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Author Biographies

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Letter from CSAUS

What a crazy year it has been! The authors in this year's Canadian Content journal highlight a diverse array of topics, including voting processes, historic student revolutions, Indigenous rights, and infamous Canadian political figures. The pieces you will read in this journal are the product of exceptional penmanship and a thorough editorial process.

The authors in this year's Canadian Content journal highlight a diverse array of topics, including voting processes, historic student revolutions, Indigenous rights, and infamous Canadian political figures. Overall, the topics covered in this journal provide insight into some of the most significant issues and events in Canadian history. We at CSAUS are delighted that we get to continue the tradition of sharing the best of Canadian content with the McGill undergraduate community.

We would like to extend our sincerest thanks to the Arts Undergraduate Society, who have provided us with the funding and resources necessary to continue the publication of our annual journal. We would also like to thank the McGill Institute for the Study of Canada for their continued support of both the journal and of our executive team.

Most importantly, we would like to thank the authors, editors, and editor-in-chief of the 14th volume of Canadian Content for coming together and making this journal possible. The authors of this journal and editorial team did a phenomenal job of organizing a smooth editorial process and formatting the final versions of the journal. We hope you are all proud of yourselves!

We hope you enjoy the 2022 edition of Canadian Content!

Sincerely,

The 2021-2022 CSAUS Executive Team



Limplementing a 'Vote on Campus' (VOC) option. The VOC option worked well in the previous two federal elections, but in this past election it was nowhere in sight. Lack of access to on-campus voting was a significant barrier for Canadian post-secondary student participation in the latest election.

On-campus voting is necessary for a more vibrant democratic process in Canada because of its proven ability to increase student voter turnout and the potential to instil civic responsibility in younger generations of voters. Foregoing this program further disincentivizes students who are unlikely to vote in the first place.

VOC's Birth

The VOC was initially implemented for the 2015 federal election as a pilot project to encourage post-secondary students to vote. It was put into effect on 39 post-secondary campuses, and consequently, total campus voting turnout surpassed 70,000 in 2015.ⁱⁱ For that election, 58.3 percent of newly eligible voters cast their vote (17.7 points higher than 2011), a result largely attributable to the VOC program.ⁱⁱⁱ

For the 2019 election, the program became available on 115 campuses and to 1.3 million students. This time, over 110,000 voted through the VOC option. According to Elections Canada, approximately 18% of post-secondary students who voted in the 2019 election stated that they would not have done so but for the VOC option.

However, the VOC encountered some logistical hiccups during the 2015 and 2019 elections, namely challenges to securing lease agreements for campus voting offices and managing effectively the high-traffic election day environment. vii

VOC's Disappearance

Elections Canada cited numerous reasons for its inability to provide the VOC in 2021. It suggested that Justin Trudeau's impromptu snap election afforded an insufficient amount of time to prepare and deliver the VOC in 2021. Moreover, the relatively short 35-day countdown to Election Day made hiring workers nearly impossible, especially considering Canada's current labour shortage. Elections Canada deemed it more pressing to reallocate resources to enable voting by vulnerable electors, such as those in long-term care homes, at the expense of on-campus voting. They also admitted that the VOC was assigned lower priority in light of the uncertainty and potential dampening effect caused by the pandemic on the presence of students on campus.

The pandemic certainly made it more complicated for Elections Canada to organise the VOC for the 2021 election. However, it is difficult to believe that they were not aware of the possibility of a snap election, which had been in the news for some time before the writ was officially dropped. The lack of foresight and preparation is unacceptable for an organisation whose fundamental purpose is to ensure that Canadians can exercise their democratic right to vote.

The VOC imperative

For many students, voting is the only connection they have to politics. Carleton University Professor Brenda O'Neill indicates that only approximately 40 percent of 18 to 27-year-old Canadians are interested in politics. She also points out that Canadian youth voter turnout levels have been declining for decades, which she largely attributes to "lower levels of both political interest and knowledge." ix

On-campus voting is a practical remedy to these concerning statistics. The VOC communicates to students that their votes are genuinely important and desired, which encourages them to vote and ultimately lends credence to our democracy. It can also foster a sense of civic duty by emphasising and enabling the fulfilment of what is arguably the most fundamental duty of citizenship. Promoting and embedding democratic values in upcoming generations creates a more robust civil society and protects popular sovereignty.

According to a Library of Parliament research paper, the "habit-forming nature of the act of voting" is a significant determinant in whether an individual votes in the future.^x To increase the likelihood that Canadian youth vote in future elections, it is preferable that they vote as soon as they are eligible. The VOC is a sensible way to prompt habitual voting in Canadian youth.

Moreover, on-campus voting significantly increases accessibility to voting. Geographic proximity is an enormous incentive for students to vote. On-campus voting facilitates fair access to the democratic process for electors with mobility issues, demanding schoolwork, or who live out of province. New Democratic Party leader Jagmeet Singh urged Elections Canada to "reconsider its decision to not have on-campus voting stations in an effort to make voting more accessible for young people."xi

On-campus voting is even more important for universities whose ridings' polling stations have been severely cut down. For instance, CBC News revealed that the riding of Toronto Centre, where Toronto Metropolitan University is located, only had 15 election-day polling stations instead of the 91 it had in 2019.xii

Finally, given the enormous cost of this election to taxpayers (reported at over 600 million dollars), it is lamentable to not facilitate voting access to such a significant segment of Canadian society. Elections Canada certainly missed a habit-forming opportunity to get post-secondary students on board with the electoral process. The likelihood of adequate government representation of student interests also decreases when thousands opt out of voting.

Prioritising VOC

Providing on-campus voting must be made an Elections Canada priority and should be guaranteed in future federal elections. VOC ensures enhanced accessibility to voting, boosts current and future voting levels, and encourages the fulfilment of a fundamental civic duty, all of which will create more meaningful and lasting democratic participation from young Canadians.

Notes

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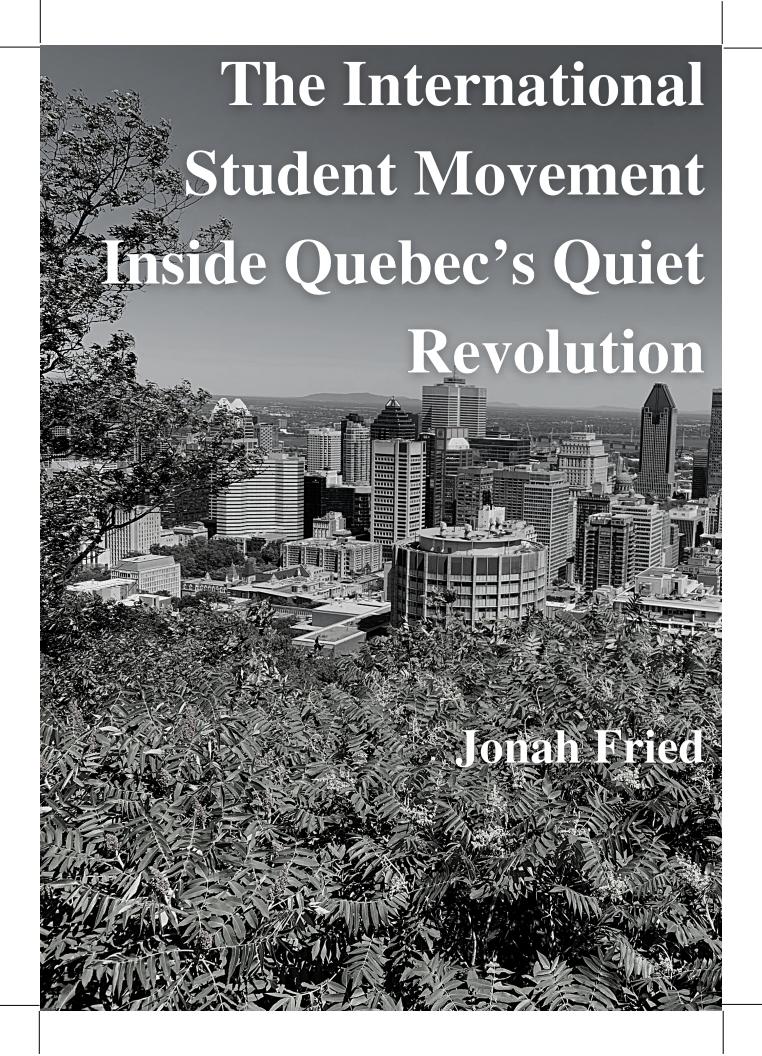
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Students in Quebec are automatically registered as members of their institutions' student societies. At all educational levels, from colleges (CEGEPs) to universities, these associations organise activities, run student services, and other functions. But since the 1960s Quiet Revolution—a Quebec-wide socio-political transformation remembered as a time when Francophones asserted the right to national self-determination—student syndicates have reimagined themselves as political vehicles for collective action. The most notorious example of this trend may be the 2012 "Maple Spring," when students claimed the trade-union right to enact "anti-scab legislation" during protests against proposed tuition increases. Although student unions existed in Quebec before the 1960s, they had never been so political. For them, "activism," if they used that word, probably meant defending academic rights, not international human rights or combatting American imperialism. That radical ideological shift did not occur until the growing Quebec student population embraced "student socialism" in the 1960s and 1970s, drawing on an idea first articulated in 1946 when French students identified themselves as "intellectual labourers."

