, substandard housing, and meagre earnings with which to feed their children. A CYFS employee explained to me how such a policy decision impacted families in coastal communities, taking an example from his recent caseload:

Income support has now shifted away and there are some detriments in that regard, as far as I’m concerned. Many of the people that we’re dealing with as you can imagine are people that are poverty-stricken. Prime example of what I had this week, there was a family who’d had no income for the last six or eight weeks and they’re being treated as just another person who’s making an application within a bureaucracy. The families need food on their table. So that system, when it was together, we were all one department. We had access to a pile of money that would provide income support. And it was easy to deal with these emergent situations with families. There’s no food banks here, but they send them to a community freezer or you send them to family and this goes on for weeks and weeks.

This employee sympathized with the plight of Labrador Inuit families, and emphasized that what is often glossed as Indigenous child “neglect” derives more from
poverty and material determinants of wellness than from abuse from parents, as such. However, he was quick to note that many colleagues did not share his views:

What I see is frontline people who I consider to be disablers rather than enablers? We need to work with them to help solve their problems whether it’s no food on the table, whether it’s an addictions issue. The biggest challenge that we face in terms of our foster care recruitment is that the foster parents of the past and present have not received the support that they need. 100%, no question in that regard. And that’s the first reason they will quote when you talk to people that have fostered as to why did you give it up: ‘because I didn’t feel I was supported by the agency.’ By CYFS. Listening ear, access, financial support. A lot of the people that do come here from outside come with one intention and that’s to fulfil their contract and get some experience and move on. They’ve done nothing to explore background of the culture, they do not integrate with the community. They do not come and show respect and understanding. Not all. But the majority.

Indeed, based on my observations in Nain and Hopedale, staff in Labrador’s coastal communities in sectors under provincial jurisdiction (the provincial Labrador-Grenfell Health department, the schools, and CYFS) are frequently, although not exclusively, a transient settler workforce: many social workers in CYFS are recent B.S.W. graduates on limited-term contracts, often from Newfoundland, focused primarily on gaining experience and, perhaps, repaying student debt more quickly by electing to work in remote fly-in communities. During the period of my fieldwork, the situation was beginning to evolve, as the Nunatsiavut Government had recently finished a pilot project that trained almost two dozen Labrador Inuit social workers in a Bachelor of Social Work program delivered by Memorial University of Newfoundland that was collaboratively adapted to reflect Labrador Inuit context and perspectives. This is a promising development, but there are significant challenges to overcome in negotiations of jurisdiction and indeed, Labrador Inuit sovereignty in child welfare.

One Nunatsiavut Government official reflected to me on the limitations and disappointments of self-government negotiations with Canada and the Labrador Inuit
Land Claim Agreement of 2005, saying that “right now it’s just like more gradual handing over of small little pockets of responsibility, or small little pockets of money.” She emphasized the need for devolution of the justice system, child welfare and education, which remain controlled by the province but are critical to Labrador Inuit sovereignty. Under the current provincial Child, Youth and Family Services (CYFS), Inuit are dissuaded from fostering children who have been removed from other homes in their community because of the surveillance and adversarial practices of CYFS – despite the longstanding tradition of child fosterage among extended families. CYFS and the Nunatsiavut Government coordinated foster home recruitment campaigns in Labrador’s coastal communities beginning in 2010, as if in presumption that the lack of available foster homes was a matter of suitability or perhaps even motivation. One woman, formerly a foster parent herself, explained the situation differently, attributing the lack of available foster homes to overcrowding and poor housing in communities, and the stigma of being monitored by CYFS as a foster parent, which she described as a sensation of being constantly “watched.” Additional childcare duties often result in wage loss for the foster parent. Another professional in the social services sector characterized child apprehensions as “legalized kidnapping,” asking me rhetorically and yet incisively precisely who is authorized to determine whether an Indigenous child is (un)safe, citing the lack of “cultural safety” Inuit experience while navigating a “white institution,” staffed to a significant extent by outsiders.

At the present time, the primary destination for apprehended Labrador Inuit children that CYFS is not able to place in foster homes in their own communities is the predominantly Pentecostal settler community of Roddickton, on the island of...
Newfoundland, and I was told that there were anywhere between 30-50 foster homes in this community of little over 1,000 residents. The fostering of Labrador Inuit children in Roddickton was inevitably a sore topic when it came up in conversations. I was bemused to hear Labrador Inuit invariably pronounce the community’s name as “Roddington,” which to my ears sounded like “Rottington.” I never determined whether this was a deliberate slight or a mispronunciation, for fear of appearing an arrogant white southerner correcting Labrador Inuit on their English. This linguistic puzzle aside, there was no question that that the outsourcing of children to “the Island” was a source of tremendous resentment for Labrador Inuit, and for justified reason, as one Nunatsiavut Government official explained:

Because the children are going to Roddington, we’re settin’ up more residential schools! ‘Cause they’re going to a foreign environment. Maybe in some ways worse than residential schools ‘cause at least we were in a room with other people! They’re one or two kids in a home. That’s foreign. Strange, and they’re out of their culture and their language and their food and traditions. It’s like an economic development opportunity for a community that had no fishery or whatever. On the backs of *us*. Backs of our children.

The Labrador Inuit context therefore powerfully illustrates Cindy Blackstock’s longstanding contention that the apprehensions of Indigenous children by child welfare agencies merely replicate residential schooling in a different guise (see e.g. Blackstock 2008). The ongoing and interconnected legacies of residential schooling, relocations, and child welfare apprehensions for Labrador Inuit demonstrate that colonial policies of Indigenous child removal and family rupture greatly exceed the IRSSA and TRC’s narrow window of recognition for Indian residential schools alone, troubling the very project of creating national memory of a history that is far from past.
The outsourcing of Labrador Inuit childrearing to a downtrodden (though still comparatively more affluent) region of Newfoundland that has witnessed the collapse of the fishery and the local pulp and paper industry raises critical questions about the ways in which intimate interventions in Labrador Inuit kin relations, and the creation of Labrador Inuit child “wards,” may provide critical resources for provincial administration and colonial projects more broadly. In this scenario, Labrador Inuit children do indeed take the alarming form of an “economic development opportunity,” as the official above suggests, an economic resource to be shuffled around between communities as part of a haphazard provincial economic development strategy.

The question of who is authorized to determine child safety, or the lack thereof, posed by my interlocutor somewhat earlier, raises critical questions about jurisdiction, sovereignty, and what counts or is validated as “expertise.” I will pursue these questions in further detail in the following chapter, where I will examine another domain of intervention into Labrador Inuit lives that is increasingly salient in the contemporary moment, and whose stakes are no less politically important: mental health.
CHAPTER FIVE
ON TRAUMA, SOVEREIGNTY, AND THE LOCATION OF EXPERTISE

One chilly winter afternoon of fieldwork, I arrive at a workshop on intergenerational trauma that is to be delivered specifically for residential school survivors in Happy Valley-Goose Bay. A representative of the institution sponsoring the workshop has granted me permission to attend, although it had at first been uncertain that the workshop would even take place, as enrolment, free of charge, had been initially too low to justify the expenses, including the flight in for the workshop leader.

Entering the office building and proceeding to the lounge in which the workshop is to take place, I recognize the vast majority of faces in the room. Just shy of twenty attendees are milling around a long rectangular table waiting for the afternoon session to proceed. Some of them I have already interviewed, and others I simply know from around town. Some individuals present, interestingly, never attended a residential school. Smiles and warm greetings are exchanged, and as I help myself to coffee and cookies that have been laid out, I am drawn into friendly conversation with John,27 a male Elder I am acquainted with, whose house is a short walk away from where I stay in the “Valley.”28

“How was the morning?” I ask him, having missed the first half of the day’s workshop due to a prior commitment.

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27 All first names given in this chapter are pseudonyms, and chosen to reflect the age of the individual. Many Elders possess Germanic first names acquired through baptism into the Moravian Church, and I have chosen other typically Moravian first names for individuals of this generation.
28 Happy Valley. The older community in the now amalgamated Happy Valley-Goose Bay, the latter community having sprawled out from the erstwhile military airbase.
“Oh, you know, nothing we haven’t heard before,” he tells me with a wry grin.

It is not long after this exchange that I am approached by the instructor of the workshop, a white Southerner⁴⁹, who crouches down next to my chair and quietly but earnestly tells me that after consultation with the workshop leaders, it would be best for me to leave. The morning session had been “heavy,” he tells me, and it would be best not to have an outsider present, a non-residential school survivor. I politely defer and pack my belongings. John reminds me to come over to his house for tea and visit again sometime. I pass Selma, a female Elder in the corridor with whom I have a friendly relationship, and to whom I have turned more than once for advice. She is perplexed to see me leave so quickly and I tell her I was asked to leave.

“Have you told them you’ve been meeting with us?” she asks me incredulously, with a flush of indignation. I tell her I will simply respect their wishes, and she promises to update me on how the five-day training unfolds.

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The scene I have just described reflects the most central, unresolved tensions in my fieldwork with former students of residential schools in Labrador, and, more critically, speaks to some of the most central, unresolved predicaments in their own daily lives, and in the struggle for Labrador Inuit sovereignty more broadly. As I left the workshop that day, and drove my car alongside the steep mounded snowbanks that dot the bleak winterscape of Goose Bay, I was struck in the pit of my stomach by a sense of discomfort.

⁴⁹ In ethnically diverse communities of Northern Labrador, where Inuit coexist with Innu, local Settlers, and other racialized minority, Settlers from Southern Canada are often distinguished in this way, with connotations that index an “outsider” perspective to the North as much as non-Indigenous racial identification.
and absurdity in reflecting upon the interaction that had just transpired. There I had been, a white Southern anthropologist in conversation with a white Southern psychologist, conferring on whether my presence was appropriate among a body of residential school survivors (clumsily attributed but targeted as the objects of intervention nonetheless) and whether I should be privy to expressions of that other related – and conflated – object, *intergenerational trauma*, in absence of any discussion with participants themselves. Compounding the irony was the fact that as a condition of reciprocity in return for my permission to conduct research in Nunatsiavut, my community research partner, the Nunatsiavut Government (NG)’s Department of Health and Social Development (DHSD), had requested me to conduct an evaluation of this intergenerational trauma programming, ongoing in the region since at least 2009, which one professional touted to me a priori as a “best practice in Inuit mental health.” I did, however, end up attending other such trainings, and my analysis thereof will form the ethnographic heart of this chapter.

The emergence of trauma as both social construct and diagnostic category is a comparatively recent development but with complex origins, drawing promiscuously from Freudian psychoanalytic theory, debates over “shell shock” in military psychology, the increasing diffusion of the Nazi Holocaust as a paradigm for human suffering and atrocity, as well as social movements against sexual abuse (Fassin and Rechtman 2009; Leys 2000; Young 1995). Initially, emergent concepts and models of trauma were vigorously and at times hotly debated, but over time there have been fewer challenges to the validity and applicability of the trauma concept, particularly since the inclusion of post-traumatic stress disorder in the third version of the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-III), stamped with the powerful authorizing imprimatur of the
American Psychiatric Association. In many respects, the concept of trauma has become naturalized as a biological fact, treated as common sense and even commonplace in Euro-American popular self-help culture. Indeed, as sociologist Eva Illouz (2003: 98) contends, “trauma has become a main trope of modern identity.”

