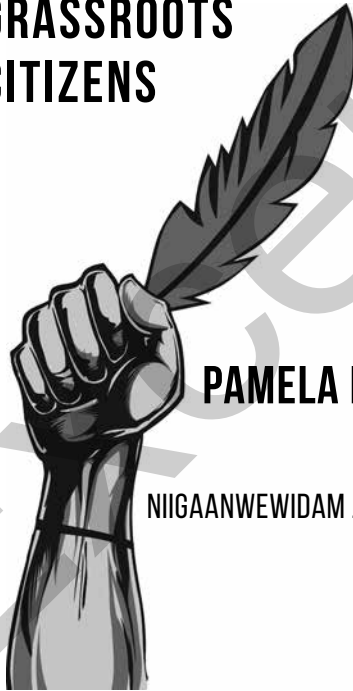


INDIGENOUS NATIONHOOD

EMPOWERING
GRASSROOTS
CITIZENS



PAMELA PALMATER

FOREWORD BY
NIIGANWEWIDAM JAMES SINCLAIR

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Lone Mi'kmaw woman, Amanda Polchies, confronts armed RCMP at an anti-fracking protest in New Brunswick. (Photograph by Ossie Michelin, APTN News, reprinted with permission)

Oh Canada! Your Home's on Mi'kmaw Land

O Canada!
Your home's on Mi'kmaw land
True genocidal drive
By all your Queen's command

With greedy hearts
You watched us die
Our strong Nation divided and poor

All for money and power, O Canada
We stand on guard against thee

Our land is not your commodity for fee
O Canada! We stand on guard against thee

O Canada, our Nation is still here
O Canada! We stand on guard against thee

O Canada! Our Mi'kmaw Nation sovereign and free.



Chronology

- 1725–26 Peace and friendship treaties signed with Mi'kmaw to stop hostilities on all sides and protect hunting, fishing, and fowling
- 1752 Treaty with Mi'kmaw confirming hunting and fishing rights, and military alliance
- 1756 Proclamation offering bounty for Mi'kmaw scalps
- 1760–61 Treaty with Mi'kmaw protecting hunting, fishing and trading rights (no surrender of land or sovereignty)
- 1971 Donald Marshall Jr. (Mi'kmaw) wrongly convicted of murder, Halifax, NS
- 1981 Police assault and arrest Mi'kmaw for exercising fishing rights in Listuguj, QC
- 1989 Donald Marshall Inquiry — Conclusion: racism against Mi'kmaw in justice system reason for Marshall's wrongful conviction
- 1998 RCMP called in against Mi'kmaw for exercising timber rights in Listuguj, QC
- 1999–01 RCMP & DFO ram fishing boats of Mi'kmaw for exercising court-proven treaty rights in Esgenoopetij, NB
- 2013 Army of RCMP assault and arrest peaceful Mi'kmaw protecting lands from hydro-fracking in Elsipogtog, NB
- 2013 RCMP flank hydro-fracking trucks to protect them against peaceful Mi'kmaw land protectors in Elsipogtog, NB

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for their hard work in making this book idea become a reality. I appreciate the work they do to make sure that all voices are represented in what gets published. They are an incredible team who all work towards social justice and empowering communities.

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Honouring the lives of our ancestors, including those lost in residential schools, murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls, those who are wrongly held in prisons or who have died in police custody, and the many Indigenous children trapped in foster care, will always be the guiding light in all my work. We won't ever stop until we bring you all home.

Foreword

Niigaanwewidam James Sinclair

One day, as usual, Naanabozhoo was walking along the shoreline. And, as usual, he was very hungry. Being very lazy, Naanabozhoo looked for a way to find food without exerting himself. He wanted roast duck. Naanabozhoo spied a flock of zhiishiibag floating in the lake. He made a plan. Knowing that ducks love nothing more than to dance, Naanabozhoo quickly made a drum out of a tree stump and decorated himself in leaves and branches. Returning at night, he made a roaring fire and sat down. Naanabozhoo could feel eyes watching him. He disguised his voice and called out: "Zhiishiibag! I am a wise old spirit! Come close!"

Naanabozhoo heard the ducks swim towards him. Accompanying the flock was Maang, the loon, who could see things in the darkness others could not. Even Maang however could not recognize this mysterious being dressed in leaves and branches and carrying a drum. An excited murmur amongst the birds emerged.

"Welcome!" the figure said. "I have a beautiful song to share with you and need only the best dancers! Are any of you good enough?" The birds rushed to the figure, for nothing breeds participation more than competition.

"This is a magical song, however and only for those who are powerful."

The birds nodded and listened, quacking about their luck.

"You must close your eyes and only listen to my voice and the beat. Do not open your eyes or the power of the song is lost."

The loon grew suspicious. Songs were not supposed to divide.