The National Union of French Students (NUFS), which met at Grenoble in 1946 to ratify the Grenoble Charter of Student Rights, patented the idea of student syndicalism. The concept of "intellectual labour" does not just refer to student activities like studying, going to class, taking exams, or even learning as a mental process. For the NUFS, students had a "sacred" duty to uphold truth, "defend freedom," and challenge the "outdated" institutions that governed them. Because they saw themselves as "workers," they claimed "trade-union rights." In this way, producing knowledge was conceived as a class issue for all university students. This revolutionary concept of student-class solidarity quickly spread in the 1960s to the Netherlands and Belgium before launching the international student unionisation movement, which consisted of tuition strikes, anti-imperialist political demonstrations across Europe, the United States, and Canada. Wii Within three decades, student groups at universities all over the world had received special legal distinctions, such as the ability to collectively bargain with governments on behalf of students' interests.

Quebec was no exception, but it was a special case. It was different because the circumstances of the "Quiet Revolution" were unique to the province, which accumulated unprecedented legislative autonomy and cultural distinction. Above all, French speakers obtained the collective right to use their language in law, business, and education. It was a political awakening for (neo)nationalists and socialists; a new era symbolically consecrated in 1959 when Maurice Duplessis, "the last of the Ancien Regime line of Seigneurs," died. (Neo)nationalist and overtly nationalist parties were elected—notably the 1950s' Cite-Libre and, after 1960, Jean Lesage's Liberal Party. At the same time, a disproportionately Francophone working class repeatedly striked for better conditions. xi

Just as French Canadians reconstituted themselves in terms of national self-determination, Quebec also experienced a new labour-class consciousness—the result of 19th century industrialization, anticlericalism, and anti-capitalism best exemplified in notorious popular figures like Joe Beef (Charles McKieran), whose restaurant mocked provincial elites in the late nineteenth century. XII Yet La Révolution Tranquille was not just about class, religion, or ethnicity. It was also

about rethinking public institutions, which meant challenging the Catholic Church's control over various areas of provincial administration, and above all, education. Francophones were demanding national self-determination because they had been discriminated against in the past, and instructing students in the language became a national priority. The statistics demonstrate this concern. For example, in 1960, only 2.9 percent of Francophones aged 20 to 24 attended university. Although 11 per cent of Anglophones did receive higher education, this remained a marginal figure relative to Ontario and the United States. As such, promoting French was considered an equity issue, and education became an equality-of-opportunity issue.

All of this meant that Quebec students were, in many important respects, engaged in different political struggles from their 1946 French counterparts. Consider also that Nazi Germany occupied France from 1941-1944 while North America was comparatively untouched. This produced many violent Marxist resistance groups in France, and the pre-war socialist Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière (SFIO) won 23 percent of the 1945 vote. xvi One could infer that the NUFS Grenoble declaration was influenced by national political trends, not just their struggles as students. Perhaps for this reason, the Grenoble Charter has not received much attention—in France, at least, it was not actually all that revolutionary. When Grenoble's ideas reached Quebec in the 1960s, they struck a new chord and birthed a distinctly French-Canadian model of student-syndicalist culture. Students at the Université de Montréal in 1961 were the first to adopt student socialism.xvii But UdeM was relatively expensive, and the University of Quebec (UQAM) and CEGEP systems were not implemented until 1968.xviii As such, the UdeM syndicate's ideas did not reach rural or working-class students. The push to democratise higher education continued, prompting the 1964 formation of the General Ouebec Students' Union (UGEQ). xix However, in 1968, the news of mass European student protests reached Quebec. The UGEQ began to demonstrate as well, demanding more schools for French students, which finally led Lesage's administration to establish l'UQAM and other educational reforms.xx Further, after 1968, French institutions may have received more funding than English universities like McGill as a form of affirmative action.xxi Growth in the education sector—new CEGEPS, new Frenchlanguage institutions, increasing enrolments—meant that more Quebecers were becoming students. xxii Before the Quiet Revolution, a university education was often inaccessible to less affluent Quebecers. At that time, few could afford the tuition, textbooks, time commitment, and other sacrifices that one made to study. The 1960s brought new, cheap, public CEGEPs, standardised low university tuition rates, and proliferated French-language schools for an increasingly nationally self-conscious French speaking populace. Enrolments skyrocketed, even in the Anglophone world. McGill's student population doubled from 1960 to 1970, to 14,500. xxiii Similar figures were seen at French institutions. Although student associations had existed in the province as early as 1909, when the Students' Society of McGill University was established, their constituencies grew considerably after 1960. xxiv As their mandates incorporated more people, they had to encompass more interests, and reconcile their identities with their student populations' changing demographic. Adjacent class turmoil meant that socialist, Marxist, and other welfarestate theories penetrated the Quebec mentalité. These developments also transpired within a global

Cold War zeitgeist of radical socialism, anti-capitalism, and anti-colonialism, issues that the international student movement heralded across Europe and the United States. xxv At McGill, which had historically been relatively moderate, many accredited student groups disseminated Marxist pamphlets—particularly to condemn Canada's position on the Arab-Israeli conflict. xxvi

For English and French student syndicates, international socialism also translated to combative unionism. *xxvii In 1974, lawmakers nearly implemented new entry exams for Francophone students. *xxviii Although the government backed down after student syndicates mobilised in opposition to the proposal. In 1975, students federated into the National Association of Quebec Students (ANEEQ). *xxix* In the years that followed, students lobbied the government for tuition freezes, representation in academic structures, financial aid, and other policies. *xxx* Through this process, Grenoblesque intellectual socialism became a popular way of rebranding student associations. A close reading of student organisations' activities shows that, by the 1960s, Quebec students were starting to mimic labour unions—perhaps as their Grenoble forebearers anticipated. But the province's matriculates succeeded beyond the Grenoble students' wildest dreams. Unlike other provinces or countries, Quebec student syndicates are still radical and combative. *xxxi The 2012 Maple Spring uprising is case in point, revealing a status quo that may stem from Quebec's separatist politics and legal autonomy.

