

Canada: Intersections of Anti-Semitism with other Forms of Racism and Violence

Submission to:

Ms. E. Tendayi Achiume, Special Rapporteur on contemporary forms of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance

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Introduction

Anti-Indigenous racism shares with anti-Semitism a narrative of racial inferiority and discrimination. This narrative justifies systemic persecution and social marginalization and – as we explain below – has justified genocide in different forms. Anti-Jewish sentiment continues to be generated in contemporary society through Neo-Nazi and extreme right-wing ideologues who actively promote and advance xenophobic rhetoric, racial hatred, hostility, and violence. These white supremacist and racist views have in turn filtered into perceptions of Canada’s nationhood and exacerbated anti-Indigenous racism.

Goal 10 of the UN’s 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda includes the commitment to reduce inequality among racialized, disadvantaged, and marginalized populations by eliminating discriminatory laws and policies. Identifying and acknowledging historical and contemporary forms of racism and xenophobia that intersect and impact Indigenous communities and other minorities will be crucial for the fulfillment of this goal. Consequently, our report draws links between racism experienced by Indigenous peoples and the concerning trends of violent nationalism and Neo-Nazi related racism in Canada. Our submission will look at some recent examples of anti-Indigenous racism and discuss the risks that the rise in white supremacist, anti-Semitic intolerance poses to Indigenous peoples in Canada.

About UBCIC

The Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs’ (UBCIC) mandate is to pursue the implementation, exercise, and recognition of our inherent Title, Rights, and Treaty Rights, and to protect our Lands and Waters through the exercise of our laws and jurisdiction. The UBCIC strengthens Indigenous Nations’ assertions of their Aboriginal Title, Rights, Treaty Rights and Right of Self Determination as Peoples, working collectively among Indigenous Nations in British Columbia (BC) as a cohesive advocacy body regionally, nationally, and internationally. UBCIC supports Indigenous Nations and communities to promote and protect Sovereignty within their traditional territories.

Intersections between Anti-Semitism and Indigenous Peoples’ Experiences of Racism in Canada

Jewish and Indigenous Experiences of Genocide

An integral part of UBCIC’s mission is the commitment to address the institutionalized racism against Indigenous peoples that is deeply rooted in Canada’s settler colonialism. The purposeful extinguishment of Indigenous culture and the assimilation of Indigenous societies through State policies and practices have not remained remote or isolated events in Canadian history. Canada continues to commit human rights and Indigenous rights abuses that have been experienced by Indigenous peoples as a form of genocide. In June 2019, the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG) released its *Calls for Justice* report. The report concluded “the human rights and Indigenous rights abuses and violations committed and condoned by the Canadian state represent genocide against Indigenous women, girls, and 2SLGBTQQIA people.”¹ The report confirmed that colonial violence and discrimination continues to inflict genocide upon Indigenous peoples and result in countless murders and disappearances of Indigenous women and girls.

The parallels between anti-Indigenous racism and anti-Semitism can be appropriately and meaningfully examined through understanding how both Indigenous peoples and Jewish people have experienced

¹ “Z, L. (2019, May 29). Home Page - Final Report. Retrieved January 30, 2020, from http://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Calls_for_Justice.pdf

different forms of genocide throughout history that have left devastating, painful intergenerational wounds. Cognizant of the dangers of glossing over the complexities and depth of the Holocaust and conflating it with or misapplying it to an Indigenous context, the atrocities and human rights abuses committed against both groups of peoples can be contextualized within a framework of genocide outlined by the United Nations Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide (the Genocide Convention). The criteria defining genocide under the Genocide Convention include any of the following actions when committed with the intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group

- 1) Killing members of the group
- 2) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group
- 3) Inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part
- 4) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group
- 5) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group²