"I will begin," Naanabozhoo announced.

The ducks immediately began to waddle and dip around the fire, moving slowly at first but speeding up as the song increased. Even the suspicious loon became excited and shut her eyes, moving with the beat. Naanabozhoo looked around. All eyes were closed. He knew his opportunity had arrived.

He sang faster, louder, and proudly.

Grabbing a duck as she danced by, Naanabozhoo wrung her neck and threw her in the fire. Immediately the smell of roast duck filled his nostrils. Naanabozhoo killed six more ducks and threw them over the coals. Now he had more ducks than he could ever eat. Naanabozhoo had grown very greedy with his power.

Dancing as fast as she could, Maang heard sounds and smelled smells she didn't recognize. Bravely, she opened one eye... and saw what Naanabozhoo was really doing.

"My relatives!" Maang called, "Naanabozhoo is tricking us!" The ducks witnessed Naanabozhoo's trickery and scrambled to fly away.

Naanabozhoo grew angry and tried to catch Maang but she was agile, running in circles. So, he picked up a large rock and broke the loon's spine.

"Let that be a lesson to you!" Naanabozhoo yelled.

"I will always stay close to the earth this way!" the loon called back, flying away. And this is why Maang walks the way she does today.

Naanabozhoo licked his lips, turning back to his feast. Reaching the fire, he realized that the ducks had burnt to a crisp. A sad Naanabozhoo picked up his bundle and continued along the shoreline.

We are in a time like no other. In the face of continuous cycles of oppression by successive Canadian governments, Indigenous nations and their citizens are advocating for – and truly living – their inherent autonomy. This is embodied in our thoughts, our actions, and – most importantly – our stories. This struggle is not new – but the fact that hundreds of thousands of Canadians are waking up to their own history and joining the struggle is new. A growing number is witnessing the fact that the foundation of Canada is built on violence: broken treaty promises, patriarchy, and draconian laws and policies like the Royal Proclamation of 1763, the British North America Act, the Indian Act, and residential schools.

In a short while Canada will celebrate its 150th anniversary, committing millions of taxpayer dollars to what should be a pretty good party. But, in the end, what will be celebrated? Well, simply, it will be stories. Most likely it will be tales of brave explorers and hardworking pioneers, and songs doused in the rhetoric of national unity – but these will be

mere veneer to the truth underneath: that Canada will never reach its potential until it fulfills treaty obligations and responsibilities, returns stolen land and resources, and passes just policies that create mutually beneficial relationships with First Nations (and Inuit and Métis). The stories we tell ourselves only carry meaning when built on a foundation of justice and truth – and this is why we need this book more than ever.

Pam Palmater is one of our loon speakers. Able to see through trickery and deceit with bravery and strength, Pam's words are gifts. They carry with them wisdom and sharp wit, humour and insight. They are sustaining and life-giving. They are most of all, moving.

In these short pieces are visions of the potential of First Nations as they are and can be. These offerings are meant to provoke, lay out visions of Indigenous nationhood and – perhaps most of all – inspire more conversations.

Pam's observations, scholarship, and recommendations deliver a much-needed dose of truth when trying to understand some of the most perplexing issues facing the relationships not just between Canada and First Nations but within First Nations themselves. We are a complex people, and Pam Palmater offers complex solutions filled with hope, a fierce love for all of her relations, and a call to action. From issues of identity to gender to environmental protection, Pam holds nothing back in this book. Everyone – from “grassroots” Indigenous readers looking for fresh ideas for old legacies to “grassroots” Canadians looking for a truly equitable vision for their country – should read it.

Our future children depend on it.

Miigwech Pam, we'll keep our eyes open.

Disclaimer

This book represents a collection of my own personal thoughts, opinions, ideas, and critiques about a wide range of issues, which I hope will develop over time with more wisdom and experience. Nothing in my book should be considered legal advice, nor relied on as such.

Through this book, I am highly critical of the assimilatory agenda of the Harper government. This is not meant to give the message that getting rid of Harper would solve all of our problems. Colonial oppression has been ongoing for hundreds of years under various colonial, federal, provincial, and territorial governments of all political backgrounds. Simply voting in the Liberals or NDP will not change the colonial laws, policies, and structures that overtly and systemically discriminate against Indigenous peoples. Liberals advocated our assimilation in the 1969 White Paper, just as the Conservatives are doing so now in their legislative suite. Under the NDP's watch in Manitoba, 90% of all children in care are Aboriginal and they have one of the highest rates of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls. The difference with Harper's government is that it is especially racist, neglectful, and targeted in terms of its intentions to eliminate Indians, reserves, and treaty obligations. Most commentators seem to agree that this is the most aggressive, anti-First Nation government we have seen in many years. He has become a dictator and cut off any real relationship with First Nations. His government's hostile and racist attitude towards First Nations has even been noted by the United Nations as risking social unrest. Voting out Harper would at least re-set Canada's own governing system and give us all chance to negotiate a more just future. Colonialism and its many lethal attributes will still remain our biggest challenge moving forward.