The Parti Québécois' 1983 ratification of Law 32, An Act respecting the accreditation and financing of students' associations, was a watershed moment. xxxii It has preserved the Quebec student movement's gains ever since, legislating compulsory student syndicate fees, and justifying their "monopoly" on political representation. xxxiii Whatever the legislators' original rationale, student groups do not enjoy privileges like Law 32 anywhere else. xxxiv The Parti may have favoured such policies because the events of 1968 and 1974 showed that student interests were inseparable from the nationalist cause. At a minimum, there was certainly a correlation. Although not every student in the 1960s to the 1980s was a Quebec Sovereigntist, provincial administrations furthered Francophone representation when they championed student socialism. This campaign of the Quiet Revolution brought increasing numbers of French-speaking students into the higher education ecosystem. Considering the proximity of 1960s radical dogma, such demographic trends may explain why student unions became as politically active, financially independent, and capable as they are today. It was a short step from the 1983 National Assembly to Montreal streets in 2012. Many academics like McGill Professor Jacob T. Levy were horrified when students claimed the authority to use anti-scab legislation, yet it was the natural culmination of almost four decades of student activism.xxxv The strikers in 2012 may not have articulated themselves in Grenoble terms, but they exercised the trade-union prerogatives that 1946 French students demanded as their sacred right.

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Indigenous Women's Rights in Canada



Saruul Khishigjargal

Introduction

s Hilary Clinton said at the 1995 United Nations Women's Conference, "women's rights are human rights" Indigenous women's rights are human rights. Indigenous women and girls from First Nations, Inuit, and Métis origins face brutal human rights violations through sexual and gender-based violence in Canada. Established and perpetuated by colonial instruments like the Indian Act, the Sixties Scoop, and Residential Schools, gender-based violence against Indigenous women and girls remains an ongoing and unchanging phenomenon in Canada. Amnesty International calls this violence genocide. ii Although Indigenous women and girls make up only four percent of the Canadian population, they are three and a half times more likely to experience gender-based violence than non-Indigenous women and five times more likely to be murdered than non-Indigenous women. iii Staggering statistics like these are surprising and suspicious to find in a self-proclaimed post-colonial or modern state like Canada. iv So, to investigate this topic further, this report explores human rights violations against Indigenous women and girls, focusing on the themes of gender-based violence, colonial sovereignty and legacies, state repression, and reconciliation. The report analyses the origins, manifestations, and remedies for gender-based violence against Indigenous women and girls. More specifically, it argues that gender-based violence continues to exist today because a) the Canadian state operates from a mindset of settler-colonial sovereignty which sees Indigenous peoples as an existential threat rather than subjects to protect, b) state-mandated repression through legal and enforcement systems are unchanged, which creates discriminatory practices and gives impunity to perpetrators, and c) reconciliation efforts as extensive as they have been, are ineffective in offering solutions due to the existing gaps.

Further, the significance of this report is three-fold. Firstly, it highlights the lived realities of Indigenous women and girls by examining their experience of state repression and gender-based violence. This serves to dispel the myth of the Canadian state as a humanitarian and benevolent provider and urges the Canadian state to uphold its responsibility to protect Indigenous women and youth against all forms of violence and discrimination effectively. Secondly, it calls to attention the residual and unresolved legacy of colonialism in Canada. Through the case study of police brutality in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, the report emphasizes the existing systemic discrimination and its contribution to gender-based violence against Indigenous women and girls. And lastly, the report provides a critical analysis of the reconciliation efforts made by the Canadian government. The report is organised into two main sections. The first section will investigate gender-based violence against Indigenous women and girls from the perspective of state sovereignty and state repression. Then the second section will assess reconciliation as a form of decolonization for Canada and discuss the key achievements made so far as well as the gaps that need to be addressed regarding Indigenous women's rights.

State repression and gender-based violence against Indigenous women and girls

Jaskiran Dhillion states, "the continual existence of Indigenous peoples in Canada

constitutes a direct conflict with settler control and the related political entitlements ensconced in settler governance."vi This means that the persistent dispossession and repression of Indigenous peoples in Canada shows that the state still operates from a mindset of *settler-colonial sovereignty* as opposed to the state operating from a mindset of *post-colonial state sovereignty*. Settler-colonial sovereignty pursues territorial integrity or the complete capture of colonial lands for resource extraction and the development of a new state, requiring the successful assimilation of the predecessors of the land. vii Whereas post-colonial state sovereignty resumes the responsibility to protect the subject within its borders. viii In other words, state sovereignty based on the supreme power within state borders and land-based resource extraction for state formation created and perpetuated the need for state repression of Indigenous peoples in Canada. This state repression has been experienced by Indigenous women dually as racial discrimination as well as sexual and gender-based violence.

Because the settler-colonial state had to extract resources from the land for its development, the state labelled Indigenous peoples, specifically women, who inhabited the lands as backward, defenceless, and in need of western civilization. This is because of the phenomenon known as the white man's burden, whereby colonial settlers saw themselves as the heroes in the story of colonisation, bringing civilization to barbaric or savage people of uncultivated lands. The colonial settlers would bring along their Western conception of gender roles and would view Indigenous women as property and equate them to the lands that they sought to conquer. For example, colonial settlers used derogatory terms meaning promiscuous, immoral and ugly to refer to Indigenous women. They also regarded Indigenous women as racially and morally inferior to Indigenous men as well as European men and women.

Moreover, Dhillion argues that sexual violence was used as a colonial tactic to generate the notion that Indigenous women were defenseless and violable, and by extension, their lands were also defenseless and "up for grabs."xii Because of this, violence to women's bodies came to symbolise the sovereignty or control of Indigenous lands and resources.xiii This colonization tactic of sexual violence not only dehumanized Indigenous women and took away their individual agency, but it also caused a breakdown of past Indigenous gender norms. With the traditions of Indigenous gender roles nullified, the value of Indigenous women within their own communities began to diminish over time.xiv And after 150 years since Canada was constituted a state, gender-based violence continues to be the most experienced by Indigenous women and girls in Canada. This violence is propagated by institutions, such as the justice system and federal enforcement agency, which operate from colonial structures built upon racial and gender-based discrimination.

Indigenous women and girls are overpoliced but under-protected because of racial and gender-based discriminatory policies and practices in the Canadian justice system and federal enforcement agency, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). For instance, the Indian Act, established in 1876, legally stripped Indigenous women of individual sovereignty and agency and created economic, political, and social dependency on either Indigenous men or European men through marriage or family ties.^{xv} This means that Indigenous women are increasingly vulnerable to domestic violence, with data showing that they are "eight times more likely to

experience intimate partner homicide."xvi However, domestic violence is not the greatest threat to the safety and security of Indigenous women and girls. The Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women reported that Indigenous women are more likely to be murdered by strangers and acquaintances than by partners.xvii

In addition, a 2013 report by the Human Rights Watch, *Those Who Take Us Away*, revealed that sexual and gender-based violence against Indigenous women and girls have been continually committed yet overlooked by law enforcement agents in British Columbia. viii The report cited "physical abuse by both police and judges, sexual assault, the terrorizing of Indigenous communities through hyper surveillance, unjust detainment for intoxication, racist threats, and zero accountability for police misconduct."xix The findings sparked new waves of investigations mandated by the United Nations and Amnesty International addressing the Canadian state to research and evaluate the livelihood of Indigenous women across Canada. xx The subsequent case study of police brutality in Saskatoon, Saskatchewan proved that racial and gender-based violence against Indigenous women and girls is in fact the standard, not the exception.