This framework allows for a more nuanced understanding of how genocide can encompass cultural genocide, particularly as it relates to the Indian Residential School System's (IRS) attempted "destruction of Aboriginal languages, religions, and cultures in Canada."³ Through government programs in the late nineteenth century and mid twentieth century, such as the IRS and the adoption of Indigenous children into non-Indigenous homes (the "Sixties Scoop"), Canada succeeded in forcibly removing Indigenous children from their families and subjecting them to institutionalized violence. The separation of Indigenous peoples from their families and culture was spurred by the ideology of "civilizing" them and resulted in cultural erosion and what became known as "post-colonial syndrome" – familial breakdown and intergenerational trauma that has led to "crime, child abuse, suicide, drug abuse, and alcoholism."⁴ In accordance with the Genocide Convention, not only does the systematic mass murder of Jewish people during the Holocaust constitute genocide, but so does the forcible separation of Indigenous children from their families, the extreme mental and physical harm inflicted upon them, and the resulting patterns of inter-generational familial breakdown.

Historical Roots of Anti-Semitism and Anti-Indigenous Racism

In Nazi Germany, "Anti-Jewish sentiments" functioned as a cultural code affecting all issues of culture, politics, society, and economics.⁵ Rooted in the idea that Jews caused societal disfunction was the belief that they collectively had "a biologically founded inability to create culture and a territorial state."⁶ Likewise, the Canadian government's treatment and perception of Indigenous peoples stemmed from the belief that Indigenous people were "inferior," "uncivilized," and at a racial, cultural, social, economic, and educational disadvantage. The German Reich and Canada relied on segregation and other discriminatory practices to depict the Jewish and Indigenous subject as alien and "other." Both countries perpetuated negative racial and ethnic stereotypes – Jews were falsely criticized as parasites, cheaters, and

² United Nations. (n.d.). United Nations Office on Genocide Prevention and the Responsibility to Protect. Retrieved January 29, 2020, from <https://www.un.org/en/genocideprevention/genocide.shtml>

³ MacDonald, D. B., & Hudson, G., (2012) "The Genocide Question and Indian Residential Schools in Canada." *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, 45(2), 427–449. Cambridge University Press.

⁴ Barkan, "Genocides," 131.

⁵ Gerlach, C, (2016). "Racism and anti-Jewish thought," in *The Extermination of the European Jews*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 152-153.

⁶ Ibid, 160.

exploiters,⁷ while the “Indian” was falsely criticized as lazy, violent, drunk, or promiscuous⁸. Through practices that included the forced displacement of Jews into ghettos and the pass system that kept Indigenous peoples isolated on reserves, both countries succeeded in destabilizing Jewish and Indigenous autonomy and self-determination. The German Reich imposed legal, economic, and social restrictions imposed upon Jews in Germany that included the prohibition of marriages between Jewish and German subjects. Similarly, Canada enacted the *Indian Act* in 1876 to control the identity, cultural practices, languages and lands of First Nations. Echoing Nazi discourse around the “Final Solution to the Jewish question,” the Deputy Superintendent General of Indian Affairs, Duncan Campbell Scott, stated in 1920:

I want to get rid of the Indian problem... Our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian department.⁹

Underlying the ‘Jewish Problem’ and the ‘Indian Problem’ is racist and xenophobic ideology meant to justify the persecution and mass murder of Jews in Europe and of Indigenous peoples in Canada.

Discussion: Present Day Concerns

Institutionalized Denialism

Racial discrimination against Indigenous peoples in the last four years has intensified because of a resurgence in Neo-Nazi, white supremacist doctrine and an intolerance toward visible minorities. This recent rise in discriminatory views has been attributed both to Donald Trump’s policies (which have resulted in “post-Trump” patterns of right-wing extremism in Canada) and the anti-Europe Brexit vote in the U.K.¹⁰ The interplay between Neo-Nazism and anti-Indigenous racism emerges in a narrative that subsumes the history of IRS and colonial violence under settler denialism, nationalism, and white supremacy.

