THROUGH THE LENS OF AN INDIGENOUS CONCEPTION OF HOME

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MY TRADITIONAL HOME(LANDS)
WHERE WE CALL HOME TODAY
WHAT DOES HOME MEAN TO YOU?
MY HOME

Sky Woman’s Story
By Owisokon Lahache
ON THE PATH TOWARDS HOME
DIFFERENT WAYS OF THINKING

Indigenous Thinking
- Non-linear sense of time
- Importance of group
- Importance in quality of relationships with people
- Accountability to each other
- Mother earth
- ‘We are in her and she is in us’
- Relationships
  - Between humans
  - Between humans and the natural world

Eurocentric Thought
- Structured time
- Importance of Individual
- Competition
- Accountability to the those in charge
- Ownership of land
- Importance of the individual
- Conquest over nature
- Superiority of humans
FIRST NATIONS DIVERSITY

614 Reservation Communities
1,400,685 Aboriginal
4.3% Canadian population
20.1% increase 2006 and 2011, compared 5.2% Canada
Live in Ontario and the western provinces (Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, and British Columbia).
Aboriginal children aged 14 and under made up 28.0% of the total Aboriginal population
youth aged 15 to 24 represented 18.2% of the total Aboriginal population
IMPACTS OF EUROCENTRIC THOUGHT

• We were seen as savages
• Political, social, and spiritual systems devalued
• Our women’s traditional roles impacted through policies
  • Residential Schools
  • Identity politics
• Dispossession for access to lands and resources

What happens when you take away a language, spirituality, and traditions of a people?
ASSIMILATE OR CIVILIZE?

Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian that has not been absorbed into the body politic of Canada and there is no more Indian question. That is the whole purpose of our legislation.

- Duncan Campbell Scott, Superintendent of Indian Affairs

(PAC, R.G. 10, 1920)
DEVELOPMENT OF THE INDIAN ACT

- Early nation to nation relations
- Relationship changed from protection to coercion
- Assimilation Based Developments
- No control of resources, no control of own children – residential schools
- Overthrow of treaty signatories, extinguishment of land title, open up land to settlement
- 1876 - First Indian Act (after Confederation of Canada) exclusive responsibility of federal government – consolidates all laws relating to Indian
- Forced enfranchisement of ‘suitable’ candidates
- Traditional forms of governance made illegal, Band Councils put in place
- Indians couldn’t vote (as well as lunatics, alcoholics, and criminals)
- Clearly defined membership policies defining Indian identity
FUNDAMENTALS OF ASSIMILATION

Policy founded on four main assumptions:

1. Inferiority of First Nations peoples
2. Inability to govern selves
3. Respect and sharing enshrined in original treaties no longer valid
4. European ideas of progress and development correct, Indigenous values, opinions, and rights not taken into account
WHAT HAPPENS AS A RESULT OF CULTURAL GENOCIDE?

• If we look to the issue of homelessness, think if the impacts this change in our ways of living, communicating with each other, our traditions, ceremonies, our very thinking itself

• Reservations are seen by some as prisoner of war camps and when you leave you are a Rez Refugee

• Rights under Indian Act are tied to you living on reserve

• What happens when you leave? There is a fear of loss of who you are because your identity is tied to that reserve. Loss of access to resources

• But then, on reserve we have higher and higher instances of lateral violence

• And it goes on.....
Their education must consist not merely of the training of the mind, but of a weaning from the habits and feelings of their ancestors, and the acquirements of the language, arts and customs of civilized life.