This broader history has also shaped the diffusion of the trauma concept in Indigenous communities, but engagements with the trauma concept also emerge from more localized histories, are salient in different ways, and, as I will illustrate in this chapter, have distinct cultural and political stakes. First, in Indigenous contexts it is not simply trauma that is the object of discussion, but *intergenerational trauma*, or *historical trauma*. While the two variants of this term are taken to refer to the same phenomenon, it has been my experience – both in Labrador and at the National Events of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission – that Indigenous people more commonly refer to intergenerational trauma, while the term historical trauma appears to be more frequently used in scholarly writings. Both terms are plagued with ambiguities. Describing trauma as *intergenerational*, within Indigenous contexts, implicitly indict Indigenous parents as vectors of transmission for traumatic experience, mapping on readily – and problematically – to dominant stereotypes of pathological Indigenous families (Maxwell 2014). Conversely, attributions of historical trauma are not always consistent in the way they describe or aetiologize history: as Waldram (2014: 370) notes, there is a tension between accounts that reference discrete historical episodes, such as Indian residential schools, and more generalized causal factors, such as colonialism writ large. Krista Maxwell (2014: 408) aptly underlines the need to distinguish the distinct voices and traditions that have become subsumed under the umbrella of historical trauma discourse;
as she suggests, “historical trauma discourse may be understood as the recent offspring of two older discourses which were once incongruous: first, native healing, whose proponents have long been concerned with the restoration of social reproduction; second, colonial professional discourse pathologizing indigenous parents and families, thereby legitimating assimilative interventions targeting children.” Indigenous trauma and healing mean different things to different actors, which is not to say that these divergent perspectives enjoy equal discursive power on an even playing field.

Athabascan scholar Dian Million (2013: 58-59) pinpoints a resurgence in native healing in the 1970s, including traditional cultural practices of therapeutic intervention, Alcoholics Anonymous programs, community health discussions, and pan-Indigenous or borrowed Indigenous healing practices. These modalities are not always discrete; their boundaries blur through a sort of “program drift” (Waldram 2014: 377) and they coexist with provincially run mental health and addictions services to form what Million (2013: 50) argues is “a dense amount of psychological technologies… to interpret [Indigenous] affect and emotion.” The timing of this resurgence of native healing is no historical accident, but coincides with an intensification of processes of Indigenous family disruption in the twentieth century, where Indian residential schooling interlinks with lived experiences of related colonial policies, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter. Healing in this context implies a cultural and political imperative to rebuild Indigenous community and re-suture family ties (cf. Kirmayer and Valaskakis 2009).

While recourse to healing practices in Indigenous communities intensified in the 1970s, trauma was not the explicit, stated target of healing interventions until much later. Scholars in the emerging discipline of Indigenous postcolonial psychology were of
differing minds in their diagnosis of the problem: Lakota social work scholar Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart (Brave Heart 1999, 2003; Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1995) introduced the term “historical trauma response” into discussions of Indigenous mental health, while Tewa/Apache psychologist Eduardo Duran and Opelousas/Coushatta public health researcher Bonnie Duran (Duran and Duran 1995) posited a Native American “soul wound.” Oneida psychologist Roland Chrisjohn and colleagues (Chrisjohn and Young 1997) took a dissident view of these developments, arguing that the notion of a “residential school syndrome” in effect constituted a medicalization of colonial injustices.

Increasing discussion of the trauma concept within Indigenous scholarly circles in the 1990s no doubt cross-pollinated with the outpouring of Indigenous testimonies of abuse during the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in the same period, which I described in detail in Chapter One. Within Inuit Labrador, most of my interlocutors agreed that it was only within the last decade that people began speaking of trauma. Even as late as 2003, conference proceedings for “‘A New Beginning’: Mental Health and Residential Schools” (Labrador Inuit Health Commission 2003) make no reference to trauma, and frame Inuit social suffering instead in the context of mental health and addictions. After the formation of the Labrador Inuit Drug and Addictions Program and in 1983 and the Labrador Inuit Health Commission in 1985, recurring conferences were held over the next twenty years, returning to discuss what many Labrador Inuit considered the most pressing community concerns: alcohol abuse and youth suicides. Those conference proceedings likewise made no mention of trauma, and community member recommendations were pragmatic: 24-hour crisis lines, safe houses, more opportunities for employment.
As Alison Crawford (2014: 341) notes, referencing Languages Commissioner of Nunavut Alexina Kublu, in Inuit contexts “oral histories frequently describe the intervention of elders when people felt they needed to receive counsel,” but the concept of intergenerational trauma is not an emic one, and can be rendered in Inuktitut, albeit in complex fashion, as “sivulirijat aksururnaqtauqkuurnikugijangat aktuiniqaqsimaninga kinguvaanginnut” – “the trauma experienced by generations past having an effect in their descendants.”

As one Labrador Inuk woman told me, “When I was in university in the eighties what people are calling today intergenerational trauma, I used to call inherited grief. That was what I coined it as, for myself.” Nowadays, however, talk of trauma is ubiquitous in Labrador, and though it incorporates earlier understandings of social suffering – such as this woman’s earlier articulation of her inherited grief – trauma is more frequently framed and discussed in ways that reflect exogenous and indeed dominant conceptions of mental health and Indigeneity. Indeed, as a dominant and frequently medicalizing construct, trauma seems to individualize pain as a personal pathology, in contrast to this woman’s notion of inherited grief, with its connotations of sadness or bereavement over the losses contained in living intergenerational legacies.

The ascendancy of trauma discourses is correlated with the increasing prevalence of mental health programming and interventions in Labrador that advance the framework of intergenerational trauma, such as the program which I described in the opening vignette to this chapter, and which I will shortly explore in greater detail. Training programs using the intergenerational trauma model have been ubiquitous in the region.
since at least 2009, and have been offered to health and social service professionals as well as community members.

The central proposition that I will advance in this chapter is that the ascendancy of trauma discourses, and the growing ubiquity of interventions taking intergenerational trauma as their object, coincide and intersect with struggles for Indigenous sovereignty in complicated and troubling ways. Sociologist Nikolas Rose (1990, 1998) has extensively and incisively theorized the increasing contemporary prominence of psychotherapeutics and the psy disciplines in their public sphere, as well as their amenability to neoliberal political projects and forms of governance: for Rose (1990: 7), “the aspirations of government” can now be “articulated in terms of the knowledgeable management of the depths of the human soul,” through a “regulative technology of expertise” (216) made possible through a legion of “experts in the management of the self” (11).

Within anthropology, E. Summerson Carr (2010) has recently issued a compelling call for the study of expertise, one which would have us denaturalize expertise as a noun and as a taken-for-granted attribution, and scrutinize expertise instead ethnographically, as a verb, an action, or a process of “enactment.” As she suggests, “expertise emerges in real-time interaction as actors and institutions struggle to authorize powerful texts that will be read as such by others” (19).

In the following section, I will ethnographically explore intergenerational trauma trainings in Labrador as a terrain in which expertise is enacted, a terrain of “interactional routines” that “enact and establish expert knowledge of psychic interiors” (Carr 2010: 26), but at the expense of Labrador Inuit self-definition, and, indeed, self-determination. These implications for self-determination converge with, and compound, the results of
Indigenous land claims agreements pursued since the 1970s, in Labrador and elsewhere, in which the founding vision of Indigenous self-determination has been disappointed and diluted in forms of self-government that instead resemble formations of semisovereignty, where relations of dependency are perpetuated through a manufactured reliance on outside, non-Indigenous expertise and agendas. It is here that I observe a striking connection between the proliferation of “psychological technologies” (Million 2013: 50) for interpreting the Indigenous psyche; indeed, establishing the Indigenous psyche as a domain of exogenous power/knowledge (Foucault 1980), and the signing of land claim and self-government negotiations, a largely co-optative process that subsumes Indigenous peoples on previously treatyless, unceded territories into new intergovernmental relations that hamstring their capacities for developing autonomous expertise and both defining and exercising Indigenous modes of governance (cf. Coulthard 2014: 66-78; M. Mitchell 1996: 340-364). Elucidating this connection leads to my central critique of the intergenerational trauma paradigm as I have seen it formulated and deployed in Labrador, particularly by non-Inuit. Medical anthropologists (e.g. Abramowitz 2014; Antze and Lambek 1996; Fassin and Rechtman 2009; James 2010; Ticktin 2011; Young 1995) have repeatedly drawn attention to the risks inherent in diffusions of trauma paradigms through mental health interventions: uncritically applied, the trauma concept is prone to medicalizing psychological distress that is frequently social and political in origin, and, though framings of trauma as shared or intergenerational might seem at first glance to collectivize experiences of distress, in practice they are more likely to individualize and pathologize distress than to facilitate understandings of suffering that indict broader structural inequities and encourage social and political responses.
While the foregoing critique is equally important for my particular case study, I follow the lead of Kirmayer and colleagues (2014), who have identified a need for greater analytic attention to ways in which the uptake of intergenerational or historical trauma paradigms may have different entailments in Indigenous communities within contexts of settler colonialism. My case study responds to this need by arguing first that outside-led intergenerational trauma pedagogies and newly established models of Indigenous self-governance are both premised on relations of continued dependency that devalue or even discredit Indigenous knowledge in favour of outsider expertise. Even more crucially, I suggest, for these newly established Indigenous self-governing institutions, whose sovereignty and range of jurisdiction are constrained well below their founding aspirations, the trauma paradigm as a recipe for individual healing and self-management becomes a convenient recourse and a crucial resource at a juncture where their governmental capacity to effect broader social and political change remains so compromised. In the following section, I ethnographically describe intergenerational trauma programming as I observed it in Labrador, before placing such programs within the broader political context of self-government, in the latter part of this chapter.

**BECOMING “TRAUMA-INFORMED”: ON THE LOCATION OF INUIT MENTAL HEALTH EXPERTISE**

While my previous attempt to attend an intergenerational trauma workshop had left me beating a hasty retreat, I found myself invited to a 5-day workshop offered to local social workers, held in February 2013. Some twenty-odd social workers were in attendance, all women. Most were Inuit, and recent graduates of an ambitious and visionary Nunatsiavut Government initiative to develop an Inuit Bachelor of Social Work
program in collaboration with the Memorial University of Newfoundland, adapting their four-year B.S.W. program to include Inuit knowledge and cultural content. Among the objectives of this initiative was to increase the presence of Labrador Inuit social workers in the area of child welfare, with an eye to eliminating some of the problems that arise with a largely transient and non-Inuit workforce in this sector, which I described in the previous chapter.

We assemble the first morning in a large conference room, floored with tiles flecked with labradorite, the iridescent feldspar mineral indigenous to the region that shimmers silver-blue when you look at it askew. Tables are set up in angles around the room, shaped to face the instructor, an inclusive U. There is a series of introductions by the instructor, who has been flown in from Southern Canada for the event, and staff local to Goose Bay. We are inducted into a pair of warm-up exercises. Blank paper and pencil crayons are distributed along the table. We are instructed to draw self-portraits with our non-dominant hand, and our eyes closed, as if in invitation to perceive ourselves in an unprecedented way. A second batch of paper is handed out. This time, we are told to write down our innermost secrets, but invisibly, without touching the paper. We all proceed to pretend to write, some of us tentatively, half-heartedly, while others mime scribbling feverishly, with almost ostentatious flourish. The instructor commands us to exchange papers, willing us to entrust our secrets in moving them about the room, until we no longer know whose secrets are purported to lie on the blank pages we are reading, in this invisible, inaudible confessional of our innermost fears and thoughts. I don’t know if my fellow participants have been made to feel safer, and equalized, or exposed,
as if the exchange of these papers might reveal invisible stigmata that could incriminate us nonetheless. I don’t know anyone here.