Introduction

Standing with Pride, Rebuilding Our Nations

The many sovereign Indigenous Nations of Turtle Island have lived here since time immemorial in complex relationships with each other and the lands, waters, plants, and animals within their territories. For tens of thousands of years, Indigenous Nations governed themselves and their territories with sophisticated governments, justice systems, and militaries — using the same trusted laws, practices, and protocols passed down from our ancestors. We maintained prosperous, responsible economies which provided for everyone in our nations, through activities like hunting, gathering, manufacturing, agriculture, and trade. While our elders passed on our languages, cultures, traditions, and ceremonies to successive generations, so too did they share their advanced knowledge of mathematics, sciences, medicine, history, philosophy, and astronomy.

Men and women both had important roles, which varied from Nation to Nation. While some nations were led by men, many of those leaders were appointed, counselled, and removed by women. Women were always valued as the life-givers of their Nations, but could also be hunters, warriors, political strategists, and/or negotiators as needed. Though Indigenous Nations may have organized themselves differently according to traditional rules contained within certain clans, houses, or districts, ultimately, they were always governed by a commitment to the collective — the Nation. Political life included vibrant debate, extended discussions, the inclusion of all voices, and a commitment to understanding and consensus. In some nations, this could mean weeks or months of discussing issues until a consensus or broad understanding was reached.

Getting to consensus was a process which took a great deal of time, patience, listening, and understanding multiple perspectives by hearing from all voices who wanted to be heard. The very strength of our nations rested in part on the diverse views, opinions, insights, analyses, and guidance of our citizens. Consensus-making was an integral part of our

governance systems, which showed a balanced respect for the sovereignty of both the collective and the individual. While there are many important aspects of our traditional governance systems, the commitment to consensus building — not just the final decision itself — is what stands out as one of the keys to restoring balance today.

The settlers and their governments disrupted our balance. They had two overall objectives: (1) to acquire Indigenous lands and resources; and (2) to reduce any financial obligations to Indigenous peoples that they acquired through treaties and other agreements. Their two primary methods of doing this were to eliminate and to assimilate Indians. Elimination policies included scalping bounties; small pox blankets; forced sterilizations of Indigenous women and girls; torture, neglect, experimentation and murder of Indigenous children in residential schools; trapping us on reserves; and providing minimal rations for our survival.

Assimilation policies included the destruction of language and culture in residential schools; taking Indigenous children away from our families and communities; the theft of our lands and resources; and the imposition of Indian Act governance on our nations. The latter has had a significant impact on the ability of Indigenous citizens to exercise our voices and be part of decision-making processes. The Idle No More movement was a historic coming together of our peoples all over Turtle Island to exercise our voices in unity against ongoing injustice and oppression by colonial governments.

We were standing up against the many Canadian laws and policies that continue to have a profound multi-generational impact on our nations. While today's Canada may be described by its settlers and other non-Indigenous people as a post-colonial state, it is not post-colonial for Indigenous peoples. What used to be residential schools became the sixties scoop, which has become the current crisis of 30,000–40,000 Indigenous children in care. What used to be scalping laws are now starlight tours, deaths in police custody, murders of peaceful land defenders, and thousands of murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls. What used to be laws against Indigenous peoples gathering, leaving their reserves, or hiring lawyers to make claims are now extensive surveillance of our people by RCMP, DND (Department of National Defence), and CSIS (Canadian Security and Intelligence Service), the over-incarceration of our men, women and children at alarming rates, and funding cuts to our

advocacy organizations. The colonial experience has never ended for us.

One of the most devastating impacts to our nations has been the impact on our traditional governance structures. Successive ministers of Indian Affairs, under the authority of the Indian Act, imposed multiple election-based systems in many communities within our larger Nations — not only dividing us geographically but politically as well.¹ Our large powerful Nations were divided into smaller communities, often relocated at great distances from one another and on less valuable land. Our long-held governance practices of consensus-building and direct accountability to the people were exchanged for government-controlled bureaucracies that were forced to account only to the minister of Indian Affairs. The minister became the ultimate decision-maker and arbiter of all issues and used its funding and intervention powers to control political outcomes in our communities. Paternalistic government control over our communities has resulted in many political, legal, and social divisions, which have created a significant barrier to healing and rebuilding.

The colonizer in the current political context is the Crown — i.e., the federal and provincial governments in what is now known as Canada. Colonization, in its simplest definition, is when a state or colony attempts to dispossess and subjugate the original Indigenous peoples of those lands. It results in the very trauma that has been widely experienced by Indigenous peoples all over the world, including Canada, the United States, Australia, New Zealand, Hawaii, and other colonies. The individual healing and nation-rebuilding process requires that we kick the voices of the colonizers out of our heads. That is not easy to do since colonization is, in part, the long-term use of torturous methods to brainwash successive generations of Indigenous peoples until we believe we are pagans, heathens, savages, criminals, terrorists, and generally less worthy than others.