- Province of Canada, 1847
INTERGENERATIONAL IMPACTS

- Alcohol and drug abuse;
- Fetal alcohol syndrome (FAS) and fetal alcohol effect (FAE);
- Sexual abuse (past and ongoing);
- Physical abuse (past and ongoing; especially, but not exclusively, of women and children);
- Psychological/emotional abuse;
- Low self-esteem;
- Dysfunctional families and interpersonal relationships;
- Parenting issues such as emotional coldness, rigidity, neglect, poor communications and abandonment;
- Suicide (and the threat of suicide);
- Teen pregnancy;
- Chronic, widespread depression;
- Chronic, widespread rage and anger;
- Eating disorders;
- Sleeping disorders;
- Chronic physical illness related to spiritual and emotional states;
- Layer upon layer of unresolved grief and loss;
INTERGENERATIONAL IMPACTS CONT...

- Fear of personal growth, transformation and healing;
- Unconscious internalization of residential school behaviors - false politeness, not speaking out, passive compliance, excessive neatness, obedience without thought, etc.;
- Post-residential school community environment - patterns of misuse of power to control others, and community social patterns that foster whispering in the dark, but refusing to support and stand with those who speak out or challenge the status quo;
- The breakdown of families and communities - loss of trust, common ground, shared purpose and direction, a vibrant ceremonial and civic life, co-operative networks and associations working for the common good, etc.;
- Disunity and conflict between individuals, families and factions within the community;
- Flashbacks and associative trauma; i.e., certain smells, foods, sounds, sights and people trigger flashbacks memories, anxiety attacks, physical symptoms or fear; e.g. the sight of a certain type of boat or vehicle (especially containing a social worker or RCMP), the sight of an old residential school building, etc;
- Educational blocks - aversions to formal learning programs that seem "too much like school," fear of failure, self-sabotage, psychologically-based learning disabilities;
MORE IMPACTS

• Spiritual confusion; conflicts and confusion over religion;
• Internalized sense of inferiority or aversion in relation to whites and especially whites in power;
• Toxic communication - backbiting, gossip, criticism, put downs, personal attacks, sarcasm, secrets, etc.;
• Becoming oppressors and abusers of others;
• Dysfunctional family co-dependent behaviors replicated in the workplace;
• Cultural identity issues - loss of language and cultural foundations leads to denial (by some) of the validity of one's own cultural identity (assimilation), a resulting cultural confusion and dislocation;
• Destruction of social support networks (the cultural safety net) that individuals and families in trouble could rely upon;
• Disconnection from the natural world (i.e. the sea, the forest, the earth, living things) as an important dimension of daily life and hence spiritual dislocation;
• Voicelessness - passive acceptance of powerlessness within community life, loss of traditional governance processes loss of agency, of being able to influence and shape the world one lives in, feeling powerless to change it.
INDIGENOUS HOMELESSNESS - WHAT ARE YOU SEEING?

Impacts from changes to:

• Relationship to land
• Relationship between men and women
• Traditions and culture
• Language
• Social, family structures
• Parenting abilities
• And so on...
AN INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE ON HOME(LESSNESS)

- Indigenous homelessness is not just an issue of lack of housing
- Respect for urban and rural contexts and how they relate
- Being mindful of the perspective of the person you are dealing with
- What is their social context, what does home mean to them?
- Intergenerational trauma
- Their knowledge base
- Their world view
DOING RESEARCH WITH US

• It is about sitting and listening
• Agency and voice of the Indigenous peoples
• OCAP Principles - Ownership, Control, Access and Possession
• Partnership in research
• Connect to the people you are working for in a way that goes beyond the research
• Establish relationships – long term accountability
FOUR FACES OF THE MOON

Canada’s dark colonial past – Animated short doc cbc.ca
EXTRA RESOURCES

• The Inconvenient Indian – Thomas King
• Multiple books by Residential School Survivors
• UBC Indigenous Foundations
  http://indigenousfoundations.arts.ubc.ca/home.html
• Documentary Live On The Reservation
  https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mV4QfYWcifM&list=PL-IZMiY-cuR2GgrMbE7rwF9JFN4bQUBG7&index=2
• Mohawk Girls Television Series – APTN
• Club Native Documentary – Tracy Deer
• The Fallen Feather Documentary
• Muffins for Granny Documentary
• 8th Fire Series – CBC/APTN