Settler colonialism operates by obscuring “the violence of persistent invasion and dispossession” by “whitewashing” the histories of the new people and eliminating the presence of Indigenous peoples,¹¹ In Canada this “whitewashing” of history is evident in the denial or minimalization of the detrimental effects of colonization. This denial is persistent and pervasive, appearing in universities (e.g academics publicly questioning the validity of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s (TRC) report¹²), in the legal system (e.g. BC Supreme Court Justice McEachern’s statement that life prior to colonization for First Nations “was nasty, brutish, and short”¹³), and political discourse (e.g. in former Conservative senator Lynn Beyak’s assertion that the negative issues of residential schools have overshadowed “some of the good things that also happened at those schools”¹⁴). Settler denialism has its counterpart in the Holocaust

⁷ Gerlach, “Racism” 147.

⁸ Fabre, Carla. (2016). *Challenging Addiction in the Canadian Classroom*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 134.

⁹ Miller, J.R. (2004). *Lethal legacy: Current Native Controversies in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press. 35.

¹⁰ MacLeod, A. (2019, July 8). The Not-So-Hidden Role of Racism in Canadian Politics. Retrieved from <https://theyee.ca/News/2019/07/08/Racism-Canadian-Politics/>

¹¹ Battell Lowman, Emma, and Adam J. Barker (2015). *Settler Identity and Colonialism in 21st Century Canada*. Halifax: Fernwood Publishing. 26.

¹² Ibid, 44.

¹³ Ibid, 26.

¹⁴ Kohut, T. (2017, March 9). Tory senator defends residential school system, says good work 'unacknowledged'. Retrieved from <https://globalnews.ca/news/3298332/senator-lynn-beyak-residential-schools/>

denial associated with anti-Semitic hate groups that claim the Holocaust never occurred or was grossly exaggerated by the Jews. Both forms of denialism are used as tools for social marginalization and justifying exclusion and intolerance.

Social Media and Online Hate

The ability to disseminate xenophobic and racist views anonymously, virally, and with minimal repercussions, makes the digital realm a haven for hate groups. “Exposing Hate,” a news series by the CBC, reported that a massive leak of posts and messages from a neo-Nazi message board, the Iron March, exposed many of its users as Canadian, including members of the Canadian Armed Forces. The leak included close to 200,000 posts and 22,000 private messages from 2011 and 2017 that were “laced with slurs against First Nations people, Arabs, Jews, blacks, and homosexuals.”¹⁵

Social media (Twitter, Instagram, Facebook, etc.) has also been used by media outlets, extremist groups and individuals to not only spread and colloquialize their racist agendas, but to galvanize the public into adopting their views. Lowman and Barker also point to “high-profile bigots” in Canada such as Gary McHale and Michelle Tittler who use social media and media platforms to call out Indigenous peoples for taking advantage of “good, honest Canadians” and to incite “hate-based anti-Indigenous social movements.”¹⁶

Neo Nazism and the Alt-Right

What is of great concern and detriment to Indigenous peoples in Canada is that *white supremacy and other xenophobic doctrine associated with neo-Nazism will be used to bolster and reinforce settler colonial beliefs and perspectives.*

This risk has already been realized in a disturbing incident that occurred in 2018 on the University of New Brunswick campus. Several posters were found on a number of buildings that urged people to “reject the anti-white narrative being pushed in media and academia” and to “stop the slander of the founding Europeans of Canada.” These posters argued that “overwhelmingly, Native Americans are beneficiaries, and not victims, of the society built by Europeans.” Further, the posters called for Native Americans to “join forces and fight together with Europeans against the threat posed by the foreign invasion of [their] lands.”¹⁷ The National Socialist Canadian Labour Revival, a hate group known for its anti-Semitic views, has claimed responsibility for these posters.

These posters were rife not only with anti-Indigenous racism, but Islamophobia and intolerance towards immigrants and refugees who were labelled as the “foreign threat” to Canadian sovereignty. A confluence of racism, xenophobia, settler denialism, and white supremacy shape a dangerous narrative of Canadian nationalism that the posters’ anti-Semitic supporters are trying to advance – it is a narrative sanitized of colonial violence and discriminatory towards Muslims and other minorities. By calling upon Native Americans to unite with “Europeans,” it also renews attempts to assimilate and disappear Indigenous peoples into a dominant, white society.