Therefore, the two goals of my blogs are (1) to help us kick the

1. Throughout this book, I refer to Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) as opposed to Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (AANDC), the department's new name instituted in 2011. In fact, the department did not do a legal name change — only an informal one. The Indian Act still refers to Indians and the Minister of Indian Affairs. The Department of Indian Affairs and Northern Development Act, which sets out the mandate and head of the department, remains the same. Section 91(24) of the Constitution Act, 1867 still refers to federal legislative jurisdiction in relation to “Indians” and neither the mandate, funding mechanisms nor programs have changed.

colonizer out of our heads and (2) to restore our political voices and inclusive consensus-building processes, which are the core of our traditional governance systems. I think one of the many ways to decolonize is to help educate and empower our families, communities, and Nations by identifying factual information, critical analyses from a wide range of perspectives, and honest assessments of the potential impacts of any government-proposed idea, proposal, or settlement. We need to help one another by speaking truth to power about the sly ways in which assimilatory laws and policies make their way into negotiations, policies, programs, and settlements under the guise of progress, development, or self-sufficiency. Sometimes this means challenging our own people or organizations.

I believe that engaging in these conversations with our Indigenous citizens all over Turtle Island will empower us all at both the individual and collective levels. It is important that our youth know that we, as Indigenous peoples, are defined not just in reference to the traumas that have been inflicted upon us — but also the greatness of our ancestors since time immemorial. Our peoples represent the incredible strength, commitment, and resilience required to survive and stand with pride in defiance of continued attempts to make us disappear. We remain proud Mi'kmaw, Mohawk, and Cree despite Canada's attempts to eliminate us, and Idle No More showed how strong our determination is to be heard. We must celebrate all the ways in which we resisted and continue to resist assimilation and elimination. My blogs are about documenting our resistance — our epic battle to protect our nations and future generations. Those that stand in defence of our cultures, identities, territories, and sovereignties are our modern-day heroes. Our youth need to see and hear our nations' warriors so that we can counter the government and right-wing propaganda that would have them believe they are worthless.

We can rebuild our nations by living, asserting, and defending our individual and collective sovereignty every day. Remembering always that our sovereignty is an *inherent* right, which is prior to our treaties, Canada, or any legislation. We owe it to ourselves, our communities, our ancestors, who sacrificed so much for us, and our future generations, for whom we owe the ultimate commitment — to heal and rebuild. One of the best ways to do this is to exercise our powerful voices and help empower others to exercise their voices in making the changes we need.

In so doing, we can challenge myths and stereotypes in the media and education system, counter government propaganda against our people, and challenge those in power who would do us harm. There is no such thing as benign neglect — Canada's racism is conscious, overt, systemic, and lethal. Murdered and missing Indigenous women, girls, and babies are a prime example of discriminatory laws making our women vulnerable, coupled with racist institutions failing to use the law to protect our women. We have to take action to protect our people from further harm. Racism is killing our people, and we have to stop it.

Sometimes this will require speaking truth to our own people, including voices that have long been excluded, and engaging with one another in new and different ways. Social media is a tool that can be used in strategic ways to help our nations share information, educate our communities, and stay connected in solidarity. But, there is a lot of noise out there. Social media can be harmful if used to attack one another, spread rumours and gossip, or focus on all the racist commentators. We have a common enemy — and that is not one another. Nor is it the average Canadian citizen, who has also been brainwashed into believing the many myths and stereotypes about our people. Our enemy is the entirety of the colonial structures, powers, laws, authorities, and measures used to maintain us in poverty and to dispossess and oppress our peoples. State power must be confronted, dismantled, and rebuilt in the original vision for this territory — on a Nation-to-Nation to basis.

Canada has not only divided us into many different political and legal categories (status, non-status, on reserve, off reserve, section 6(1) Indian, section 6(2) Indian, good Indian, bad Indian) but has tried to make us think poorly of ourselves. Think of the high rates of suicide amongst our youth in so many of our communities. Think of the addictions, self-destructive behaviours, and/or self-harm amongst some of our families. Our peoples have suffered a very long winter, which has lasted for many generations. We are still hurting, and this will only end when we stop thinking the worst of one another and remember who the real enemy is — it's the colonizer in our heads. Now more than ever, we need to hold one another accountable while still being the soft place to fall for our people. We have all the time in the world to fight with one another once we get our nations back in order. But for now, we have to focus on empowering our people to heal and rebuild.