The invitations to perceive ourselves from a different paradigm – with an unfamiliar hand – and to entrust ourselves to sharing with the group segue into a group activity, in which we are broken up into small groups and asked to generate questions on trauma and healing. I join up with a few of the social work graduates. They are a receptive audience already well versed in the intergenerational trauma paradigm, or “trauma-informed,” as one woman puts it. I sit with them as an observer as they generate a flurry of questions. “How not to retraumatize?” “How long is healing, compared to the timeframes required in systems [of funding, health services and programs]?” “Who to start with [in treatment] if [there is] intergenerational trauma? The first generation [that experienced it] or the person [client] who’s with you? The youngest [family member]?” In small communities, you can know the family history more easily, one social worker points out, answering the latter question, to which others nod in agreement.

We return to the larger group. Curiously, the instructor proceeds with the workshop proper, beginning to lecture rather than answering the questions about trauma generated in the smaller groups. It is as if asking questions about trauma is enough, or that it is enough to be framing questions in that way. Historicizing our topic of discussion, the instructor tells us that the understanding of trauma is based on understandings of what is healthy that go back to ancient cultures. It draws from “ancient” spirituality and “modern” quantum physics. It is seemingly timeless, and universal; veridiction seems to come from everywhere and yet nowhere in particular, though the word trauma itself, he tells us, originates in ancient Greek, and refers to a “hidden
wound,” not unlike (I think to myself), our blank papers of secrets. Trauma, then, comes from everywhere and nowhere, and it is everywhere. “Trauma is in the eye of the beholder,” the instructor tells us, and “a very individual experience,” as if to answer with these maxims all the questions generated in our small groups. He proceeds to review slides on the neurobiology of the trauma response, and distinguishes three types of trauma. With Type I, single episode trauma, recovery happens mostly on its own, assuming social support is present. Causes could include accidents, natural disasters, assault, or the death of a loved one. A person’s emotions and thoughts are disconnected and the job of a social worker is to help them piece together their feelings with the bigger picture. Type II is ongoing and repetitive trauma, we are told, and can stem from chronic, severe childhood neglect, a history of physical or sexual assault, or war-related experience. The interfaces between body and mind, the social and emotional are all more fragmented. Type III, our primary focus, is intergenerational trauma, associated with recurrent fatal epidemics, starvation, colonial oppression, assimilation, relocations, cultural losses, the introduction of alcohol, residential schools, economic dependency, and ongoing trauma. The list of causal factors has multiplied considerably. The instructor acknowledges that the concept of intergenerational trauma has only emerged over the past ten or so years – as I noted in the previous section – and that it is not unanimously accepted that historical trauma is transmitted to the next generation. A lot is not yet sure in trauma psychology, he admits.

And yet, despite these caveats, the instructor proceeds to make a number of definitive pronouncements about the reality of intergenerational trauma and displays no hesitation in illustrating their applications to Labrador Inuit society and history. Trauma
can “wash away the core of a people,” he tells us. The spirit is “buried, hidden,” the soul “lost.” Culture is “deadened, numb, in shock mode.” People don’t understand what is going on. In his narrative, contact with Europeans led Indigenous people into “shock,” and a “ripple effect” where overwhelm produced a “numb phase,” prompting denial, triggering “survival mode,” where energy was reduced in the interest of minimizing harm, making Indigenous behaviours short-term, dedicated to physical survival and to the survival of offspring. Indigenous people were in “stunned silence,” and a “traumatized group is easy prey for domination.” “Passivity becomes almost a way of life.” Resistance is futile – “the net effect of Indigenous resistance is getting overpowered, warriors ending up dead or in jail.”

The instructor’s gloss of Labrador Inuit history provides a glaring example of a problem that scholars have identified as an increasingly central concern (e.g. Gone 2014; Kirmayer et al. 2014; Maxwell 2014; Waldram 2014): formulations of the historical trauma paradigm are themselves often ahistorical, relying on what Gros Ventre scholar and psychologist Joseph Gone (2014: 402) considers “oversimplified and overgeneralized uses of history,” which risk flattening and trivializing the complexity of Indigenous histories, and particularly, histories of Indigenous resistance. The written historical record for Labrador Inuit following European contact is unusually detailed, in good part because the Moravian Brethren were meticulous note-takers of social life on the North Coast of Labrador, and their records are not always triumphant accounts of successful conversion and profitable merchant trade. Rather more interestingly, they document the Brethren’s frequent perturbation over Inuit acts of noncooperation and resistance to the moral doctrines and economic relations through which the Mission
sought to govern the coastal communities. As I noted in Chapter Four, Inuit historically resented Moravian interference in family matters and sexual relations, and frequently flouted Moravian moral codes and proscriptions, in full knowledge of the moral sanctions this would incur in mission communities (Brice-Bennett 1981: 390-391, 1996: 161). Similarly, Inuit bitterly resented the policies of Moravian trade, which had once seemed to promise new possibilities through its introduction of new technologies, but while the Moravian Mission profited from its exports overseas, provision of store credit led to Inuit economic dependency, impoverishment, and an increased vulnerability to famine (see Chapter Four). Particularly after the 1850s, with an increased recurrence of famines, Inuit protested the economic bondage that the Brethren had manufactured; the Moravian Mission’s Annual Reports make frequent references to theft, assault, and arson at the Moravian mission stores (Brice-Bennett 1990: 242). Even conversion to Christianity, the ostensible objective of the Moravian Mission, in practice was often secondary to the operation of the Moravian mercantile colony, and conversion only began to accelerate in tandem with the increasing economic dependency of Inuit (see Brice-Bennett 1990, 1996). Inuit living further north than Hebron, the Moravians’ northernmost permanent mission community, retained their economic self-sufficiency for much longer, and accordingly, were better positioned to resist Moravian attempts at conversion (Brice-Bennett 1996: 93-4); indeed, the last remaining Inuit to convert to Christianity were members of the Onalik family ilarit, residing in Aulasivik in 1933 (133), over 160 years after the establishment of Moravian mission communities.

Returning to the scene of the workshop, I wondered whether my fellow participants shared my deep offence at this rendering of Inuit history as aetiology, as a
simplified vector for trauma, which after all was their people’s history, and not mine. Responses were subtle and polite, but seemed to carry the seeds of lingering doubt. One social worker noted the tendency to “overblame” victims, and asked whether the idea of transmission in utero wasn’t too fatalistic. “People aren’t doomed,” she said.

“I want you to stay in the doom and gloom because your ancestors couldn’t feel it,” the instructor replied. “Notice our tendency to push away from the heavy stuff. It’s okay if we feel that because [y]our ancestors didn’t have the opportunity. Where could they go with all those feelings?” He commended the importance of “staying with the wounding, instead of the flight into healing.” “I’m angry about the history I don’t know,” another woman said, implicitly conveying an unease with the history that was put on offer – its dissonant pairing of decontextualized abstraction and a kind of dramatized animalization of its Inuit subjects, who in this account are deadened, numb, stunned into silence, shuffling forward thinking only of their survival and that of their young, herdlike “easy prey for domination.” “I’m angry that I don’t know more about the Aboriginal me,” this woman added. The instructor thanked her for her expression of anger, praising her for doing for her ancestors what they couldn’t do for themselves.

I am struck by this real-time interactional negotiation of historical expertise (Carr 2010: 19). In an Indigenous context where the ruptures in families engendered by colonial policies are a source of real sorrow, and losses of traditional knowledge are still keenly grieved, the instructor’s response to questions about his accounting of history is a piercingly targeted appeal. In contemporary Inuit societies, as Lisa Stevenson (2006) has observed, memory acquires a central role in the wake of losses incurred through cultural genocide, manifesting itself as an “ethical injunction to remember,” a kind of self-
conscious engagement in which memory is something “one must actively strive to create, the result of a certain kind of discipline one assumes, and actions one takes” (181-182). In the context of the intergenerational trauma workshop, this invitation to remember, sympathize with, and even absorb ancestral pain is a distressingly well-targeted emotional appeal to these Inuit social workers. The relationship of these women to their collective pasts is emotionally charged with a sense of loss – loss of family, cultural traditions, the Inuktitut language – and this claim, loosely held together by the tenets of intergenerational trauma, that they are processing their ancestors’ feelings, could be evocative and powerful.

As I have attempted to illustrate in my description of this ethnographic encounter, the diffusion of the intergenerational trauma paradigm has relied on multiple, mutually reinforcing enactments of particular kinds of expertise. First, it relies on enactment of historical expertise that is decidedly inexpert by scholarly standards, but, as Carr (2010: 23) reminds us, “successful enactments of expertise hinge on the would-be expert’s ability to establish an interpretive frame through which to view that object.” In this instance, an interpretive frame for intergenerational trauma is established and made compelling through references to hallowed ancient wisdom and spirituality, and by extension, to a primordial Labrador Inuit wisdom lost through the “wash[ing] away [of] the core of a people,” but palpably, if amorphously, available to these women in a kind of affective inheritance. What the instructor says “resonates,” he is fond of saying, “because it connects with what they already know as Aboriginal people.” He often follows this comment with another about himself that draws on the trope of the once arrogant and redeemed non-Aboriginal discovering that “it’s more about learning than
sharing [what he knows],” a dramatic and blatant reversal of precisely whose expertise is being enacted through these workshops.

Expertise is enacted through reference to quantum physics and the neurobiology of trauma, an amalgam of scientific and quasi-scientific discourse that constitutes, for those not versed in it, what Carr (2010: 20) calls an “expert register,” “a way of speaking that is recognized as a special kind of knowledge and that manifests in interactions of such.” Anthropologists have long made penetrating observations of the way nature, science, biology, and the body are often put to symbolic and discursive work as favoured instruments for naturalizing social facts (e.g. Franklin and McKinnon 2001; Lock and Farquhar 2007; Strathern 1992; Yanagisako and Delaney 1995). I am less interested in responding to that eloquent conversation with the ethnographic material I have to offer than to reflect on the curious and troubling uses of history and memory in the enactment of expertise in intergenerational trauma. History and memory are highly malleable here, and yet rhetorically and affectively powerful, particularly in an Indigenous context where loss of knowledge is discussed and keenly felt, where much memory, it is believed, has been lost through family ruptures, colonial dislocations, and perhaps also simply the vagaries of time. Memory of one’s people’s history is affectively and ethically important, and yet elusive. Presentations of the intergenerational trauma framework, as a means of knowing one’s people’s history, seem to instil an ambivalence in Labrador Inuit: they are affectively compelling, and yet seem to leave some workshop participants uneasy, with longing to know more of their own history, and with lingering uncertainties about the “Aboriginal me.”
This particular workshop, held in February 2013, offers but one example of the diffusion and popularization of a construct that is increasingly taking hold in Inuit Labrador. Talk of trauma, I soon found, is ubiquitous, and trauma has now become the dominant language for expressing personal and collective losses, and experiences of colonial and political violence. For Kirmayer and colleagues (2014: 307), trauma discourses lend themselves to “looping effects,” and “the more popular the historical trauma concept becomes the more likely individuals are to think about their problems in this way and to produce narratives and attributions that confirm the model.” As in the presentation of Inuit history in the workshop I described, and its erasure of Labrador Inuit resistance, “Indigenous cultural identity may itself come to primarily signify ancestral victimization… and [an] overgeneralized form of historical consciousness” (307) that “may not serve the emancipatory goals of Indigenous decolonization” (311). In speaking the language of trauma, as Million (2013: 93) notes, Indigenous peoples may “become empowered by trauma’s discourse at the same time as they become its subjects,” a perplexing double bind. And indeed, it is hard to deny that programs such as this are distinctly pedagogical, and implicitly strive to create certain kinds of subjects – “[t]he colonized subject [becomes] a trauma victim” (Million 2013: 6) and here “trauma-informed” subjects, such as these recent social work graduates, can spread the good word in their communities.