State repression manifests as police brutality against Indigenous women and youth in Saskatoon, and it is a symptom of systemic discrimination and violence. xxi Everyday microdoses of intimidation, threats, physical domination, racial profiling, silencing, and lack of accountability feed a racially and gender discriminatory culture within the Saskatoon city police and justice system. xxii The racist attitude towards Indigenous women and girls by the police system stems from the colonial legacy of white power and privilege, which in the modern day translates as authority.xxiii Because of this, the police feel justified in their use of excessive and arbitrary surveillance and force against Indigenous women and youth to silence their voices, diminish their agency, destabilise their security and communities, and maintain their sense of control over them. For instance, Dhillion recounts a case of two police officers interrogating an Indigenous woman named Sherry. xxiv They accused her of breaking parole while she was on a walk in her community but before Sherry could explain that she was not, the police started roughhousing her, convinced that she was lying. xxv When Sherry came to visit her case worker, Paula, the next day, her arm was in a sling and her face black and blue. xxvi What is even more alarming is that because her case worker had seen this occur frequently, she didn't report it to her supervisor or file a complaint against the police station because it was "time consuming and often didn't result in anything being done".xxvii

This example attests to two key things. The first is that many cases of police violence against Indigenous women and youth go unreported and so the available data does not capture the full extent of the violations against their rights. Second, the lack of initiative from the case worker suggests that the criminal justice system turns a blind eye to the violations. This begs the question, what exactly is the role of the criminal justice system in Saskatchewan in the gender-based violence against Indigenous women and youth? Aside from police brutality, Saskatoon is notorious for the disproportionate number of imprisoned Indigenous women, men, and youth compared to non-Indigenous people.xxviii The systemic discrimination of Indigenous peoples makes them more likely to be arrested, detained, sentenced, jailed, and incarcerated.xxix

Justice for Girls and the Native Women's Association, triggered the very first human rights violation investigation into Canada by the Human Rights Watch in 2013.** Collaboratively, they produced a report, *Those Who Take Us Away*, to draw the attention of the international community and the Canadian public to the neglected reality of Indigenous women and girls who live through sexual and gender-based violence. Although this was not the first time the issue was brought up, the report marked a turning point for Indigenous women and girls' rights to become a priority in state affairs.

Secondly, NGOs empowered Indigenous communities to share their truths and create community-led change. Findings from the research and investigations incited new programs through NGOs as reconciliation efforts with state and private sector funding. xxxvi For example, NGOs like Networks4Change and More Than Words have been working to empower Indigenous youth to safely tell their truths in a culturally authentic way. More specifically, the programs worked with sexual and gender-based Indigenous survivors and encouraged them to tell their stories through art as a means of truth gathering and healing. This form of participatory work has incited community-led changes from East to West, challenging the discriminatory policies and practices that prevent Indigenous peoples from achieving adequate protection.

Finally, the NGO's organised social movements allowed the broader Canadian public to participate in social change and pressure the government to take decisive action towards policy reform. The momentum built by back-to-back social movements in 2020, such as Indigenous Lives Matter, Justice for Joyce, and more recently Orange Shirt Day, successfully mobilised the public against the ongoing violence against Indigenous women and girls, calling for more inclusive governance and effective protection for Indigenous peoples. These reconciliation efforts made 2020 the year of Indigenous Activism in Canada, and the protests, social media campaigns, and youth-led activists successfully pressured the government to make policy reforms and change its behaviour towards Indigenous affairs.xxxviii For instance, in June 2021, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) was finally adopted by the federal government, making Indigenous rights protected by the legal system.xxxviii

These acts of solidarity prompted the federal government to renew its commitments to reconciliation efforts by sponsoring new programs and revising policies to support Indigenous communities more fully and practically. XXXIX While the state has more to do to ensure Indigenous women and girls are fully protected, the progress made in recent years is promising. In summary, the robust activity of NGOs played a critical role in reconciliation for Indigenous women and girls through mass mobilisation, Indigenous empowerment, and data documentation to pressure the state to prioritise Indigenous rights and protection. The recent pledge of 18 billion dollars towards Indigenous peoples' affairs by the federal government in their 2021-2022 fiscal budget shows the tangible impact of NGOs' efforts. XI It also demonstrates that the state is willing to step up to its responsibilities and provide effective protection for the Indigenous women and girls in Canada.

However, there remains progress to be made and gaps to be filled to ensure that Indigenous women's rights are protected and sexual and gender-based violence is eradicated. Indigenous

In Saskatchewan, Indigenous peoples are even more vulnerable as Indigenous women and girls comprise 87% of the prison population. This racist, gendered and often biased criminalization of Indigenous people leads to increased insecurity and decreased protection for Indigenous women and girls. Without a reliable mechanism to ensure their safety, Indigenous women and girls are left to weather the storms of sexual and gender-based violence alone, with minimal progress over time.

Thus, the lived experiences of gender-based violence and human rights violations of Indigenous women and girls at the hands of state-controlled institutions, such as the enforcement agency and justice system, serve as concrete examples of the continued colonial practices of settler-colonial state sovereignty in Canada. Having established that, in order to move towards decolonization or "reconciliation" in Canada, the state needs to update its institutional operations to provide effective protection and enforcement of Indigenous rights, specifically focusing on Indigenous women's rights. The next section will explore the reconciliation efforts, progress, and gaps involved in creating a decolonial agenda.

Reconciliation efforts and gaps regarding Indigenous women's rights

Reconciliation is defined as the process of creating mutually respectful relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people by fostering an "awareness of the past, an acknowledgment of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour."xxxii Reconciliation emerged from an Indigenous-led organisation that began in 2012 following the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, which documented the impact of residential schools on Indigenous communities.xxxii Reconciliation efforts starting with the research into residential schools which have uncovered existing and unresolved colonial legacies and ignited momentum for the advocacy for Indigenous peoples' rights. For example, in May 2021, the first of many unmarked graves of Indigenous children were discovered in the former Kamloops residential school building and surrounding areas.xxxiii These unmarked graves are currently still under investigation and are estimated to comprise over 3,200 Indigenous children who attended the residential school.xxxiv This discovery took the media by storm and highlighted the struggle of Indigenous peoples, who pressured their government to do better.

It also sparked the Every Child Matters movement which was organised by Indigenous-led non-governmental organisations (NGOs). NGOs are the forerunners in advocating for Indigenous rights and they are particularly active when it comes to Indigenous women and girls' rights. NGOs have played a crucial role in reconciliation by advocating for women and girls' rights through three key actions. NGOs publicised the truths and lived realities of Indigenous women and girls, empowered women to tell their stories, and demanded justice from federal and provincial governments through organised social movements. Firstly, NGO-led investigation into Indigenous livelihoods and documented the necessary data to prove that Indigenous peoples are left unprotected and structurally targeted by the state. NGOs acted as the whistle-blowers and knowledge keepers regarding the plights of Indigenous people in Canada. For instance, the NGOs,

women say that most reconciliation efforts, from support programs to violence prevention frameworks, do not reflect their actual lived realities and thus do not offer effective solutions. xli This misrepresentation and resulting ineffective efforts stem in part from the overuse of the term "reconciliation" in recent years, leading it to mean different things for different people. The head of state, Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, for example, uses reconciliation to represent the "decolonization of the 1876 Indian Act," while most Indigenous peoples across Canada see it as a symbolic acknowledgment for the damage done rather than a change in state behaviour. xlii In other words, the reconciliation efforts that the state has produced so far have yielded modest results for the lived realities of Indigenous women and girls. So what is missing in reconciliation efforts to effectively ensure Indigenous women's rights?