We don't have to do this alone. The Idle No More movement showed us that we have allies in most Canadians. We have allies in other Indigenous Nations. We have allies in other countries around the world. We can work together to get rid of whatever barriers stand in our way — both for us as Indigenous Nations and for our allies — Canadian citizens — who want to live up to the treaty relationship of mutual respect, prosperity, and protection. Idle No More was never about grassroots citizens versus their leaders — it was about everyone working together to push the colonizer back and to assert our sovereignty. I believe one of the best ways to do that is to include all voices in the discussion about where we go from here.

Many elders have shared their advice on how to heal and rebuild. Some of their core messages include:

- Love our communities, even if some of them don't yet know how to love themselves;
- Forgive each other for the many ways in which colonization has divided us;
- Never discount the angry voice, nor the silent one — there is wisdom in both;
- Don't focus solely on the barriers or you give them too much power; and
- Live, act, and assert our sovereignty every day or we lose it.

I have taken a great deal from their wisdom, and it's what made me decide to start blogging in addition to my other activities. When I could see that the media didn't cover our issues in a balanced or factual way, or the government only told Canadians one side of the story, and our political organizations stopped advocating on our behalf, I knew we had to find a way to collectively change the conversation. Blogging was one way to have a conversation on our terms and talk about how we are going to force the change we need.

Idle No More was in part supported by this wave of communication in social media. It showed us that we have had the power all along to take charge. No longer would people hold back their voices for the sake of "unity." We can and should be unified in strength, passion, and commitment, but I do not hold with unity for its own sake if that means accepting an assimilatory path simply because one Aboriginal organization promotes it. Healing means challenging the illness in our political

institutions which were created and are maintained by the colonizers.

We are grounded and empowered by the strength which comes from our many diverse Nations, views, and beliefs. The myth of the “Indian race” has been burst, and no longer will we be constrained by one “Aboriginal” voice that supposedly fits all. Canada created the fictional race of Indians for the sole purpose of our extinction — not for our benefit. The only possible future we have is in the celebration of our diversity as Mi’kmaw, Ojibway, Maliseet, and other Indigenous Nations. Within those Nations are learned voices, experiences, and viewpoints that can help us wade through the lies and misinformation and find our way back to healing, nation-building, and reasserting our sovereignty.

This book is a collection of some of the blogs I wrote over the last five years about issues which impact us on a daily basis. It covers core areas like racism, justice, murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls, legislative initiatives, and national politics. Throughout my blogs, I address the following:

- decolonizing;
- challenging attacks on our Indigenous identities and cultures;
- living, asserting, and defending our sovereignty;
- challenging the status quo and current structures impeding our progress;
- providing some of the facts needed to challenge government propaganda; and
- working towards solutions to issues facing us on a daily basis.

Only through re-empowering the voices of our people can we restore our traditional governments and bring balance back to our nations. It is my hope for this book to be part of the ongoing conversation amongst our people which will encourage everyone to exercise their voices, push the colonizer back once and for all, and be part of the change we need to ensure a better life for our current and future generations.

The Long Shadow of Assimilation

- 150,000** Number of First Nations children who were taken from their families and forced into residential schools as part of Canada's assimilation policy from the 1870s onward. In 2008, the government apologized to Aboriginal peoples "for failing them so profoundly."
- 70 cents** Amount Aboriginal peoples earned for every dollar non-Aboriginal peoples earned in 2006. At this rate, the income gap between Aboriginal peoples and the rest of Canadians won't disappear for another 63 years, unless Canada adopts a new approach.
- 1 in 4** Number of children within Indigenous families who live in poverty in Canada, much higher than the 1 in 10 children in non-First Nations families who live in poverty.
- 444** Number of recommendations to improve the lives of Canada's Aboriginal peoples within the landmark Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples report, now 19 years old.
- \$7.5 billion** Estimated annual cost of doing nothing to resolve First Nations employment and social problems in Canada (in 1996 alone).
- 5 to 7** Number of Aboriginal youth suicides for every non-Aboriginal Canadian youth. Suicide rates among Inuit youth are among the highest in the world, 11 times the national average.

1181 Number of unresolved cases of missing and/or murdered Aboriginal women in Canada.

120 Number of First Nations communities with a drinking water advisory, as of October 31, 2011. Of the more than 500,000 First Nations people who live on Canada's reserves, thousands live without indoor plumbing.

Nearly half Number of houses on First Nations reserves in need of major repair. The federal auditor general says First Nations housing is subject to overcrowding and requires more federal funding to keep up with the growing First Nations population.

\$169 to \$189 million Estimated federal government underfunding of capital expenditures on reserves annually. The Assembly of First Nations says 40 new schools, at a cost of \$12.5 million each, and 85,000 housing units need to be built to meet current needs.