As Lisa Stevenson (2012, 2014) has observed, contemporary health and social development interventions in Inuit regions target social suffering, mental health and addictions, and suicidality in a flurry of “reeducation campaigns” (Stevenson 2014: 82), often carrying the implicit and urgent imperative that Inuit become proper biopolitical
subjects and cooperative participants in a particular “regime of life” (70). Inuit also “frequently fail to cooperate with the regime of life and… its grid of intelligibility.” And indeed during my time in Labrador I heard dissenting perspectives that questioned some of the underlying assumptions of the intergenerational trauma framework, even while using the language of trauma to express their critiques. One common concern was that dominant representations of trauma and addictions seemed to almost dehumanize the persons being referred to, and trivialized the cultural knowledge they potentially possessed, as illustrated in the reflections of these two Elders:

They [health and social service professionals] also have to involve Elders more [as program resources]. For their opinions. For their advice. They don’t want to know, eh? You know, to be an Elder, a lot of times from my experience, just because due to addiction, they don’t look at a senior that is active in drinking, but don’t drink everyday but drinks when he gets money. They don’t seem him or don’t want to see him or her. My God, when they’re sober! And they walk their own shoes, my God! That individual, although it be act different drinking sometimes, they got some knowledge and wisdom! Hey? We got to look at their knowledge of what they can give back to the community. We’re dyin’! We dyin’ out.

I feel bad for people who come from the Coast and they’re just walkin’ around, couple of people that we know. Maybe they got a life that we don’t know anything about. Use them too, you know? They may look shabby and may be drinking and that but maybe you could ask them a day that they’re not feelin’ like that, to see. I know Inuit are very shy. And they feel that they can’t speak, but maybe if they could ask them. Some people are too “oh, but she drinks, or he drinks.” But maybe they could learn from them, those street people that walks on the street. Maybe they can even make skin boots for all I know! Maybe they can clean seal skin! How do we know what they cannot do or do? Maybe they knows more Inuksititut than some of us do in the community. You know, like, use them!

In similar ways, both of these Elders implicitly question the kind of enactment of expertise that appears in the intergenerational trauma workshops and in programs of its ilk, where expertise is presumed to travel in a unidirectional flow from the outside,
“trauma-informed” *kablunaak*\(^{30}\) consultant, and founded on the “idea that Aboriginal people need to be educated about their trauma” (Waldram 2014: 381). In the first quotation, Selma reflects on how dominant constructs of mental health and addictions may perversely contribute to a trivialization of Elder cultural knowledge, and she is emphatic that an inability to maintain consistent sobriety in no way cancels out an Elder’s acquired expertise. As James Waldram (2004) has noted, the trope of the “Traumatized Aboriginal” far too readily maps onto the more established trope of the “Alcoholic Aboriginal,” entrenched stereotypes that beg for a more critical and reflexive interrogation of “[w]hat… we think we know about North American Aboriginal mental abilities, mental health, and mental illness, and on what basis… we think we know it” (3).

The quotation from the second Elder, Sabina, refers more directly to an often transient and revolving group of North Coast Inuit who arrive in Happy Valley-Goose Bay in search of employment opportunities or to leave behind family problems in the fly-in communities. They typically arrive homeless or insecurely housed, and I have heard them termed “the walkers” for their conspicuous perambulations about town. They are often stigmatized and shunned by Goose Bay folk, particularly the Settler population, and are not well served by health and social development programs. But as Sabina points out, the tendency of Goose Bay folk to ignore and invisibilize them also overlooks their own potential areas of expertise, expertise that they lack opportunities or encouragement to enact.

Sabina went on to critique the mental health programs as they were currently delivered, proposing alternatives that she believed promised greater efficacy:

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\(^{30}\) White (Labrador Inuktitut).
The thing is to look ahead! The reconciling of memories is all past now, it’s time to heal. And think positively. But how long are we going to wait is the thing! we know how people are feeling, we know they’re feeling depressed, we know they’re angry about being in the residential school, but you can’t carry that forever! You’ve got to start understanding what you can do about it. And I think that the Elders or people who went through such things are the ones that [staff] should be working with! Somehow there’s got to be a better way to teach our Inuit the Inuit way. We were more quieter people, like if anyone died, I think they went out on the land and did more like walk, to get away from thinking. There must be Elders or anyone who’s experienced in talking about resilience. The reason why we keep going.

She illustrated this perspective with reference to an extended family member, who took off on her own following the death of her husband, putting up a tent away from the community and remaining there “‘til she was over her hurt.” Sabina’s remarks unearth a number of critical questions with respect to the diffusion of intergenerational trauma models. It is notable that, while she too would refer to trauma, her remarks evidence a concern over fellow Inuit developing a kind of intergenerationally traumatized self-concept or subject position – “you can’t carry that forever!” She emphasizes instead the importance of forward motion, a position that is not unsympathetic but which calls for moral deeds and right action, an attitude I heard expressed by a number of Elders. Another Elder, John, critiqued the emphasis in mental health programming on talking circles, a therapeutic modality often associated with Indigenous peoples in generalizing ways, but on which Labrador Inuit frequently expressed differences of opinion:

They tell you, you got to talk about it. And every meeting you have, they’re saying you have to talk about your problem. But there’s a time you have to stop talking about your hurt or whatever and then talk about more positive stuff and what you’re gonna do.

One woman, Noreen, spoke disapprovingly of people “wearing” their trauma, and expressed praise for individuals she knew who had experienced significant traumatic events but had nonetheless persevered and attained significant personal accomplishments,
or served their communities in important ways. This Inuit cultural ethic of righteous deeds and moral action in service of the collective – expressed to me in different ways by a number of Elders – contrasts rather sharply with the instructor’s earlier admonishment to “stay in the doom and gloom because your ancestors couldn’t feel it.” I also want to parse a second provocative suggestion in Sabina’s analysis of mental health programs. Although politely phrased, her comments implicitly question the process through which non-Inuit outsiders are assigned jurisdiction as the locus of expertise on Inuit mental health. Teaching in “the Inuit way,” in her assessment, meant “get[ting] someone who can speak about an experience [they] had,” “Elders… who went through such things” themselves. Selma concurred with Sabina’s point, suggesting that the knowledge possessed by older generations of Inuit who have survived traumatic experiences was itself a form of expertise that held immense value for younger generations in distress. In her estimation, appropriate mental health support meant enabling Inuit to “see where their ancestors walked,” both literally and figuratively, developing self-knowledge in a way that is grounded in knowledge of history, culture, and the land. As Selma commented,

Let our people get our people to do the work. They don’t recognize our Elders as professions in their own right. We have Elders now and even individuals who have so much knowledge that’s not recognized as a profession. That could be used as a teaching tool to hand down.

While our instructor, above, may claim that the intergenerational trauma paradigm “resonates… because it connects with what [Inuit] already know as Aboriginal people,” these Elders’ reflections suggest otherwise, contending that their own life experiences accrue a form of empirical, real-life expertise that is not validated in the dominant pedagogies of international trauma, predicated as they are on a binary of outside “experts”
teaching local Indigenous “laities” (cf. Carr 2010: 22). Tellingly, although Labrador Inuit workshop participants are trained and sometimes even granted certificates in intergenerational trauma training, workshops continue to be led almost exclusively by outside consultants, as one woman noted in disbelief:

Why aren’t they acknowledging the training? It’s similar to the assimilation that’s been happening. With relocation, dislocation, basically that was the goal. To assimilate us to the European practices. With this, even though we have a lot of ad hoc training, there’s no real foundation there to help people to move from just being paraprofessionals to professionals in the field. We have other individuals who have, on their own, got their social work degrees, and are working. I see that stigma of not recognizing Aboriginals with profession as viable caregivers [with] models to help. They’re still searching out there, and not looking in.

In this woman’s analysis, the continued reliance on outsider expertise and knowledge of the Inuit psyche is consistent with earlier colonial interventions which I described in Chapter Four, and in construing this reliance on outsider knowledge as a form of assimilation, her observation resembles Mi’kmak scholar Marie Battiste’s (1998: 20) critique of “cognitive imperialism,” which she defines as a process that “discredit[s] other knowledge bases and values and seeks to validate one source of knowledge and empower it… maintain[ing] legitimacy of only one language, one culture, and one frame of reference.”

Why, then, if the intergenerational trauma paradigm seems so rooted in outsider models, has it taken hold in Labrador in the way that it has? In this section, I have attempted to illustrate some of the tensions that emerge in Labrador Inuit encounters with the intergenerational trauma paradigm. As I have suggested, while its linkage of individual and ancestral pain seemed alluring or comforting to some Inuit, in the wake of family ruptures and breaks in the transmission of cultural knowledge, the model’s sloppy
renderings of Indigenous history seemed to leave workshop participants cold, alienated from knowledge of their history, and what one participant called “the Aboriginal me.” The troubling paradox here is that such knowledge and historical memory is precisely the form of expertise that Elders, above, profess to hold, and which they argue is of therapeutic value. As Carr (2010: 25) reminds us, “regimes of expertise obscure actual social relations,” and in the remainder of this chapter, I wish to explore the social and political context in which the concept of intergenerational trauma has become suddenly meaningful in Inuit Labrador, raising critical questions about the constraints facing Indigenous sovereignty.

“WE’RE SUCH A GOOD LITTLE WHITE GOVERNMENT”: LAND CLAIMS AND THE LIMITS OF LABRADOR INUIT SOVEREIGNTY

The Labrador Inuit Association was established in 1973, emerging during a period of renewed Indigenous sovereignty struggles and political movement in the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the settler states. Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Coulthard (2014: 4-6) pinpoints three political developments that were particularly pivotal during this period, and which were consequential for the Labrador Inuit land claim as well as for other Indigenous peoples. The first development was the federal government’s failed attempt to introduce its 1969 “White Paper” or Statement of the Government of Canada on Indian Policy, a policy proposing the “blanket assimilation of the status Indian population by unilaterally removing all institutionally enshrined aspects of legal and political differentiation that distinguish [Indigenous peoples] from non-Native Canadians under the Indian Act” (Coulthard 2014: 4). Indigenous communities vehemently rejected this assimilatory proposal, and it prompted a new wave
of activism on the part of Indigenous political leadership and a desire to renegotiate the terms of their relationship to the federal government.

A second impetus for land claim negotiations, particularly for Indigenous peoples in Northern Canada, derived indirectly from the energy politics occasioned by the oil crisis of the early 1970s, prompting newly aggressive state and industry interests in exploiting oil, natural gas, minerals, and hydroelectric resources in the North, some of which had only recently been discovered (Coulthard 2014: 6, 56-59). The third contributing factor toward land claim negotiations during this period was the Supreme Court of Canada’s 1973 *Calder* decision in the case of the Nisga’a First Nation, which overturned an earlier precedent from *St Catherine’s Milling and Lumber Company v. The Queen* (1888) stating that “Aboriginal land rights existed only insofar and to the extent that the state recognized them as such” (Coulthard 2014: 5), and introduced a new measure of uncertainty in jurisprudence around Aboriginal land rights, prompting the government to release its 1973 *Statement on Claims of Indian and Inuit People: A Federal Native Claims Policy*, thereby signalling a new opening for the resolution of unsettled Indigenous land claims. This new opening should not be mistaken for a magnanimous change of mind in federal policy on land claims: federal action on comprehensive land claims emerged in “symbiotic relationship with major resource development projects in Northern Canada” (Daniel 1980: 220, quoted in M. Mitchell 1996: 344) and the state was motivated primarily by the incentive to “pave the way for massive exploitation of the reputedly resource-rich Arctic” (M. Mitchell 1996: 344).