The National Action Plan on Violence Against Women and Gender-Based Violence (NAP) has identified four key gaps to answer this question: xliii

- 1. <u>Social infrastructure and protection</u> are vital for Indigenous women and girls because they provide the social and economic foundation to exercise their rights. xliv
- 2. <u>Prevention work</u> needs to be inclusive, trauma-informed, and needs-based. It needs to include men and women to decolonize gender roles. In addition, it needs to retrain social workers to tackle trauma related to gender-based violence and address the situational needs of women, such as housing, more effectively. It
- 3. <u>Responsive legal and justice systems</u> need to be promoted to ensure that the lived realities of violence against Indigenous women are represented and held legally accountable to ensure their long-term safety. xlvii
- 4. <u>Survivors and their families</u> need to be supported with well-coordinated, accessible, and universal services, such as health care, child protection, and social assistance. These services need to be prioritised to foster effective community-based response mechanisms to violations against Indigenous women's rights. xlviii

These gaps that exist prevent Indigenous women from accessing their fundamental human right to life, no discrimination, equality before the law, freedom of expression, right to social security, and right to freedom, to name a few. Thus, to move towards effective reconciliation and protection of the rights of Indigenous women and girls, the Canadian state must decisively act at both the federal and provincial levels as well as support the NGOs and other advocates who are working to tackle these challenges.

Conclusion

This report argues that Indigenous women's rights have been violated by the persistence of gender-based violence in Canada. It examined settler-colonial state sovereignty and the continually practised colonial instruments, such as the Indian Act and state repression, as the core reasons behind gender-based violence against Indigenous women. Then, the paper investigated a case

study on state repression in Saskatoon that established the justice system and the federal police agency are operating from outdated and discriminatory practices that maintain and cause disproportionate violence to Indigenous women based on race and gender. Additionally, the paper has evaluated the efficacy of reconciliation regarding the protection of Indigenous women and girls' rights. It has analysed the achievements of NGOs as significant reconciliation efforts in pushing the agenda of Indigenous women and girls' protection and rights. Finally, the report outlines four areas, namely social infrastructure and protection, prevention work, responsive legal and justice systems, and supporting survivors and their families, as gaps in reconciliation that need to be addressed.

Though Indigenous women's rights have been systematically violated and limited by state-controlled institutions, reconciliation efforts and the recently renewed commitments to policy change are promising. Without discounting the fact that Indigenous women say their experiences don't reflect the claims of efforts and progress reported by the Canadian government, it is important to recognize the increased prioritisation of Indigenous affairs by the Canadian government. The social change of eradicating racial discrimination and healing from gender-based violence against Indigenous women and girls may be slow and gruelling. Nevertheless, this change is necessary to build a more inclusive, stable, and prosperous nation. Only time can tell if reconciliation efforts by the Canadian government are for show or if Canada has finally stepped up to meet its responsibility as a post-colonial or modern state and provides effective protection to all individuals within its borders.

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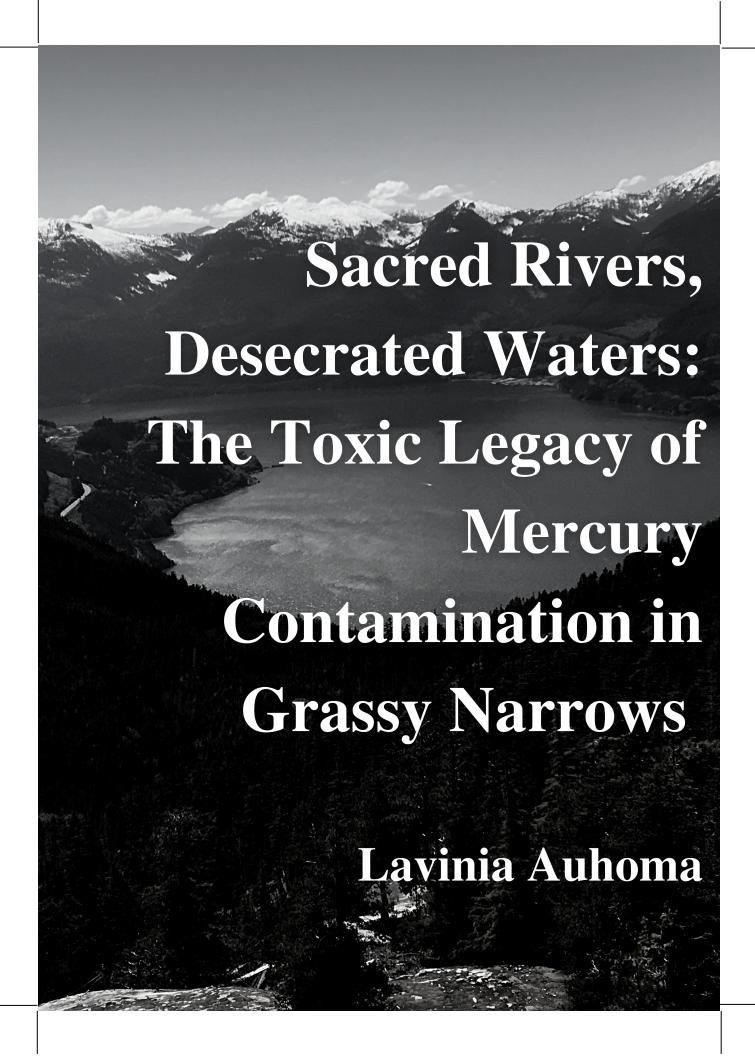
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I. Introduction

Asubpeeschoseewagong First Nation, an Ojibwe community, live in what is better known as Grassy Narrows. Along the English-Wabigoon riverbank flows an inauspicious stream, carrying 20,000 pounds of mercury, a toxin that torments those who have cared for it the most. The mercury contamination of Grassy Narrows marks one of the most arduous socioenvironmental conflicts between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state. In the 1960s and 1970s, the Canadian government enabled destructive corporations to violate their land and livelihood to build factories and corporations. While in direct violation of previous Treaty acknowledgements, the plight of the Grassy Narrows First Nation was dismissed by the government. Reckless endangerment is an understatement—the mercury poisoning of the Grassy Narrows reserve is "nothing less than genocidal." The prosperity of Grassy Narrows is deeply interwoven with the health of its river. As Chief Fobister of Grassy Narrows First Nation declares, "the story of my people, the Grassy Narrows First Nation, weighs heavily on the collective conscience of Canada. For over half a century, mercury poison has contaminated the river that is our lifeblood." The prosperity of Grassy Narrows that is our lifeblood."

In this paper, I seek to answer a central question: how does the enduring presence of mercury contamination within Grassy Narrows permeate its cultural landscape? By consulting literary studies and fieldwork in my research, I analyse the ethnographic case of Grassy Narrows within an anthropological lens, considering the dichotomy between the Ojibwe worldview against the Western worldview. iv Throughout this essay, I aim to prove that the mercury pollution of the English-Wabigoon River of the Grassy Narrows Nation in the 1960s and 1970s signifies the climax of cultural erasure within the reserve, a long-standing struggle between the Ojibwe community and state actors, which includes the provincial government of Ontario, Canada, and the Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Act (DIAND). However, it is not the beginning of this conflict, which is indivisible from the colonialism and capitalism that legalised and socialised systemic violence. Through forced land dispossession and displacement, the state has destabilised the Grassy Narrows First Nation physically, socially, and spiritually. The poisoned rivers serve as a reminder of the enduring presence of colonialism. Its virulent legacy plagues the culture of the Grassy Narrows First Nation intergenerationally through a myriad of health and social issues, which can be traced back to mercury contamination, enabled by the colonial project.