Adapted from Hennessy's Index: January 2013 — First Nations: The Long Shadow of Assimilation

Excerpt

SECTION 1

RACISM



Renee McGurry, challenging the face of racism in Canada (Photo from Perception, by KC Adams, reprinted with permission)

“No Natives” Allowed – How Canada Breeds Racism and Fear

March 16, 2011

I received a picture from friends on Facebook today about a restaurant in Lakefield, Ontario, which allegedly posted a sign on their door saying “No Natives.” It was reported in the *Toronto Sun* that police are investigating this as a hate crime. On the one hand, I cannot believe that we as Indigenous peoples are still subjected to such overt racism on such a frequent basis. On the other hand, I am not surprised, given that this kind of anti-Indigenous sentiment is still out there in more hidden forms, also known as systemic racism. I guess the best way to describe my feelings is that I sometimes feel overwhelmed that these perverse ideologies don’t just come from a few wackos, but they come from all elements in society — individuals, business, professionals, academics, politicians, and government.

If this incident actually happened (and everyone is innocent until proven guilty), it is a symptom of how Indigenous peoples are portrayed generally in our society — in schools, in the media, and by federal and provincial governments. Even if this one turns out to all a big misunderstanding, there used to be many similar signs, just for Indigenous people.

I am less surprised by this kind of overt racism from members of small communities than when I hear it from famous people, like Kevin O’Leary (who appears on *Dragon’s Den* and CBC News’ *Lang & O’Leary* show). You will recall that Kevin O’Leary called his co-host an “Indian giver,” and when she rebuked him for such barbaric language, he repeated the phrase and defended his use of it.

This comment was made on Canada’s CBC News during prime time, when a large number of Canadians would be watching. It happened in

October 2010 and not a word of apology was issued by O’Leary or the CBC. It wasn’t until five months later and after the CBC ombudsperson had publicly released their decision that the comment was wrong and so was CBC for not immediately addressing it, that we heard any mention of an apology.

The Ombudsperson stated:

In this instance, the preferred course would have been for O’Leary not only to privately recognize the fault of his ways but to publicly express remorse, either that night or the next night or soon after. But if he wasn’t going to publicly apologize, the program could have done something further to make amends. Its obligation goes beyond the complainant to the viewers in order to uphold the broader reputation of the program and CBC itself.

This is obviously the point I am getting at about the effect such comments have, especially when left for many months to fester. The problem is that Indigenous peoples are getting it from all sides, and with our public broadcaster not acting to address these issues, it’s no wonder Canadians think this is acceptable. Scripted apologies forced by legal decisions, litigation, or threats of job loss are hardly sincere or effective at undoing the damage caused.

You will recall on the very same day that Prime Minister Stephen Harper offered a public apology on behalf of all Canadians for the physical, sexual, and other abuses committed in residential schools, his Conservative MP Pierre Poilievre had the nerve to question the compensation being given to survivors and asked whether it was “value for money.” I still feel nauseated when I read his comments. As if there is any monetary amount that could ever compensate for sexual abuse like rape, physical abuse like beatings, the neglect that resulted in many deaths, or the loss of culture, language, and hope.

Keep in mind that Canada compensated Japanese families for ripping them from their homes and putting them in camps for a short duration during the war. The Chinese were also compensated for the head tax that was imposed on them for a limited time to prevent them from immigrating to Canada. While the Supreme Court of Canada has specifically said that discrimination is not “a race to the bottom” (i.e., a contest about who is more discriminated against), they have said that oftentimes Indigenous

peoples have a unique experience and are disadvantaged on multiple levels not necessarily experienced by other groups.

Indigenous peoples suffered in residential schools for their entire childhoods and multiple generations continue to suffer the deadly effects. How could residential school compensation — which came from lengthy litigation-based negotiations — be considered less “value for money” than another group’s negotiated settlement? Somehow, Conservatives and others find a way to insert doubt and blame into the conversation when it is about Indigenous peoples. Blaming the victim is easier than accepting responsibility for wrongs done in the past and which continue today.

We all know about Senator Patrick Brazeau, who used the Senate chambers, resources, and logo to film carefully worded videos meant to portray First Nations as lazy and corrupt. In fact, elsewhere in my blogs, I highlight his negative stereotypes of First Nations and how in one show he even accused First Nations as being hubs of “illegal activity.” All of this hatred and self-loathing coming from an individual who claims to be First Nations — imagine the powerful effect this has on the views and opinions of non-Indigenous peoples.

That brings us to Minister of Indian Affairs John Duncan. As you know from other blog posts, I am no fan of Minister Duncan, given his past racist comments about Indigenous peoples and their rights. Duncan was very much opposed to Aboriginal and treaty rights to fish, ignored their constitutional protection, and characterized them as “race-based” rights.

More recently, however, Minister Duncan appeared before the Senate Committee on Aboriginal Peoples regarding Bill S-11, the bill dealing with safe drinking water on First Nations reserves. Senators commented that all witnesses, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike (including water experts and legal experts), all agreed that this Act is so bad that even amendments could not save it.