As with other Indigenous peoples pursuing concurrent land claims, Labrador Inuit sovereignty struggles coalesced around a defence of the Labrador Inuit landbase and a
desire to protect cultural lifeways. In 1972, a delegation of representatives from the newly established Inuit Tapirisat of Canada (now Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami) invited Labrador Inuit to form a regional affiliate, an instance of pan-Inuit cooperation that led to the creation of the Labrador Inuit Association (LIA) in 1973 (Kennedy 1997: 10) as a new governing body for Inuit in the region. Extensive field research was commissioned on Inuit land use and occupancy in Labrador (Brice-Bennett 1977), and the LIA concurrently submitted to the federal government its Statement of Claim to rights to land and sea ice in Northern Labrador (Haysom 1992: 182). While the federal government accepted the LIA’s application in 1978, the province of Newfoundland only agreed to negotiate in 1980 upon the condition of a cost-sharing agreement with the federal government (Rodon and Grey 2009: 324).

The Labrador Inuit land claim was subsequently delayed by a federal government policy that limited its engagement in land claims negotiations to a maximum of six claimant groups at a time, and negotiations on a preliminary Framework Agreement took place from January 1989-March 1990 (Alcantara 2007: 191). Away from the land claims table, the LIA was actively involved during this period in multilateral diplomacy, participating in the Inuit Committee on National Issues seeking to entrench Aboriginal rights in Canada’s Constitution, as well as the Charlottetown Accord negotiations (Haysom 1992: 181). The LIA also energetically sponsored the development of subsidiary organizations delivering new programs for Labrador Inuit in the late 1970s and early 1980s, with largely federal funding, including the Labrador Inuit Alcohol and Drug Abuse Program, the Labrador Inuit Health Commission, the Labrador Inuit Development Corporation, and the Torngat Regional Housing Association, among others.
(Brice-Bennett 1986: 133-135), although the majority of social and economic programs delivered to Labrador Inuit were still provided by the province, with federal funding (Alcantara 2007: 182).

Progress toward an Agreement in Principle on the Labrador Inuit land claim remained slow until the 1994 discovery of a $4.3 billion nickel deposit in Voisey’s Bay, a region in Northern Labrador claimed by both Labrador Inuit and Innu. Both the federal and provincial governments were motivated to accelerate negotiations and clear obstacles to mineral exploration and extraction, and reached an agreement with LIA to fast-track negotiations in July 1996, resulting in a ratified Agreement in Principle in 2001, a ratified Final Agreement in 2004, and a ratified new government constitution in 2005, at which point the Labrador Inuit Association ceased to exist, and the new Nunatsiavut Government was established (Alcantara 2007: 192-194).

It was this period of fast-tracked negotiations that would witness some of the most significant concessions in the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement, from the position of Labrador Inuit. Notable here was the province’s refusal to admit lands immediately surrounding the Voisey’s Bay nickel deposit onto the bargaining table, despite a long history of Inuit land use in the area. The Voisey’s Bay region had been dotted with seasonal, and at times permanent or semi-permanent Inuit camps (aullásimavet) where Inuit harvested char, salmon, and particularly, jar seals, as Voisey’s Bay was known to be among the best spring and fall sealing areas with the greater region of Nain (Brice-Bennett 1977). In the finalized LILCA, Voisey’s Bay is excluded from Labrador Inuit lands; Section 7.5.1 affirms that the Nunatsiavut Government is entitled to a mere 5% of the revenues from the Voisey’s Bay Development (DIAND 2005: 102) and
under Section 7.3.1, only 25% of revenue from other subsurface resources in Labrador Inuit lands, the remainder being reserved for the province (100). LILCA provisions with respect to land use and subsurface revenue rights have created, and will continue to create, significant constraints and problems to manage for the Nunatsiavut Government. Falling commodity prices have for now halted exploration into uranium resources near the Nunatsiavut community of Postville, but may resume in the future should market prices rise. The Voisey’s Bay development has been an ongoing source of controversy, despite the employment of Inuit in Voisey’s Bay mining and the implementation of Inuit Impact and Benefits Agreements for revenue sharing. As recently in March 2015, Nunatsiavut Government President Sarah Leo called attention to the Province’s violation of Section 8.6.2 (a) of the LILCA, after the Province signed an agreement to receive $200 million from Voisey’s Bay developer Vale Canada Ltd. in return for permission to export materials from Voisey’s Bay, abrogating its duty to consult the Nunatsiavut Government.

For the Labrador Inuit, the LILCA represented significant concessions around land selection; while the Province conceded more coastline than it intended, the LILCA nonetheless pared down the Labrador Inuit land base to a comparatively humble set of “ribbons” of land, coastline, and sea ice (Alcantara 2007: 194), considering that research provides evidence of Labrador Inuit land use and occupancy of far wider swaths of territory (Brice-Bennett 1977). This scenario would appear to illustrate Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred’s (2005: 44) contention that the state’s handling of land claims and self-government negotiations affords Indigenous peoples “a small measure of self-administration, and… a small portion of the moneys derived from the exploitation of indigenous nations’ lands,” resulting in arrangements that may resemble “coopted
communities” (44) more than self-determining governments. From the government’s perspective, “the settlement of land claims basically involves the exchange of undefined aboriginal land rights for concrete rights and benefits defined by law” (DIAND 1986: 63), but as former Inuit Tapirisat of Canada President Rosemarie Kuptana has noted, “How can we know if this is a good trade off if we don’t know what we’re giving up?”, questioning “the wisdom of trading away aboriginal rights for ‘defined’ rights, [since]… aboriginal rights have yet to be defined in the courts” (quoted in M. Mitchell 1996: 364).

As Marybelle Mitchell (1996: 343) argues, “Inuit have varying degrees of control over the land, but no land-claim settlement allows for its unconditional disposition. In other words, Inuit beneficiaries of land-claim agreements do not own land but have conditional use and access to it. To the extent that they have been dispossessed of land and resources, they have also lost the potential of generating internal capital.”

This last point – the generation of internal capital – is significant: what the LILCA (DIAND 2005: 299) calls Nunatsiavut Government’s “own-source revenue capacity” is significantly constrained, in turn increasing its reliance on “fiscal financing agreements” (296-298) with the federal government and the province, rendering Nunatsiavut Government priorities a matter of intergovernmental negotiation. As a result, Nunatsiavut Government has experienced the pressure to “harmonize,” to a significant extent, the organizational structure of its Inuit government with that of the federal and provincial governments. As Felt and colleagues (2012: 255) observe, “the structure of the new Nunatsiavut Government in many ways mirrors those structures found in federal and provincial bureaucracies. The offered rationale for such a close resemblance is that it expedites ‘government-to-government’ communication and co-operation,” but at the risk
of orienting Nunatsiavut Government accountability toward external governments at the
expense of Labrador Inuit, while Section 1.1.3 of its Constitution underlines its mandate
“to consider and provide for Labrador Inuit culture, Labrador Inuit distinctiveness and
the aspirations of Labrador Inuit by making policies and laws that meet Labrador Inuit
needs, reflect Labrador Inuit culture, customs, traditions, observances, practices and
beliefs” (LIA 2002). “Already challenged by a general lack of financial and human
resources,” Felt and colleagues (2013: 256) caution, “Nunatsiavut government
bureaucrats may find themselves simply administering existing government programs
that they themselves have criticized for being out of step with the priorities and needs of
their citizenry. In this sense, the Nunatsiavut government may become complicit in the
perpetuation of federal and provincial policies and programs” – and notably, I might add,
in validating and applying exogenously derived formulations of “expertise” at the
expense of local knowledge.

During my fieldwork in Labrador, many Elders and middle-aged Inuit old enough
to remember the formation of the Labrador Inuit Association and the heady days of early
land claim activism in the 1970s articulated concerns that resonate with the caution
identified by Felt and colleagues above. There is a poignant irony in the fact that
comprehensive land claim agreements may result in Indigenous governments absorbing
organizational structures and forms of governmentality that are perceived as foreign to
traditional political customs, or resistant to Indigenous cultural control, a sentiment that is
apparent in one woman’s reflections on the outcome of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims
Agreement:

People had greater expectations of how things might have changed with the land
claims settlement, and aren’t seeing the kinds of results that they had hoped that
they would see. I know *I thought* things would be different. I thought that there would be more resources in the community, more support. We’re such a good little government. [For] the feds and the province, we make such a great little White government, for an Aboriginal government. They gotta be so proud of us. ‘Cause we go right by the book, and it’s such a White way of doing things now. It’s *such* a White way of doing things. There’s not enough of the cultural stuff in there. That existed and it’s hugely disappointing because it’s that kind of *bureaucracy* that is *so* evident in the federal and provincial governments, and we’re good at it, we are right up there! I gotta do a PR to get a PO before I can go buy something, like, you know? It’s so hugely disappointing. You’re talking about a culture where people *connect* with each other, it’s about being out there, it’s about being on the land. This is what the Inuit were. We were not this corporate kinda people! So much as we’ve become clones of what their governments are!

Another interlocutor noted the devaluing of Inuit knowledge and local expertise in effect perpetuates colonial relations:

Part of colonization is internalization of the oppression and the belief that we’re less than. There’s a *lot* of consultants coming from outside. Some of them are lovely, lovely people. I still would like to see not too far down the road where we don’t *have* people coming in! ‘Cause we should be able to draw on people *here!* I hope that we can eventually get to the point where the government will not sanction that.

Indigenous sovereignty, as Lenape scholar Joanne Barker (2005: 22) has argued, is critically interlinked with the “attendant concept” of self-government, “signify[ing] rights to determine, practice, and transform multiple forms of social organization – in effect to decolonize social institutions from federal/state paternalism and to reformulate them along the lines of distinctive cultural perspectives.” It is this right to decolonize federally and provincially modelled organizational structures and to infuse them with Inuit cultural perspectives that seems so vitally missing, and yet longed for, in my interlocutor’s remarks above. As Barker (2005: 18) notes, sovereignty is an “oppositional perspective… toward the racist ideologies of beneficiarism… a staunch political-juridical identity refuting the dominant notion that indigenous peoples were
merely one among many ‘minority groups’ under the administration of state social service and welfare programs.” Indeed, the comprehensive land claims process as it is negotiated in Canada entrenches precisely the logics of beneficiarism that Barker argues undermine sovereignty. As in other contexts where land claims have been negotiated, in Labrador it has become common parlance to refer to Inuit and Kablunângajuit alike as “Nunatsiavut Beneficiaries,” and I often heard individuals refer to themselves as a “proud Nunatsiavut Beneficiary,” a new subject position and form of self-identification in which Inuit and Kablunângajuit ethnocultural identities are blurred and subsumed under a “handout,” as one Inuit woman told me disapprovingly.

It is instructive to compare the Labrador Inuit experience with that of the Inuit of Nunavut, whose own land claim resulted in the creation of the territory and Government of Nunavut in 1993, twelve years before the creation of the Nunatsiavut Government. Unlike Nunavut’s territorial model of government, Nunatsiavut is a government nested within a province, with “governance arrangements [that] are part of a tripartite negotiation in which the [province has] most of the jurisdiction and the federal government plays a secondary role” (Rodon and Grey 2009: 318). Like Nunatsiavut, Nunavut also inherited Canadian bureaucratic structures, yet it has differed from Nunatsiavut in its more concerted and systematic attempt to integrate Inuit knowledge into governmental practices in order to make them more culturally relevant for Inuit, using a policy of Inuit Qaujimajatuqangit (IQ) or “Inuit knowledge already acquired that is still relevant today” (Lévesque 2014: 116 n1), an organizing concept which emerged during a 1998 conference in Igloolik that that brought Elders together from all Nunavut.