II. Background

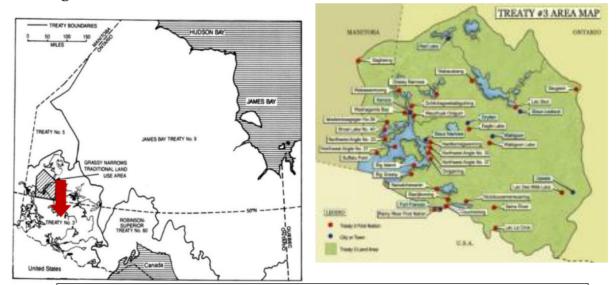


Figure 1 (left) and Figure 2 (right). Map of Treaty No. 3 Land Area as of 1873.

In 1873, a few years after the confederation of Canada, the Ojibwe First Nation signed Treaty No. 3, yielding territorial ownership of 55,000 square miles of their land to Canada in exchange for rights to harvest on non-reserve lands, as shown in Figures 1 and 2.vi Part of this agreement ensured that the Ojibwe peoples had access to their traditional land-use area for hunting and harvest purposes. However, this agreement came with one major caveat, which stated that their access is granted only until the government should create new rules for their industrial purposes. As Vecsey writes, "the infrastructure of Canadian life brought changes, and also disaster."vii Shortly after the declaration of Treaty No. 3, the Ojibwe communities retreated to one of two reserves, one being Grassy Narrows. viii False promises of cooperation were made to the Grassy Narrows First Nation regarding their land and the government's interference. Eventually, in 1947, the former Department of Lands and Forests enacted a new program of licensing lands that forced the community to seek land-use permits to use their traditional land areas. ix This infringed on the rights granted by Treaty No. 3, and consequently, the people living in Grassy Narrows were forced to relocate along the English-Wabigoon River. It signalled the beginning of long-term oppression through physical displacement, social oppression, and spiritual corruption, leading to cultural erasure.

The physical dispossession of land from the Grassy Narrows First Nation weakened their cultural landscape to meet the goals of the state. The impact of forced resettlement is imperative to understanding the legacy of mercury contamination in the region, as the conditions that predated the mercury spillage created fertile grounds for exploitation.* The relocation of the Grassy Narrows reserve was non-consensual and coerced, leaving them famished with insufficient lands for hunting and agriculture; fishing was their only resort. While all documentation that details the reasons for relocating the Grassy Narrows peoples have "disappeared," most scholarship suggests that the resettlement was in line with the colonial project's goal of assimilation in an attempt to

"modernise Indigenous life." Following their relocation, the state allowed Reed Ltd., a paper and pulp mill, to begin operation upstream along the English-Wabigoon River system. Throughout their production from 1962 to 1970, an estimated 20,000 pounds of inorganic mercury was dumped into the river, which underwent a process of biomethylation to become methylmercury, an extremely lethal substance that moves up the food chain. As the Grassy Narrows First Nation relied on fishing after their relocation, the mercury which entered the fish soon entered the bloodstream of the people. Environmentally and physically deadly, mercury corrupted the body with dire effects. Symptoms were grave, including speech disorders, cerebellar atrophy, paralysis, and deformity. The methylmercury would also remain in the fetus and be passed down at birth, afflicting generations to come. The state of the people is a state of the passed down at birth, afflicting generations to come.

The burden of mercury contamination was not only physical, but also socioeconomic. The forced relocation of the Grassy Narrows First Nation demonstrated a remnant of the colonial project that continues to play its heavy hand. The destruction of their economy and the damage to their health and livelihood deny their ability to live autonomously. The new location also left no room for traditional Ojibwe perceptions of proper social planning, debilitating the sense of cultural unity within the First Nation. For example, the practice of trapping was a mainstay of Ojibwe culture, and it was made impossible as subsistence agriculture was depleted in the new region. This was an act of cultural erasure by the government, resulting in the demoralisation of the community which has been caused or aggravated by economic and cultural losses stemming directly from the contamination of the river system. Today, the Grassy Narrows First Nation is rife with issues due to socioeconomic neglect, such as high suicide rates, drug abuse, and alcoholism.

Mercury contamination, along with the destructive behaviours of the state regarding land dispossession, permeated the spirituality of the Ojibwe First Nation within Grassy Narrows. Firstly, it must be acknowledged that "spirituality" exists as a Western conception. This language does not appear within Indigenous sources, as the sacred nature of the river and land is fact of life and part of the Ojibwe worldview, not divorced from reality as the term "spirituality" may imply.xix The colonial project of modernization came with "racism, discrimination, loss of land and culture, and traditional Anishinaabe spiritual practices being outlawed."xx Furthermore, following their relocation, the people of Grassy Narrows would refer to the land as a death sentence and "spiritually deadly."xxi It was a foreboding omen, a possible warning sign for the destruction that would soon poison their land. Through the denial and eventual criminalization of spiritual practices, the state stripped away at the foundation of the Grassy Narrows First Nation. As a result, the enduring presence of mercury in the river stream persists through the tides of life, demoralising the social consciousness of the Grassy Narrows First Nation and corrupting the spiritual beliefs of the land.

III. Analysis

From an anthropological perspective, the physical, social, and spiritual subjugation of the Grassy Narrows First Nation, due to the mercury contamination speaks to the dichotomy between

Western and Ojibwe worldviews, and the reality of the relationship between nature and culture. The sanctity of the environment is deeply interconnected with the way of life for the Ojibwe peoples, but for the Canadian government, the priority is economic development, which they seek regardless of its impact on the environment. Furthermore, the case of the Grassy Narrows First Nation and the debilitating effects of mercury contamination reinforces the stronghold of the Western hegemony. Traditional ecological knowledge is seen as inferior to Western scientific knowledge. The government thus denies autonomy to Indigenous peoples due to the falsified belief that they will not be able to govern themselves. To reclaim the territory and foster Grassy Narrows back to health, the belief is that land must be returned to its rightful caretakers, the Ojibway peoples. The divide between nature and culture is one of the main underlying conflicts that affect the case of Grassy Narrows. Through observing cultures within anthropology, it is clear that in the Western framework, culture is assigned exclusively to humans, existing in the foreground, and non-human entities are seen as static entities, as objects in the background. This contrasts with the Ojibwe conception of nature that views both nature and culture as interwoven. The Elders of the Grassy Narrows First Nation maintain that the mercury poisoning permeates the entire ecosystem and their people's culture. They state that when "the fish, animals, birds, and plants are sick" and "when the land is sick, the people are also sick."xxii Various anthropological studies have expanded this view, exploring cultures that view nonhumans and humans as equal participants within society. This has supported Indigenous claims to territory and sovereignty because of their historical claims to land and Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK).

The emergence of Traditional Ecological Knowledge is relevant to the case of the Grassy Narrows First Nation as it grants its community a newfound legitimacy and a framework of autonomy. According to Berkes, Traditional Ecological Knowledge is defined as "a cumulative body of knowledge and beliefs, handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment." It seeks to highlight Indigenous forms of knowledge as equally valuable to scientific knowledge and diminish the hierarchy that considers Western knowledge superior, as reinforced by colonial realities. XXIV Arguably, TEK can work in tandem with scientific knowledge because it expands an otherwise limited conception of the world. For the Grassy Narrows First Nation, it means acknowledging that the river and the people exist within an interdependent system. Highlighting Indigenous voices, methodology, and approaches allows the Ojibwe people to reclaim the land they know best. Thus, respect is the most appropriate way to reconcile with the consequences of mercury contamination and cultural oppression.