On March 8, 2011, Minister Duncan, expressing his frustration, commented:

This committee has been receiving a very one-sided view on the way things are going. We’ve actually been working very collaboratively especially with the Treaty 6, 7 and 8 group from Alberta ... You’re correct in concluding that everyone does not

have the same view. But I think this committee has managed to somehow capture a prevalence of negative views. Sometimes that's what happens. It's easier in First Nations politics to be aggressively contrary to something than it is to be supportive. And that's an observation that I will make and stand behind and it's something I hope we can change.

How could we as Indigenous peoples *not* be, at the very least, “aggressively contrary” to the unilaterally imposed legislation which all experts agree will make our situation worse? This type of paternalistic government behaviour is how we came to suffer sexual abuse in residential schools, the outlawing of our cultures, the legislated exclusion of our women and children from our nations, the removal of thousands of our children to child welfare agencies, the early deaths of our people from extreme poverty, the theft of our traditional lands and resources, and the political and legal destruction of our laws, governments, and communities? In other countries, the continued oppression of a people can and has resulted in revolutions. Canada should be thankful we are only “aggressively contrary” in a political context.

While I can't say for sure what was going on in his head, it certainly appears to me that Minister Duncan gave his comment some thought before he said it as he followed up his comment with confirmation that he will stand behind it. This is not dissimilar to Kevin O'Leary, a financial commentator and television personality who vigorously defends capitalism, standing beside his racist remarks (using the phrase “Indian giver”), or Tom Flanagan, an American-born political scientist who is best known for advocating for the assimilation of Indigenous peoples, standing beside his comments (calling First Nations “primitive” and “communists”). I have always been told to believe people when they tell you who they really are — so I am listening and I believe them when they say they stand beside their racist views about eliminating us.

Aside from showing a predisposition to having racist views about Indigenous peoples, Minister Duncan's negative stereotyping of First Nations does little to suggest his views have evolved over time. Looking at it from society's point of view, if the minister of Indian Affairs, who is legally mandated to act in the best interests of Indigenous peoples, has such hostile, negative views about us, how could we expect other

Canadians to be any better? It's almost as if Minister Duncan is sickened to even have to work on this portfolio — which begs the question: why does he?

Sadly, comments by our top law enforcement agencies about Indigenous peoples are not any better. Official documents in the Department of National Defence characterized Mohawks as insurgents and terrorists. This not only factually false and politically offensive, it also serves to spread fear and distrust amongst non-Indigenous society. My own children's friends ask questions about whether we are "terrorists." It is the Canadian state's racist stereotyping of Indigenous peoples that allows for thousands of our women and children to be murdered or go missing — many without ever seeing justice.

The damage has been done. No carefully worded apology will be able to undo the damage to Indigenous peoples, especially the Mohawk in this case. Canadians are more likely to see us as terrorists than the First Nations of this territory. If there was any doubt, just ask Christy Blatchford and TVO, who portrayed the Mohawks in Six Nations as "lawless" and out of control.

In 2010, the Canadian military indicated they would apologize to the Mohawks for referring to them as insurgents alongside other terrorists in their military manual. However, no apology has been forthcoming. It makes me wonder what kind of priority they made of the apology. Instead, there seems to be a universal default that these comments are permitted, defended, repeated, and given time to sink in before any superficial apology will ever be offered. We deserve more than this anti-First Nations propaganda on our own homelands. We signed treaties of political, economic, and military alliances — despite all that has been done to us, we have kept the peace.

Add to this, the list of right-wing academics — like Tom Flanagan, Dale Gibson, Frances Widdowson, Alan Cairns, and many others — who promote the assimilation of Aboriginal peoples in various forms. This is reinforced by some teachers in schools who either don't teach their students about Indigenous peoples, or do so in a minimal or historical way. Some teachers even teach the very same stereotypes as the most right-wing academics. This is further reinforced by the various media outlets which make millions of dollars by portraying First Nations as lazy, crooked, criminals; including movies and TV shows which promote an

archetype of Indians that few today can live up to — the “good” version or the “bad” version.

This is an old battle, one that we have been fighting since contact. While many Canadians would like to believe that old colonial ideologies about Indigenous peoples have long since waned, the opposite is true. Just take a peek at some of the vile comments posted on online media stories about Indigenous peoples and you’ll see what I mean. Not only do Indigenous peoples face this battle on multiple fronts and on a daily basis, but they must also face the battle within themselves. Every day we face the battle to prove we are worthy as human beings. Too often this battle is lost, and we lose our young people to suicide, violent deaths, and early deaths from diseases, malnutrition, and lack of housing or clean water caused by extreme poverty.

