



INTRODUCTION:

For the past 150 years, we have been taught to avert our eyes from Canada's true history and the treatment of Indigenous, Métis and Inuit communities. Canada is deemed "our home and native land," yet the vast majority of this land has been stolen from Indigenous nations. In BC alone, 95 per cent is truly unceded territory that was never legally signed away by Indigenous peoples to the Crown or Canada (Lukacs, 2014). Gradually, histories have been brought to the forefront of government attention through the commencement of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2008) and subsequent Calls to Action (2015)—of which demanded an investigation into the alarming plethora of Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls. This launched the National Inquiry into MMIWG which was formally released in 2019 and ultimately reported on the "deliberate race, identity and gender-based genocide" that has been, and continues to be, committed against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA individuals. The following research—whilst not yet concluded—embarked on a journey to discover how the media and various stakeholders covered/represented the issues raised by the *Inquiry*—and specifically the genocide claim.

**"We—even we here—hold the power, and bear the responsibility."
— Abraham Lincoln**



NATIONAL INQUIRY INTO MMIWG (2019):

The Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls was a response to the TRC's Calls to Action, and was mandated to report on:

- Systemic causes of all forms of violence; and
- Institutional policies and practices implemented in response to violence experienced by Indigenous women and girls in Canada.

Among their findings were testimonies of the victims' family members and alarming data gathered by the RCMP, who confirmed 1,181 cases of "police-reported incidents of Aboriginal female homicides and unresolved missing Aboriginal females" between 1980 and 2012 (Reclaiming Power and Place, 2019). The Inquiry also revealed that Indigenous women and girls are 12 times more likely to be murdered or missing than any other women in Canada, and 16 times more likely than Caucasian women (Meeches, 2016).

Perhaps their most controversial finding was labelling these instances of MMIWG as a "genocide," empowered by "colonial structures evidenced notably by the Indian Act, the Sixties Scoop, residential schools and breaches of human rights, leading directly to the current increased rates of violence, death and suicide of Indigenous peoples" (Reclaiming Power and Place, 2019).

**"Why is it important to understand the history of genocide in Canada? Because it's not history."
— Pam Palmater**

DEFINING GENOCIDE:

Being the "crime of all crimes" (Power, 2002), *genocide* is a contentious word that should not be invoked lightly. Through the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (hereafter, TRC), and under the government of Stephen Harper, Canada admitted to engaging in a "cultural genocide" against Indigenous peoples as a result of Indian Residential Schools which ran for over 100 years. Still, however, there has been much debate regarding whether the Canadian government has also been guilty of literal genocide against First Nations.

The term 'genocide' was coined by Raphael Lemkin who—after conducting research regarding the Armenian massacre in the early 1900s, and having witnessed (first-hand) the atrocities which unfolded in Europe against the Jews in the 1940s—eventually succeeded in making the crime recognized by international law in 1948 (Salvesberg, 2010). Article Two of the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Genocide defines the crime as:

- ...any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, such as:
- ...killing members of the group;
 - Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
 - Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
 - Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group; or
 - Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.

Prior to their ratification, Canada—alongside the United States, New Zealand and Norway—refused to sign onto the UNGC until the original draft language which included the terms "ethnocide and cultural genocide" (Mako, 2012), were removed. In fact, the original draft also included the following:

Indigenous peoples and individuals shall not be subjected to genocide, forced assimilation or destruction of their culture (Mako, 2012, p. 187).

It is important to note that while Canada recognizes the crime laid out by the UNGC, our country only officially acknowledges the following genocides: the Armenian genocide, the Ukrainian genocide, the Holocaust, the Rwandan genocide, and the Bosnian genocide.

**"The words of our lost ones are spoken! We will be there to represent them; they may be lost, but they are not forgotten!"
— Jeremiah Bosse**

METHODOLOGY:

In order to discover how the media and various stakeholders covered/represented the issues raised by the *Inquiry*, newspaper discourse was compiled pertaining to the genocide claim from CBC News, the Globe and Mail and APTN National News. Whilst the former two are Canada's most prominent broadcasting corporations, it was found necessary to include APTN because of the importance of encompassing Indigenous voices—being one of the Calls for Action demanded by the *Inquiry*.

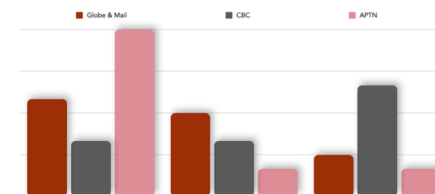
Through the utilization of content analysis with a mixed quantitative and qualitative approach, discourse was compiled and analyzed. While this research has yet to be concluded, thus no resolved answers have coalesced, various tensions and conflicting responses to the *Inquiry's* genocide finding, have emerged.

**"Being part of the Inquiry has opened my eyes to the emotional wounds I was suppressing."
— Fallon Farinacci**



INITIAL FINDINGS:

Quantitatively, data revealed that 70 per cent of the compiled newspaper discourse reported in support of the *Inquiry's* genocide claim, whilst 20 per cent reported against the claim, and 10 per cent neither set a tone that supported nor denied its findings.