IV. Outcome

Despite the numerous obstacles to cultural sovereignty, the Grassy Narrows First Nation stands united and defiant against the years of oppression that permeated their culture and livelihood. In 1976, Chief Fobister demanded reparations for the mercury poisoning on the reserve, including a formal acknowledgement from the state actors, such as the government of Ontario, Canada, and the DIAND, to take accountability for the destruction of this community.xxv

However, justice for Grassy Narrows remains out of reach. While the DIAND subsidised \$121,000 to Treaty No. 3 chiefs, it continues to deny that the provincial and federal governments hold legal responsibility for the mercury contamination of their territory. *xxvi* This apprehension led to a public outcry that rallied the government into creating a "Memorandum of Understanding" and the "Grassy Narrows and Islington Bands Mercury Pollution Claims Settlements Act." *xxvii* However, these reconciliation efforts were fruitless, as the real issues in Grassy Narrows, such as economic depletion and adverse health effects, were never resolved. In 2002, Grassy Narrows defenders organised a blockade that prevented logging trucks from entering their territory—a defiant act symbolising the adversity they faced from a paper and pulp mill. While it receives little attention in Canadian media, the Grassy Narrows blockade is the longest-running in North American history. *xxviii*



Figure 3. Personal photo taken at Toronto Climate Strike 2019.

In recent years, Grassy Narrows has not stepped down in its plight for Indigenous sovereignty. Now, their movement has grown, and their goals have broadened, supporting wider efforts of decolonization within Canada. In my field research, I first encountered Grassy Narrows at the Toronto Climate Strike in 2019, seen in Figure 3, where the "Free Grassy" movement took centre stage. It called on the media's acknowledgement of mercury contamination, supporting decolonization efforts and demanding "Land Back" to re-establish Treaty no. 3 areas as Ojibwe land. "Land Back" is a slogan coined by Arnell Tailfeathers, a member of the Blackfoot confederacy, in criticism of Prime Minister Justin Trudeau's complacency and failure to deliver proper reconciliation.** This sentiment echoes with the Grassy Narrows First Nation, who have fought for the fair return of their land since the 1960s and continue to do so today.

V. Conclusion

The Grassy Narrows First Nation suffers the burden of mismanagement, ignorance, and corporate greed at the hands of the state. As an "outsider" to the community, I do not represent the community or its members, though I express utmost respect for their work, which I delineate in my anthropological study. The Grassy Narrows First Nation has faced deep and intergenerational permutation to the land and its cultural makeup due to the toxic levels of mercury contamination present in the English-Wabigoon River. However, the story of Grassy Narrows runs deeper: it is a tragedy that exists within the colonial legacy of the Western world, which enabled the poisoning of the river. Despite this, the Grassy Narrows community demonstrates remarkable resilience, maintaining a growing movement with unwavering determination and unfaltering spirit.

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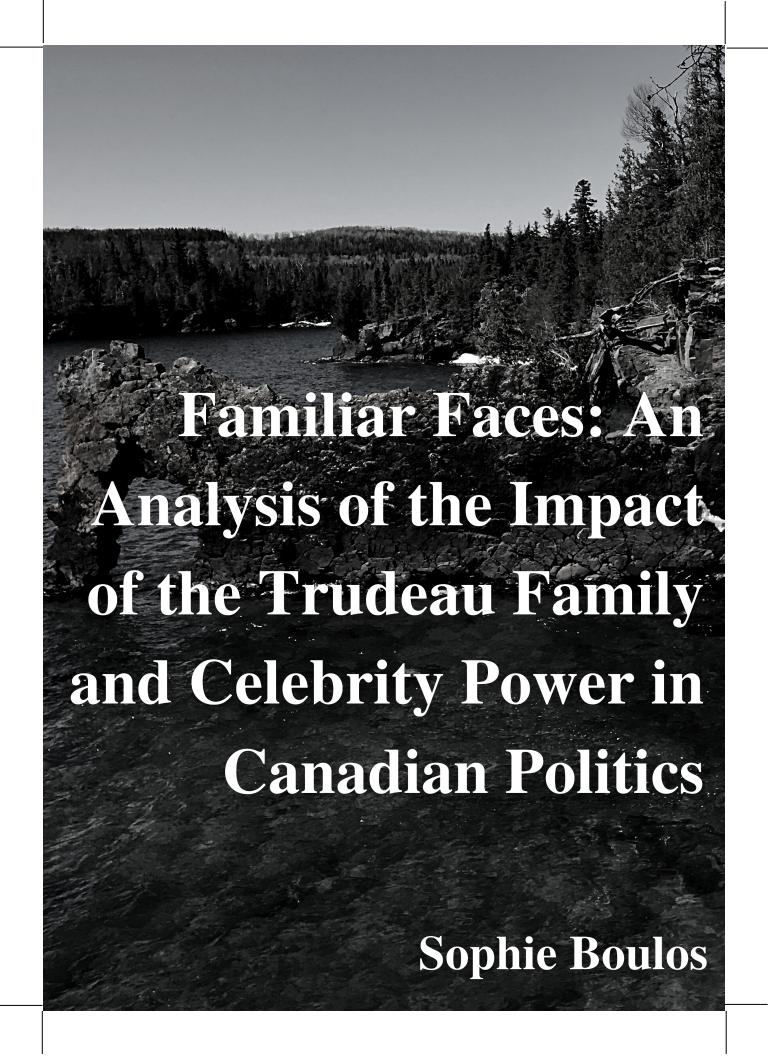
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Local Late Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau to the current Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, their celebrity status has helped their ability to gain popularity, and their societal influence contributed enormously to their political success. The media has long been important in promoting politicians and it gave rise to Pierre Trudeau's infamous "Trudeaumania" phenomenon, which contributed to his son's political success and most recent victory over the Conservative Party candidate, Erin O'Toole. However, with the rising influence of social media on political candidates' reputations and electoral results, the personal privacy of these candidates is much more limited than it used to be. Social media can make or break a politician's reputation by shaming them or advertising their successes to a large audience in seconds. The Trudeau family's impact in Canadian politics exhibits how a politician's success depends on their celebrity. Therefore, the ability of politicians to succeed in the political arena largely relies on their celebrity power because it enables them to create a bond with the voting population which can positively impact the progression of their political careers.

Charismatic political leaders capitalise on their celebrity power to influence their media portrayal. An example of this is former Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, who was enormously popular among the public, which led to his political success and widespread attention and respect from Canadians. He served as Prime Minister over three decades from 1968 to 1979 and from 1980 to 1984. The montage created by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for Trudeau's funeral captured some of his greatest media moments, thus we can summarise his impact on Canadians as:

"Crowds of screaming young girls in his earlier political career, reminiscent of the Beatlemania that inspired the term Trudeaumania; to Trudeau's famous pirouette behind Queen Elizabeth; to telling the press on the steps of the Parliament buildings in Ottawa to 'Just watch me' in response to a question about how far he would go to foil the FLQ (Front de Libération de Québec); to the sight of a much frailer man bowed by grief at the funeral of his youngest son Michel in 1998; the series of images and sound bites solidified for those viewers who could recall those (mediated) moments, and created a seamless televisual narrative for newer viewers."