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31 See note 24 in Chapter Four. Rather ambiguously, the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement defines Kablunângajuit as individuals with “Inuit ancestry” or “no Inuit ancestry but who settled permanently in the Labrador Inuit Claims Area before 1940” (INAC 2005: 30-31).
communities (Lévesque 2014: 122). As Searles (2006: 98) notes, “IQ has become the guiding ethical and intellectual template for building a new government and society, one that many Inuit believe is a formula for both cultural preservation and greater self-determination.”

The codification of IQ is not without controversy among Inuit, as it inevitably contributes to a reification of Inuit cultural values on which there may be dissenting perspectives, and to a certain extent it also decontextualizes Inuit knowledge through its reinsertion into the Nunavut bureaucracy (Lévesque 2014: 127; cf. also Stern and Stevenson 2006). Nonetheless, it does represent an attempt at political innovation to increase the degree of Inuit cultural control and even a kind of cultural sovereignty within government structures and policies, or what is often glossed as “cultural safety” within Native Studies and Indigenous health literatures. It is at the very least, as Tester and Irniq (2008: 59) suggest, a “kappianannngittuq” – a “foundation” or “safe place” made so by the historical struggle of elders.”

These still evolving discussions about the nature and place of Inuit knowledge in the governance of Nunavut are less noticeable in Nunatsiavut, to the frustration and unease of many Labrador Inuit Elders I spoke with. As Felt and colleagues (2012: 257) have noted, there is no formal role for Elders in Nunatsiavut Government, nor formalized Elder councils (TungavittalauKit Inutukavut). Elders reminded me that such councils were active – and actively consulted – during the early days of land claims negotiations, and, like the following male Elder, strongly wished for their resurrection:

We do highly recommend there should be a board. Because it’s only the people in the communities that know what’s going on, how they’re feeling. Because they only send the representatives to the Assembly and that person is not getting much information from the people within the communities. [Before] they had to,
because they were negotiating land claims and they had to pretty much come out with what was negotiated in every few months.

Another female Elder expressed a similar sentiment, arguing that consulting Elders for advice should be part of the work of government, rather than treating Elders as a doddering population solely in need of recreational programming or entertainment:

They also have to involve Elders more. Hey? For their opinions. For their advice. They gotta reach out to Elders, to seniors. They have to be reached. They have to be seen. Get them involved. Not just having bingo or get together and play games.

Elders are frequently invited to be in programming, such as the trauma program I described earlier, but on an informal and ad hoc basis and where their role is not clearly defined. Numerous Elders described this involvement in ways that reflected a perceived tokenization of their knowledge, or that their knowledge was welcome only insofar as it was not to contradict or conflict with pre-established program mandates, as the following account illustrates:

They had us there as Elders [and] we were giving them this advice. But they never really said anything, did they? We weren’t asked to go again. They haven’t used us for quite some time, but for a while there they’d use people every time they went. And they’d be the same ones all the time? And we mentioned this to them the one time before, they should alternate them? Like probably take us now and then a month’s time now once again, but try to get different people, different Elders. And I think that was kind of a disrespect to the Elders, that they never came back and let us know one way or another. They listened to us and they said they was gonna look into it or whatever, but I don’t know what did happen. Like always, they never got back to us. And we were feeling, why did they ask for Elders to go down in the beginning if they’re not going to listen to our advice or at least hear it? And that’s the thing with Elders, you don’t criticize an Elder because they know more than you. You just listen to what they say. And this is what the Elders are supposed to do. But this is where it comes in about an Elder, that the younger people aren’t respecting us, they’re telling us that we don’t know anything.

This decline in Elder participation in – and indeed direction of – Labrador Inuit political life, after its resurgence during the early days of land claim negotiations, further
diminishes Elder authority, and it is reminiscent of processes I described in Chapter Four, when the Newfoundland began to flex its provincial authority over coastal Labrador in the wake of Confederation, usurping in the process social and political roles that had once been under the moral purview of the Elders’ councils (*AngajaKaukatiqet*).

For this renewed waning of the role of Elders in Labrador Inuit politics, a decisive moment came toward the end of the land claim negotiations, particularly in the mid-1990s when the Labrador Inuit Association agreed to fast-track negotiations with the federal and provincial governments upon discovery of the Voisey’s Bay nickel deposits. The processes that “fast-track negotiations” euphemize were the increasing sidelining of Elders from the negotiation table, and the corresponding marginalization of their cultural knowledge in the negotiations themselves and in the final settlement agreement. “There’s not enough of the cultural stuff in there,” in other words, as my interlocutor lamented above.

How then, do these disappointments with the Labrador Inuit land claims negotiations help us to make social and political sense of the proliferation of trauma-based mental health interventions in recent years? I have attempted, in this chapter, to demonstrate some of the conundrums and complications that arise in the travels of the intergenerational trauma paradigm within the Labrador Inuit context. The use of intergenerational trauma as a framework for explaining Labrador Inuit society and social ills evokes a range of contradictory, yet powerful, responses. Many interlocutors, as I have shown, expressed consternation over models of Inuit psychology and history – and prescriptions for wellness – that rely exclusively on exogenous systems of knowledge. Others, nonetheless, find engagements with intergenerational trauma pedagogy
affectively compelling, allowing them to reclaim a feeling of ancestral history in the wake of multiple generational ruptures – even if the instruction in history that such workshops offer is dangerously simplifying and lacking in real detail. Beyond, however, the reasons why individuals may or may not find intergenerational trauma “good to think with” as an explanation or descriptor for their social milieu, it is crucial to consider the broader social and political context in which the trauma concept has taken purchase.

As Michael Lambek (2008: 255) reminds us, “diagnoses of trauma fit particular narratives and acts of accountability and blame and the needs and interests of particular kinds of institutions or discourses.” The diffusion of the intergenerational trauma paradigm is a way of classifying a people’s history as much as it is a comparatively new model for self-classification that produces new kinds of subjects and subjective identifications with important effects. Staying in the “doom and gloom” and “heavy stuff” that Labrador Inuit ancestors “didn’t have the opportunity” to feel, in the model promulgated by the trauma workshop leader earlier in this chapter, responsibilizes Labrador Inuit to become “trauma-informed” helpers in their communities. Individual and community healing – however those elusive things might be defined – become delegated tasks, and while the intergenerational trauma paradigm correctly diagnoses colonial history as a central contributor to social suffering, its weak and misleading invocations of history fail to directly link colonial violence to its concrete, contemporary manifestations in Inuit Labrador. Responsibility for healing intergenerational trauma is internalized and individualized, not attached to social inequalities and injustices that demand broader collective responses.
This point brings us back to the limitations of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement – as discussed earlier, the asymmetrical power relations inherent in land claims negotiations between Indigenous groups and the settler state tend to result in agreements that empower only conditional and circumscribed Indigenous land use, limited opportunities to develop internal capital, a continued reliance on fiscal financing agreements with federal and provincial governments, and a sovereign jurisdiction over social and political life that remains comparatively limited despite the urgency of community needs. The 2012 Aboriginal Peoples Survey commissioned by Statistics Canada found that 47% of respondents in Nunatsiavut communities reported heavy alcohol consumption over the previous 12-month period (the highest rate among all the Inuit nunaat [regions]), while 45% of respondents reported living in households with food insecurity, and 33% of respondents reported being house in dwellings requiring major structural repairs (Wallace 2014: 12, 17, 18). The Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the national political organization for Inuit in Canada, has recently proposed a comprehensive framework for addressing the social determinants of health in Inuit communities, for which they identify eleven key factors: quality of early childhood development, culture and language, livelihoods, income distribution, housing, personal safety and security, education, food security, availability of health services, mental wellness, and the environment (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami 2014). It is not clear how mental health workshops premised on an intergenerational trauma paradigm are able to address any of these crucial determinants of Labrador Inuit well-being.

Given the limitations I have outlined here in terms of jurisdiction, own source revenue capacity, and the continued need for multilateral negotiation of priorities with
federal and provincial governments, the Nunatsiavut Government’s capacity to act on these social determinants of health is constrained, and compromised. In such a context, the framing of social and political injustices as intergenerational trauma may provide a convenient resource, perhaps even a necessary resource. Where intergenerational trauma is diagnosed as the source of all ills, its most commonly associated prescription is individual healing. Unlike the more readily measurable indicators of social well-being offered by Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, slippery conceptualizations of intergenerational trauma render it amorphous – a malignant, but vague miasma – ubiquitous and yet impossible to pinpoint, eluding qualification, quantification, and, most importantly, attempts to measure whether it is being alleviated or not. This critique of the intergenerational trauma concept is in no way intended to invalidate the reality of social suffering in Labrador Inuit communities, which have witnessed, particularly since the 1980s, distressingly high rates of alcohol and drug abuse as well as youth suicides, in a context of generalized poverty. It is, instead, to question intergenerational trauma – or at least in the way it is most commonly framed – as the most appropriate diagnostic here, and, particularly, to take issue with the individualized and depoliticized prescriptions for well-being that are its logical entailments.

The limitations of the Labrador Inuit land claims negotiations do not only intersect with the proliferation of trauma-based mental health interventions in the ways that both have promoted exogenous expertise and agendas at the expense of Inuit knowledge and self-determination. Perhaps even more significant is the uncanny doubling of self-government that is at play here – a self-government by self-government, a neoliberal downloading of the responsibility for improving social welfare to “trauma-
informed” helpers, atomizing social and political injustices as individual trauma to be healed in the absence of greater government sovereignty and resources. As Thomas Lemke (2002: 59) has helpfully summarized, discussing Foucault’s analysis of the political work done through “technologies of the self” and self-care, “The strategy of rendering individual subjects ‘responsible’… entails shifting responsibility for social risks such as illness, unemployment, poverty, and so forth, and for life in society, into the domain for which the individual is responsible and transforming it into a problem of ‘self-care.’” The implication here echoes an argument I made in Chapter Two, namely that the dominant politics of truth and reconciliation in Canada impose an asymmetrical burden of forgiveness on Indigenous survivors on residential schooling. Here too, I observe that the other paired master tropes that most frequently appear alongside discourses of truth and reconciliation – trauma and healing – are just as frequently individualized as matters of Indigenous self-management and self-care, in lieu of a broader view that would argue for collective social and political responsibilities.

My case study then responds to an ethnographic need to demonstrate how the amorphous yet pliable concept of trauma travels and is taken up in particular contexts (see Lambek 2008: 255), as well as to the need for more scholarly analysis of the particular ramifications of the historical or intergenerational trauma concept in Indigenous contexts (cf. Kirmayer et al. 2014). I argue that in such contexts, or at least in the case of Inuit Labrador, the trauma model has taken root amidst the intersection of neoliberal constraints and biopolitical imperatives in contemporary Canadian settler-colonialism. While settler colonialism has been most influentially described as a “structure” (see esp. Wolfe 1999), it may be more analytically productive to understand
settler colonialism—and the combined constraints and opportunities it enables for Indigenous life—as a shifting social and political formation that draws upon, albeit unevenly and never entirely successfully, political technologies of statecraft that move between registers. While the healing of trauma and negotiation of self-government form the cornerstones of contemporary political discourse with respect to Indigenous peoples, both, as I have attempted to show in the context of Labrador, are steeped in institutionalized “tutelage” (Paine 1977) tied to exogenous, rather than Indigenous, systems of knowledge. In tandem, limited forms of Indigenous self-government and the proliferation of trauma-based mental health interventions promote political formations of Indigenous semisovereignty that resemble a kind of self-government by self-government, downloading issues of social and political justice to the level of individual therapeutic management and self-help.