I’d like to point out that section 319 of the Criminal Code of Canada specifically prohibits hate crimes. That means that public statements made against an identifiable group that incites violence against that group is a *crime*. Similarly, section 318 specifically prohibits *genocide* —which is the killing of an identifiable group, or creating life conditions that would bring about that group’s physical destruction. Although prosecution under this section sounds like a viable option, the tricky part is that the attorney general must first agree to bring these charges. So, back to the drawing board ... while assimilation, racism, the theft of our lands, resources and souls continues...

Those of us who manage to wake up every day and win this internal battle (at least enough to keep trudging along), must then engage in the political and legal battle for our basic human rights and freedoms, to protect our cultures and identities for future generations. On top of this we must ensure that we are asserting and defending our sovereignty, Aboriginal and treaty rights, and land rights. We have to know more than anyone else about our issues, we have to work harder than anyone else, and we have to find ways to do so politely and with smiles on our faces lest we be characterized as “aggressively contrary” or “terrorists.”

So the next time you hear someone say how easy First Nations have it, how they get everything for free, or how lazy they all are, why don’t you suggest they live on a remote, northern First Nations for a while and see what the “free & easy” life is really like? Or perhaps they’d like to discuss the subject with those of us who fight in this battle 24/7?

It is time Canada accepted the fact that we will not be assimilated. Whether you call it “aggressively contrary,” “insurgency,” or “criminal” — we will continue to protect our cultures and identities for future generations. If only Canadians could leave their minds open long enough to see the incredible strength of our diverse peoples, the beauty of our rich cultures and traditions, the unique ties we have to our territories, and the incredible pride we have in our identities — then they would see why we refuse to give it up.

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The Canadian Taxpayers Federation's Chief-Bashing Campaign

November 27, 2010

Since the Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) and others have released various media statements accusing chiefs of being paid exorbitant salaries while their people suffer in misery, I have been fielding questions from students, the public, media, and others to answer for this alleged injustice. In answering these questions from mostly non-Indigenous people, I have heard endless stereotypes about Indigenous peoples and faced pent-up anger about “ancient history” and “special” rights and have been asked to accept ludicrous solutions like:

- “doing away with s.35” of the Constitution Act, 1982;
- relocating all northern reserve residents to the cities;
- make Indians like everyone else;
- get rid of treaties and reserves; and
- just “get over it.”

I consider myself a strong Indigenous woman who has won life's lottery — I have good health, two healthy, happy children, a large supportive family, and my Mi'kmaw culture. I have never taken for granted the power of being able to fall back to a safe place where my brothers and sisters will guide me, support me, and offer a sympathetic ear during hard or stressful times. None of us are rich, but it has never been money that we needed from one another — it has always been the advice, guidance, support, and unconditional love. Not everyone is so fortunate to be in this circumstance. Even within this safe space, my family is not free from the multiple generations of colonialism-based trauma and oppression, the ill effects of severe poverty and overt racism, and struggles with addictions, suicides, and loss.

Many Indigenous peoples were taken away from their families in residential schools, the sixties scoop or even the current child welfare system. Many others are subjected to racial profiling by the police, and subsequently arrested, detained, and imprisoned at a higher rate than non-Indigenous peoples. Still other Indigenous peoples, like our women, girls, and babies, are murdered or missing at an alarming rate or subjected to high rates of stranger, acquaintance, and family violence. Others live in homes without water, sanitation, and power; or homes which are contaminated with mould and asbestos. No matter what our educational or employment background — all of our families have been subjected to discriminatory colonial laws and policies which desperately seek our assimilation or elimination.

Despite these similarities and differences, we have some very important factors in common — our Indigenous cultures and identities and the fact that every insult, racist stereotype, neglected community, or suicide of one of our own children destroys a piece of our soul. The public telling me that all our leaders are corrupt hurts me no less than it does the accused leader. Having to defend our people against uninformed members of the public wears on me just as much as it wears on all of our peoples no matter how they are situated in life.

Humour is what keeps my family moving forward in this battle that we inherited from the colonizers. If we could not make fun of ourselves and laugh at our troubles, we could not repair our souls. It's never meant to make light of our situation, but to force us to remember that we have an obligation to our children to be optimistic, to be hopeful, and to help inspire our people to action. This is a lot to ask of our people, many of whom are forced to manage the kind of poverty seen in third world countries, but our future depends on their hope. Humour has traditionally been our way of healing, lifting one another up, and moving forward.

But our ability to cope and resist are constantly challenged by Canada's assimilatory laws, policies, and actions. We are forever dealing with broken treaty promises, empty apologies, conditional rights, two-faced politicians, and those who wish to keep us in our position of poverty and submission. There have been endless research projects, studies, surveys, reports, and commissions identifying both our issues and the solutions. This crisis in our communities could have been addressed decades ago.

The solutions that have been suggested by royal commissions, justice