Qualitatively, a number of frames emerged—the first being articles against the *Inquiry's* genocide finding. At the forefront of genocide denial was the opinion held by former Aboriginal Affairs Minister Valcourt, shared by a number of articles, who felt the *Inquiry* was "propagandist" and the genocide claim was a "thunderous silly conclusion" (Barrera, 2019). The issue highlighted by a number of reporters was how society, when hearing the word "genocide", think about the worst atrocities such as the Holocaust or the Rwandan genocide, wherein hundreds of thousands (or even millions) of people were slaughtered within a relatively short time frame. Thus, when applying the term to the situation regarding Indigenous peoples, it becomes difficult for most to label those tragedies as a genocide because it has not occurred in a fixed area or time, making it arduous for the general public to "understand the concept of a 'slow genocide'" (Moran, 2019).

Martens (2019) noted the definition of genocide used by the inquiry, pulled from Raphael Lemkin's *Axis Rule*, which states genocide is a "coordinated plan of different actions aiming at the destruction of essential foundations of the life of national groups, with the aim of annihilating the groups themselves" (para 13)—which is a concept that has proven to be unfamiliar to most peoples' understanding of the atrocity. Further explaining this concept of unfamiliarity, Commissioner Qajaq Robinson reminds readers that "who we are is ultimately defined by how we respond to what we know" (Brake, 2019). Thus, genocide denial stems from society's uneducated perspective on the subject which, in turn, enables the belief that such a crime solely involves the physical mass extermination of a group within a fixed state and time.

Contrasting media's portrayal of genocide denial was an abundance of articles supporting the antithesis, and that "persistent and deadly force against Indigenous women and girls is a form of genocide" (Martens, 2019). Barrera (2019) recognized that whilst historical policies are horrifying due to their "systemic destruction of Indigenous communities" in Canada's past, "many of these policies continue today under a different guise" (para 12). Further building the case of the claim, a sociology professor Andrew Woolford stated how genocide continues "not just as a matter of physical destruction, but in a sociological sense, as the destruction of groups" (Barrera, 2019).

Brake (2019) quoted Chief Commissioner Marion Buller, who stood firmly by the belief that what has happened and continues to happen to Indigenous women and girls is a genocide that requires an "absolute paradigm shift" in order to "dismantle colonialism" (para 3). Martens (2019) asserted that because of the continued dominance of colonialism in Canada, "many Indigenous people have grown up normalized to violence" caused by "intergenerational effects of genocide" (para 3).

Sarain Fox (2019), an Indigenous reporter, claims to be a "survivor of genocide" who is "intimately aware of the reality that Canada doesn't want us to exist" (para 4). She states how the very policies that were "created with the goal (intentional or otherwise) to...remove us from the land" still persist, and "govern our relationships with Canada" today, which ultimately continue to "make most of the decisions about what happens here—to [Indigenous] bodies and land" (Fox, 2019, para 5). Fox (2019) further refers to this state of neocolonialism as being enabled by "subtle tools of genocide," which involve "eliminating language, culture, spirituality, dignity, health and economic sovereignty...passed on genetically like a silent epidemic" (para 8).

We think of genocide as violence, and violence as war, but colonialism, while it certainly involves violence, is also about legal systems enabling the violence both physically and socially through discrimination, settler entitlement, and Indigenous oppression.

WHAT DOES THIS TELL US?

As a society, we must implement the calls for action laid out by the TRC and MMIWG Inquiry which clearly lay out what all levels of government, industries/institutions, the media, and all Canadians need to do to end this ongoing genocide. On a governmental level, Indigenous peoples have to be at the table when making decisions regarding things like resource extraction—instead of focusing on pipelines, for example, the government needs to prioritize ending the 58 long-term drinking water advisories currently in effect. There cannot be peaceful coexistence if we are not recognizing Indigenous sovereignty and governance, which is why Indigenous communities are demanding this sovereignty with resistance.

The inquiry is evidence to the continued violence against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA individuals, and it stringently calls on ALL Canadians be part of this long-overdue change. First, we need to educate ourselves, read the inquiry, know our history, OWN our history, and take active steps to call out, condemn, and speak out against racism, sexism, and violence against Indigenous women and girls committed by all segments of society. Only then can we end the persistent genocide against Indigenous women, girls and 2SLGBTQIA peoples.

**"Of all of the hurtful experiences associated with the vanishing of a loved one, one of the most is the racism displayed when our First Nations loved ones disappear."
— Gladys Radek**



FUTURE RESEARCH:

While my research remains unfinished, future research will include a larger time frame from when the MMIWG Inquiry was released to our current day. Instead of solely focusing on newspaper discourse, future research will also include media discourse in general, as well as share first-hand testimonies of Indigenous women, girls, 2SLGBTQIA peoples and victims of this ongoing Canadian genocide. For further questions or insight, please feel free to email me at: sebastianmunshaw@me.com