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It is at this point in the narrative that I reach my “ethnographic limit” (A. Simpson 2011a: 78), a limit that Mohawk scholar and anthropologist Audra Simpson (2011a, 2014) has theorized as a kind of “ethnographic refusal.” This refusal is about deciding just how far to go in heeding the call of what Andrea Smith (2008: xxiii) has termed elsewhere “the ‘ethnographic imperative,’ which would strive to make Native communities more knowable to non-Natives” and it is about deciding where to draw the line, especially where matters of sovereignty are involved. It is a “calculus of what you need to know and what I refuse to write in” (A. Simpson 2011a: 72), a calculus that
involves asking oneself questions like, “what am I revealing here and why? Where will this get us? Who benefits from this and why?” (78). Ethnographic writing is inevitably selective, the product of choices and omissions, and much of the awkwardness, the unresolvable contradictions, and the discomforts in the anthropological enterprise are relegated to the shadows between the inked lines of our monographs, but there is a heightened salience and particular stakes to refusal in ethnographic writing on Indigenous communities. It is a way to “respect,” as Simpson (2014: 198) argues, “the ethics of collective representation within deeply asymmetrical fields of power,” and writing on and around some of the contradictions and limitations of sovereignty is a delicate one for the ethnographer, particularly in light of dominant “vilification of Indigenous life” (199), and the public scrutiny, often hostile, to which Indigenous political formations are subjected.

In this chapter, I appear to have strayed far outside the confines of the classrooms of the Indian residential schools, the intergenerational impacts they produced, and the politics of memory in which they are imbricated, the central objects of inquiry in this dissertation. And yet, the legacies of the Indian residential schools are deeply present here too. In the preceding pages, I have brought the proliferation of intergenerational trauma programs in Inuit Labrador into juxtaposition with some of the disappointments of self-government and the Labrador Inuit Land Claims Agreement. I have done so in order to illustrate how seemingly disparate structures in place to deal with the legacies of Indian residential schools and interrelated experiences of colonial violence – mental health programs, negotiated Indigenous self-government – may yet breathe life into the spirit that animated the Indian residential schools in the first place: the colonial and assimilatory assumption that the location of expertise on Indigenous souls, lives, and
correct aspirations is always outside, exogenous rather than indigenous, justifying a need for permanent reschooling, or “tutelage” (Paine 1977). As anthropologist Robert Paine (1977: 4) has argued, “an administration that apparently wishes to increase Inuit control of their own affairs [can be] nevertheless, colonial.” Paine’s key insight that relations of tutelage are central to settler colonial power relations remains underappreciated in contemporary analyses, but it resonates here in the context of outside-led mental health re-education programming as well as in negotiated forms of semisovereignty.

As Alcantara (2007: 188) rightly notes, Labrador Inuit “have rarely, if ever, invoked the language of sovereignty” in the articulation of their political aspirations. And indeed, during the period of my fieldwork in Labrador, sovereignty was a word that appeared to be on no one’s lips, although trauma certainly was. To be fair, however, I also did not originally use the language of sovereignty in framing my research questions, or in framing questions to my interlocutors. Sovereignty – or the lack thereof – was rather something I began to read in the mental health interventions I observed much later, as if written there in bold relief. Am I, then, also guilty of subscribing Labrador Inuit into yet another regime of expertise – in this case, sovereignty debates in Native Studies, and to a lesser extent anthropology – precisely the process I critique? Sovereignty is a term with a complex European political, legal, and theological genesis (Barker 2005), and as Barker (2005: 19) observes, “translating indigenous epistemologies about law, governance, and culture through the discursive rubric of sovereignty was and is problematic. Sovereignty as a discourse is unable to capture fully the indigenous meanings, perspectives, and identities about law, governance, and culture, and thus over time it impacts how those epistemologies and perspectives are represented and
understood.” And yet, debates around sovereignty have become a “critical language
game in the conditions of settlement” (A. Simpson 2014: 5), critical to the ability to
safeguard Indigenous lives, cultures, and livelihoods, and critical to the ability to assert
Indigenous knowledge and expertise. The conversations I had with Elders, to my mind,
did indeed demonstrate concerns about Labrador Inuit sovereignty, expressed through
epistemologies and idioms of distress regarding the decline of Elder consultation and
authority within the community, and a corresponding concern that cultural forms of
governance were being lost.

The past forty years have been momentous and turbulent for Labrador Inuit, from
the formation of the LIA in 1973 through the long and winding path to self-government,
a path that has witnessed the recasting of Inuit and Kablunângajuit as “Nunatsiavut
Beneficiaries.” The Nunatsiavut Government has completed its first decade of service on
behalf of Labrador Inuit, and indeed there is time – but urgent need – to nurture and make
use of Labrador Inuit knowledge and local expertise in the service of urgent health and
social needs. To do so requires addressing deeply complicated but fundamental
questions about what counts as Inuit knowledge, through what processes that will
expertise be established, and how broader structures of accountability can be created to
move the promotion of well-being among Labrador Inuit beyond a delegated self-
government by self-government.
Figure 5.1 – The Nunatsiavut Government’s Legislative Assembly, Hopedale, April 2013
Photograph by the author
CONCLUSION

It is June 2015, and I file into the proceedings of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, this time for the final time, since it is the Closing Event of the TRC, having reached the completion of its six-year mandate. We press into the back of the room, where it is standing room only, awaiting to hear the Commission’s official release of its findings. The room holds a large and – I imagine – expectant crowd, but I do not think the turnout is larger than at other TRC events I have attended. The greater concentration of videocameras and media recording than at earlier events, on the other hand, seems to conjure up vaster virtual audiences, present and future, to bear witness to the Commission’s conclusions. The ballroom of the Delta Ottawa hotel is small, a humble and rather inconspicuous venue for the release of the TRC findings, considering our location in the nation’s capital – unlike the stained glass window commemorating residential school survivors in Parliament, which I discussed in Chapter One. Other hotels have been booked up, it is rumoured, due to the arrivals of football players for the 2015 FIFA Women’s World Cup.

This closing event is different in tone and atmosphere from all other TRC National Events that I have attended. The Commissioners Sharing Panels, which hosted the outpouring of survivor testimonies and seemed to form the heart and soul of Commission activity, are not part of the closing event. The survivors have spoken. Gone too is the Commission’s metadiscourse on survivor testimony, its complicated invitations and incitations to language and affect, the politics of which I analyzed in Chapters Two
and Three. Releasing the TRC findings, I hear the Commissioners strike a more directive, almost activist tone, and their intended audience this time is not so much the residential school survivors in the room as it is the Canadian public, the government, settler society writ large.

Figure 6.1 – “It’s Time For Reconciliation”. Release of TRC findings at the Closing Event, Ottawa, June 2015. Photograph by the author.

The Commission releases 94 recommendations or “Calls to Action” (TRC 2015a) and they are thoughtful and comprehensive. A full 5 recommendations concern the Indigenous child welfare system, highlighting its continuities with the Indian residential school system, and tacitly signalling that the TRC’s closing is, however, no closure. The recommendations address education, health, law and the justice system, and call on the federal government to establish a public inquiry into missing and murdered Indigenous women, noting its “[l]inks to the intergenerational legacy of residential schools” (4). The Commission declares that Indian residential schooling constituted cultural genocide, a position on which it had vacillated previously. It calls on the federal government to fully
implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, and devotes a panel of its Closing Event to discussing how that might be done. Compared to the tone of previous National Events, “reconciliation” here is less fuzzy and amorphous, no longer something residential school survivors are enjoined to perform through testimonial language and affect (Chapters Two and Three) – here, reconciliation is attached to calls to action, recommendations, frameworks to implement, which implicate the settler state and Canadian society.

As I commit these words to paper and crystallize this dissertation into a relic of its time, the social and political context changes, seemingly offering new politics of possibility for memory of Indian residential schooling in Canada. A new government has been elected, one that promised to fully implement all 94 recommendations of the TRC, among many other effusive pledges delivered along the campaign trail. In a soberer spirit, those of us with memories longer than federal political terms might recall how the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (which I discussed in Chapter One) released its 444 neglected recommendations for change in 1996, along with a 20-year timeline to implement them that arrives now, at the contemporary moment, like the uncanny ghost of a parallel, unrealized future. The disjuncture between the Commission’s politically targeted calls for action and the often depoliticizing ethos of its proceedings, with those mantras about therapeutic speech, is a contradiction I cannot truly resolve in this dissertation. It is plausible, however, that the source of the discrepancy may be as simple as the fact that demonstrating some evidence of movement toward reconciliation – which often occurred in the therapeutic re-scripting of survivor testimony, as I argued in Chapter Three – is no longer in the TRC’s hands. With the end of the Commission’s
mandate, those hands are to a certain extent untied, and it is far easier for the TRC to issue more politicized calls for action now that it is no longer the host of the primary political theatre in which reconciliation is discussed and debated.

This being said, these calls to action, however comprehensive or well-intentioned, coexist uncomfortably with – and are perhaps almost drowned out by – the rather louder and more ubiquitous calls for healing and reconciliation. As I have shown throughout this dissertation, these calls for Indigenous healing and national reconciliation are typically depoliticizing and often laden with pedagogical assumptions. They assume multiple forms and occur in various institutional contexts, whether at the TRC with its insistence on performances of therapeutic speech, in child welfare systems that recast Indigenous poverty as inadequate parenting skills in need of correction, or yet in mental health interventions that stress the need for Indigenous people to become “trauma-informed” self-managing subjects in the absence of broader structural improvements in their communities. These pedagogical imperatives charge Indigenous survivors of colonial violence with an individualized responsibility to act to improve their lot in the absence of broader collective action. Through observation of multiple contexts, I have contended in this dissertation that pedagogical imperatives constitute a central facet of Indigenous experiences of Canadian settler colonialism. It is an observation that troubles the TRC’s project of “calls to action” by pointing out longstanding inequalities and asymmetries in Indigenous-settler relations: the recurrent “reschooling” of Indigenous peoples throughout Canadian history and in various forms presumes an Indigenous responsibility to act toward their own betterment (often conceived in assimilatory ways), in the absence of broader collective action toward restructuring Indigenous-settler and
Indigenous-state relationships. This is an observation that troubles the TRC’s project of “calls to action” by underscoring a long history of collective inaction, or perhaps more precisely, a history of asymmetrical action, where Indigenous peoples have been expected to assimilate to Canadian settler society, instead of a more transformative approach to political relations premised on mutual action.

As for the status of Labrador, the TRC’s 29th recommendation “call[s] upon the parties [to the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement] and, in particular, the federal government, to work collaboratively with plaintiffs not included in the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement to have disputed legal issues determined expeditiously on an agreed set of facts” (TRC 2015a: 3). This provision would include the more than 1,000 plaintiffs in the Labrador residential schools class action lawsuit that is currently, at the time of this writing, on trial at the Supreme Court of Newfoundland and Labrador. Even in the event of a legal resolution in their favour, many survivors in Labrador made it clear to me that the nature of their experiences in residential schools defies the very possibility of justice. Reconciliation and healing, for many, are both daily preoccupations and elusive frustrations, imagined states that are yearned for, but ongoing – they are iterative, struggling verbs rather than resolved, realized nouns.