Pierre Trudeau was viewed as the ideal Canadian and the person responsible for establishing Canada as a bilingual and multicultural society. Pierre Trudeau artfully laid out the canvas for his son to follow in his footsteps. His interest in multiculturalism and familiarity with the immigrant communities in Canada translates to Justin Trudeau's campaign promises and specific attention to targeting these communities within Canada. Like his father, Justin Trudeau emphasises the importance of narrowing the distance between himself and Canadians. He has done this by using social media to create a similar bond with Canadians that his father had during his time in office. The critics' statement from 2016 exemplifies this when they considered Trudeau to be "the most visible Canadian leader since his father, Pierre," because he had taken part in at least

168 public events since swearing in his cabinet in November 2015. iii Justin Trudeau has remarkably "leveraged Instagram's distinct structural and functional properties to engage in practices of image-making emphasising more conventional forms of communication on political and policy matters as well as patterns of personalization and celebritization through a focus on his private life," and through this, he has successfully engaged with the younger population. Iv Although Justin Trudeau has used similar tactics as his father to grab the voter's attention, his focus has largely been on a younger demographic than his father. According to a study conducted by Heather Bastedo, a determining factor regarding youth's engagement with politics is the feeling of identification with the political figure. The results of Justin Trudeau's first successful campaign reflected his emphasis on using social media to appeal to this demographic as he had the highest young voter turnout recorded. Through this, we can understand how Pierre Trudeau's unique approach to politics rooted in his celebrity power and his appeal to Canadians enabled Justin Trudeau to cultivate a similar repertoire with Canadians. However, Justin Trudeau capitalised on the opportunity to use social media to form a bond with young voters, which has earned himself three terms as Prime Minister of Canada.

Politicians with celebrity power possess influential personality traits that appeal to the voting population. Their celebrity power, coupled with these charismatic personality traits promote forgiveness, therefore sparing these political figures the repercussions of their faux pas. The Big Five personality traits are a useful taxonomy in psychology that aid in predicting human behaviour under stable conditions. In a study conducted by Thomas Bergeron and Thomas Galipeau, which examined the political impacts of personality in Canada, they discovered that "only three traits—openness, extraversion and agreeableness - affect the attachment to political parties at a statistically significant level."vii Interestingly, people high in openness and agreeableness will tend to identify with the Liberal Party and its candidates. viii Hence, out of the Big Five personality traits, agreeableness and openness are the most applicable to Justin Trudeau's public reputation. ix People who are agreeable will cooperate and seek more harmonious interactions.* This quality is apparent in Justin Trudeau's informal approach to politics because he markets himself similarly to how most celebrities do. He consistently seeks to establish himself as "accessible, relatable and authentic."xi Trudeau has acknowledged the increasing importance of digital technologies on politician's reputations, as he has successfully adapted to the fact that the "key tasks such as canvassing voters, raising funds and recruiting other volunteers are outsourced to this new army of online volunteers who, having signed up via a central web hub, are given a capacity for autonomous action and tactical control of campaign operations on a scale that was not possible in the pre-digital era."xii This information provides insight into the public's forgiveness of Trudeau's multiple blackface scandals, as his agreeable celebrity persona established voter confidence and contributed to lessening the impact of the backlash he received from the photos. When the most recent photo of him in blackface emerged, Trudeau explained that he "took full responsibility for the scandal, calling his behaviour unacceptable and acknowledged that he has enjoyed layers of privilege in his life."xiii His response reemphasizes his agreeable personality because he shows his desire for cooperation and harmony. He seeks to avoid

confrontation while attempting to increase the proximity between himself and Canadians while also being considerate by acknowledging his privilege. However, his repeated attempts to ask for forgiveness put into question how genuine his apologies are. Nonetheless, this demonstrates the importance of having a highly agreeable personality coupled with high celebrity status in recovering from a scandal. It also shows how celebrities can garner forgiveness for otherwise unforgivable actions.

Similarly, the Big Five Personality trait of openness relates to an individual's willingness to listen to new ideas and perspectives. This trait is exemplified by Justin Trudeau's "emphasis on consulting the public before making major decisions—in stark contrast to the Conservatives he unseated in his first victory.xiv His tendency for consultation has created trust between voters and the Prime Minister by promoting a democratic decision-making process where the public feels like they have a voice, especially in the case of his extensive social media following. More and more, visuals are playing an instrumental role in the shaping of a politicians' public image and "as the last decades have been marked by the intensification and acceleration of the personalization of all facets of political processes, image-making has become a mainstay in politicians' communication efforts."xv Trudeau has maximised his social media presence, with over four million followers on Instagram, whereas his most recent competition, Erin O'Toole, boasts a mere 53.2 thousand followers. Both politicians have contrasting perceptions of social media, as O'Toole believes these networks are not professional news organisations, and the design of their platforms is changing the way we consume news by limiting our ability to understand and respect other points of view on political issues.xvi Though this statement holds some truth, his refusal to adapt to the times is responsible for his lack of popularity amongst Canadians. Therefore, when issues arose surrounding his stance on key issues such as a mandatory vaccine mandate, he was met with much less forgiveness than Trudeau, namely because of his lack of celebrity power, which is reflected in his low approval ratings both within his party and from the public. xvii

Canadian politicians with high celebrity statuses still command more authority than their colleagues, despite lacking the knowledge or experience regarding key issues, such as legislative processes. Justin Trudeau exemplifies this concept because "in pure marketing speak, Justin Trudeau is a line extension of his father's brand."xviii Despite having only completed his university studies at the bachelor's degree level and having limited experience in the political arena prior to his bid for Prime Minister, he still became a roaring political success. We can attribute this to his public status which is exemplified by the April 29, 2013 edition of celebrity newsmagazine *Hello! Canada*, "whose cover featured a photo of him with his wife and children, which was positioned above photos of Princess Kate and Angelina Jolie."xix This example shows how Justin Trudeau has long capitalised on his celebrity status and media presence to build artificial relationships with Canadians. We can better understand this concept by considering the logic in this process, "where the reproductive quality and power of images found on social media contribute to building quasi-relationships between the object and the viewer."xx Trudeau both takes and shares selfies and media photo-ops and continues to rely heavily on social media opportunities to help construct his image "as a charismatic leader who naturally possesses leadership qualities."xxi This lends itself

to the fact that "what we think about individuals and how we see them is no longer solely based on our face-to-face interactions."xxii Hence, Trudeau's media presence has enabled him to create a closer, more personal bond with his audience. And in the case of former justice minister and attorney general of Canada, Jody Wilson-Raybould, his celebrity status excused his unfair actions towards her. Wilson-Raybould experienced public humiliation from Prime Minister Justin Trudeau after deciding to prosecute SNC Lavalin, a Quebec firm "accused of bribing officials in Libya to win contracts under Muammar Gaddafi's regime [who] had been lobbying the government for a deal to avoid prosecution."xxiii Wilson-Raybould found herself caught between making the moral decision of prosecuting this corruption and following the directives of Mr. Trudeau, who was concerned for the potential impact on employment if SNC Lavalin were to be prosecuted. Following this event, during a cabinet shuffle, she was moved to the Minister of Veterans Affairs, which she viewed as a demotion. Following this incident, she resigned from the cabinet, as she believed in her principles. This caused Prime Minister Trudeau to "eject [her] from the Liberal caucus,"and accuse her of not being a team player. xxiv Mr. Trudeau interfered with the legislative processes in this case however, his popularity and celebrity status cushioned the scandal that initially hurt him and enabled his steady recovery, while Wilson-Raybould had been pushed out of the political spotlight. Therefore, we can understand how Justin Trudeau's celebrity status enabled him to convince individuals he made the right decision to cut party ties with Wilson Raybould and had a negligible impact on his political success.

Celebrity power has heavily influenced Canadian politics, through capitalising on the power of a family name, prioritising the importance of influential personality traits, utilising social media to persuade the younger population, and demonstrating the authority that comes with such celebrity. Pierre Trudeau created a brand for his son to inherit, and Justin Trudeau took advantage of this by masterfully turning his father's legacy into a successful political career, having won three federal elections. Through using similar tactics as his father, despite lacking extensive academic qualifications, Justin Trudeau has and continues to win over the hearts of Canadians. We cannot neglect Justin Trudeau's successes because of his ability to capitalise on the use of social media to spread his message and his constant effort to be current with the times. Hence, one's celebrity can be extremely powerful in Canadian politics, but only when used tactfully and with purpose.

Notes

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