Any analysis of the possibilities for national memory surrounding Indian residential schools must begin with an acknowledgement of their profound asymmetry, which I discussed in Chapter One, an asymmetry premised on the politically uneven “relations of recognition” (Coulthard 2007: 442) between Indigenous peoples and the Settler state. For residential school survivors like my interlocutors above – and, perhaps in different ways, intergenerational survivors of residential schools (cf. Kidron 2009) –
memory of Indian residential schooling is a kind of “poisonous knowledge” (Das 2007: 54-57) embodied, and embedded in the everyday, a living “burden of history” (Lambek 2002: 4). The very presentness of the residential school past for survivors contrasts markedly with the temporality to which it is predominantly consigned in the Canadian public sphere: as a “sad chapter” of Canadian history, a “discrete historical problem of educational malpractice” (Henderson and Wakeham 2009: 2) that we can safely bookend, now better informed, and morally reassured that this episodic lapse in judgement does not unwrite the preferred national history of settler benevolence (see Mackey 1999). And for Indigenous peoples who have known otherwise, these dominant mnemonics of colonialism in Canada leave them to embody this burden of memory, treated as the “past-tense problems of past-tense people” (Povinelli 2002: 178). As I observed in Chapter One, and again in Chapters Two and Three, the TRC’s focus on the figure of the abused Indigenous child – unique among the forty-some truth commissions that have been implemented around the world – offers a series of complicated possibilities and constraints for Indigenous political life in Canada.

Particularly since the work of the TRC, the figure of the abused Indigenous child seems to stand in as a synecdoche for the broader project of settler colonialism in Canada. One the one hand, it allows us to better understand the project of Canadian settler colonialism by following it to its sorest and most intimate extremities (see Stoler 2002, 2006). It also helps us to better recognize the central role that ward-making and forced family ruptures played in advancing the Canadian settler colonial project, as I argued in Chapter Four, by tracing the interconnections between residential schooling, child welfare apprehensions, and forced community relocations in Labrador. And yet on the
other hand, over the course of Commission proceedings, the abused Indigenous child, turned living, aging, residential school survivor, often disappeared under the superimposition of its own uncanny double, a more abstract figure of the child – Indigenous or non-Indigenous, of ambiguous unmarked identity – a beacon of hopeful futurity for whom survivors are urged to reconcile.

On the very last day of the TRC’s Closing Event in Ottawa, I saw this abstract figure of the child return, multiplying and materializing in physical form. The TRC ended its final event with a “Planting Dreams Ceremony,” in which children from the Ottawa-Gatineau area were gathered to greet the TRC Commissioners and residential school survivors at Rideau Hall, home of the Governor General of Canada, the designated representative of the Crown.

Figure 6.2 – The “Planting Dreams Ceremony”. TRC Closing Event, Rideau Hall, Ottawa, June 2015. Photograph by the author.
On that sunny, cheerful June day, students carried two hearts mounted on stakes with drawings and messages for residential school survivors, one of which was to be planted in the Heart Garden of Rideau Hall, the other to be presented to a residential school survivor with whom they would walk in procession, leaving Rideau Hall, to, as the event program informed us, “symbolize that children will lead us to a future of reconciliation.”

What becomes of residential school memory, here, in this politics of closure, a child-washing that relegates the inheritance of an irreconcilable colonial past, and its pastness in the present, to the temporality of a hopeful future perfect tense? “You can’t rush reconciliation,” one of these staked hearts stated (Figure 6.3), as if in direct answer to precisely this question.

Figure 6.3. – “You Can’t Rush Reconciliation”. TRC Closing Event, Rideau Hall, Ottawa, June 2015. Photograph by the author.
This procession of children from Rideau Hall, holding hands with recognized national leaders and dignitaries, vividly re-enacted – even physically incarnated – the symbolic work that the figure of the child, it had seemed to me, performed for the Commission throughout its proceedings. The invocation of future generations of children for which the nation needs to heal and reconcile, erases the abuse and violence enacted on real-life Indigenous children, now grown adult survivors, and imposes upon them an asymmetrical burden of forgiveness so that the nation may reconstitute itself, reasserting the status quo rather than grappling toward enacting more transformative Indigenous-settler relations.

In Chapters Two and Three, my paired chapters on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission events, I sought to enter directly into that densely and heavily emotive space, and attempted to make sense of the circulations of affect and language that I encountered there, both analytically and politically. In Chapter Two, I explored the production of survivor testimony as a form of affective labour – and indeed, for anyone who has attended the Commission, it is incontestable how brave and laborious these testimonies are: public, and before a national audience. In observing survivor testimonies as an affective labour, and a labour of educating Canadians about a central thread of our national history, one that interweaves with so many present-day Indigenous concerns, I also noted how this labour was performed in a space characterized by inequality, and what I termed uneven economies of affect. The affective labour to which the TRC played host was asymmetrical: the outpouring of survivor emotion there is ultimately unreciprocated by effective contrite action on the part of the settler state, and Canadian society writ large, presuming such a reciprocation could even be possible. Furthermore, I
argued that the operation of TRC proceedings relied on what I called a discursive
temporalization of affects in part to manage the contradictory and almost impossible
burdens of their work, scripting a linear chronology in which survivor pain and outrage
are relegated to the past, curtained away from a hopeful and reconciled future purportedly
made possible by their catharsis.

In Chapter Three, I analyzed the very production of “truth” in the Truth and
Reconciliation Commission of Canada by parsing the structuring context and
microinteractions of language and discourse through which the TRC’s “truth” is
produced. As I observed, the TRC made use of discursive resources such as
contextualization cues, expectations of iconicity, and language ideologies insisting on the
necessarily healing nature of Indigenous speech, in order to produce textual and
testimonial evidence of reconciliation, thereby appearing to fulfil its contentious and
contradictory mandate. In my observation, the Commission frequently both prescripted
and rescripted Indigenous testimony in such a way as to encourage testimonies of
therapeusis, rather than acts of parrhesia (see McFalls and Pandolfi 2014), a distinct
choreography of affect. I raised the concern that that choreography of affect resembles a
“reschooling” of residential school survivors as to what constitutes an appropriate
testimony, and by extension, proper emotional comportment and civility, echoing the
“‘disciplining’ affective technologies” (Million 2013: 50) of the residential school era in
troubling ways. The preferred therapeutic script of the TRC, however, did not go without
“interruption” (cf. A. Simpson 2014) or contestation from Indigenous participants at the
events.
In Chapters Four and Five, I drew on material from fieldwork in Inuit Labrador to present a different ethnographic window into the legacies of Indian residential schools, at the level of individual communities rather than the national stage of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. My choice of Inuit Labrador as a fieldsite was initially motivated by its exclusion from the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, a position that appeared to place Labrador Inuit at the “margins of the state” (Das and Poole 2004) and the margins of the national reconciliation process. This position, I believed, would afford Labrador Inuit perspectives on the legacies of Indian residential schooling a unique epistemic salience. In spite of their exclusion, the local histories and social and political dynamics that I encountered in Labrador are probably, in the end, fairly similar in broad brushstrokes to those in other Indigenous communities in Canada in which I have not had the benefit of direct fieldwork. In Chapter Four, I sought to problematize and complicate the national focus on Indian residential schooling as the sole colonial injustice currently slated for redress, by exploring its interconnections in Labrador Inuit history with other experiences of colonial violence, notably forced community relocations and the ongoing apprehension of children in the child welfare system (the former experience being common to numerous Indigenous communities, and the latter virtually ubiquitous throughout Indigenous Canada). In doing so, I underscored the importance of kinship as an underappreciated analytic for making sense of the settler colonialism in Canada. Forced family ruptures, dislocations, and child removal were and continue to be central to the settler colonial project, an assimilatory interruption of the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous knowledge and the reproduction of their very peoplehood, by replacing it with a created wardship to the Canadian state.
In Chapter Five, I brought into juxtaposition two kinds of structures that are often used to deal with these legacies of colonial violence: mental health interventions and self-government negotiations, but which are seldom analyzed in tandem, despite the way that both, in a broad fashion, tend to be constructed around exogenous expertise and models of best practices, to the direct devaluation of Indigenous cultural knowledge. As I discussed in Chapter Five, the concept of intergenerational trauma is a very new and relatively foreign concept to Inuit in Labrador, and yet it has begun to circulate ubiquitously, in large part due to the proliferation of mental health programming that takes the intergenerational trauma paradigm as its framework. And yet, in their application, such programs often deliver grievously flattened renderings of Labrador Inuit history through accounts that trivialize Labrador Inuit resistance to colonialism and indeed, in my observation, can be seen to dehumanize Inuit and their capacity, creativity, and resilience – a portrayal that not uncoincidentally characterizes Inuit and the Inuit soul itself as in perpetual need of outside education, and exogenous, rather than Indigenous, expertise. In this way too, perhaps, we return yet again to the figure of the child, through an infantilizing assumption that Inuit exist in perpetual need of tutelage from outsiders. The diffusion of the model of intergenerational trauma, as far as I have been able to observe, tends more often than not to medicalize settler colonial violence, to pathologize Indigenous survivors of colonial violence for their experience, and to flatten and downplay histories of resistance in ways that seem to deny the possibility of past and future anticolonial political action.

In the valorization of outside expertise at the expense of recognizing local Inuit knowledge, there are parallels with the conclusion of the Labrador Inuit Land Claims
Agreement and self-government negotiation process. As they have been conducted with other Indigenous nations, the comprehensive land claims process in Canada has tended to result in agreements that favour capital accumulation by state and industry actors in Indigenous territories at the expense of Indigenous peoples’ “own-source revenue capacity” (DIAND 2005: 299), an ongoing material dispossession that in effect perpetuates colonial relations of dependency, hindering Indigenous self-determination, assertions of sovereignty and expertise. Likewise, negotiations have tended to result in self-government organizational structures that create uncomfortable “clones,” as one interlocutor put it, of federal and provincial bureaucracies that lack cultural safety and indeed, cultural sovereignty for the Indigenous peoples they serve, despite the efforts of many conscientious Indigenous politicians. As with the intergenerational trauma programs, then, self-government negotiations leave Labrador Inuit in a position of some constraint in defining and asserting Inuit knowledge, Inuit expertise, and ultimately their own sovereignty. These constraints tend to produce a kind of self-government by self-government, where trauma-based mental health interventions that responsibilize individuals for their own suffering and healing make social and political sense. My admiration for the thoughtfulness, good humour, and resourcefulness of many Labrador Inuit I met, including Inuit in administrative positions, leads me still to hope that what I observed in 2012 and 2013 will evolve to better help and serve the Inuit who stand most to benefit from expanded sovereignty.

It is here then, that I reach the central argument of this dissertation, one that has been threading through subtly and gradually over the course of these pages. As Patrick Wolfe (1999: 2) has famously argued, settler colonialism is a “structure not an event,” a
set of asymmetrical political relations between Indigenous peoples and settler states that perdures, rather than discrete, historical colonial transgressions that can be relegated to an abstract national memory or, worse yet, forgotten. In my perambulations through the National Events of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, and into the Inuit communities of coastal Labrador, I have come to think of the Indian residential schools as a structure – not an event – that almost seems to stand in metonymic relationship to the settler colonial project as a whole. Indian residential schools have closed, and Indigenous peoples have left the abusive and dangerous confines of those schools, but that school spirit of re-education – of devaluing what Indigenous people know and striving to assimilate them into other regimes of expertise – seems to linger, as apparitions elsewhere, in relations of “tutelage” (Paine 1977), in pedagogies of appropriate testimonial language and affect, in intergenerational trauma training, and in the imposition of foreign norms in the operation of self-government structures. Although engaging with the legacy of Indian residential schools may seem to recognize or make room for only one aspect of colonialism in Canadian national memory, I believe the lingering structure of those schools has yet much to show us in contemplating what a reconciling Canada might look like.
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