¹⁵ Rocha, R., & Yates, J. (2019, November 9). Leak of thousands of posts from defunct neo-Nazi forum offers clues to identify Canadian members | CBC News. Retrieved from <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/iron-march-message-board-canadian-forces-1.5353201>

¹⁶ Battell and Barker, *Settler Identity*, 26.

¹⁷ Staff. (2018, January 17). 'Racist' posters removed from University of New Brunswick campus. Retrieved from <https://globalnews.ca/news/3970310/racist-posters-campus/>

Of high concern was the Canadian Red Ensign flag that topped each poster. This flag contains a Union Jack and the Canadian Coat of Arms and, like the Nazi Swastika and the Confederate States flag, has been appropriated by anti-immigration, alt-right extremists in Canada who consider it a symbol of white supremacy. The Red Ensign has been called “the flag of true Canada, the European Canada” and is an emblem of colonialism that has been used to confront Indigenous protesters.¹⁸ The increasing popularity of this flag among anti-Semitic groups points to a growing alt-right movement in Canada that uses neo-Nazi related doctrine to champion a “European” society and marginalize Indigenous peoples.

It is important to note the dangers of legitimizing anti-Indigenous racism as right wing or alt-right perspectives; racism is not a political agenda and has no place on any mainstream political spectrum. Racism is appropriated and disguised by groups and individuals as something that has a valid place in our everyday discourse, politics, and lives. As evidenced by the hate and intolerance contained in the posters, there is a growing movement to disseminate and normalize anti-Indigenous racist dialogue in the public.

UBCIC’s Recommendations:

The following are UBCIC’s recommendations to prevent and combat anti-Semitism and Anti-Indigenous racism:

- States experiencing an upsurge in anti-Semitism must **remain vigilant and aware of the overlaps this intolerance has with anti-Indigenous racism**. In particular, **the pre-existing colonial framework of any nation and associated regimes of institutionalized racism must be recognized as a root cause and factor in continued racist, white supremacist views**.
- States need to understand that genocide includes a spectrum of actions aimed at destroying the integrity and dignity of a group’s culture. **States must recognize that genocide can be an ongoing process inflicted by a State or institution upon Indigenous peoples – a process that is supported and strengthened by the continued spread of neo-Nazi, anti-Semitic views**.
- **States must create and implement effective mechanisms, policies, and legislation to address online hate speech and the use of online platforms to spread neo-Nazi views**. In 2019 Canada launched a national Anti-Racism Strategy and invested \$45 million over four years to fund programs and efforts aimed at eliminating racism. \$0.9 million was invested to combat online hate by **developing “a national framework and evidence-based guidelines to better respond to hate crimes, hate incidents, and hate speech,”** and \$5 million to **support literacy programming to address online disinformation and hate speech**. \$6.2 million was invested to **“increase reliable, usable and comparable data and evidence regarding racism and discrimination.”**¹⁹ Canada must continue strengthening its attempts to police and halt the spread of online hate; it must define and set clear guidelines and punitive measures around online hate-speech and the use of media to spread it.
- **States must make it a priority and matter of national importance to speak out against anti-Indigenous racism**. In Canada there has been a rise in incidents wherein non-Indigenous members of the public, law enforcement, the justice system, and the Canadian

¹⁸ Hamilton, G. (2017, July 10). Former Canadian flag, the Red Ensign, gets new, darker life as far-right symbol. Retrieved from <https://nationalpost.com/news/canada/former-canadian-flag-the-red-ensign-gets-new-darker-life-as-far-right-symbol>

¹⁹ The Government of Canada (2019, July 17). “Building a Foundation for Change: Canada’s Anti-Racism Strategy 2019–2022” Retrieved from <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/anti-racism-engagement/anti-racism-strategy.html>

government disregard or distort blatant anti-Indigenous racism. Recently, an Indigenous man and his 12-year-old granddaughter were racial profiled and unjustly handcuffed at a BMO bank in Vancouver. The bank and the Vancouver Police Department minimized the incident and did not address the trauma and colonial violence they enacted. This injustice is most **Allowing one form of racism to grow unchecked creates and legitimizes a climate wherein all forms of intolerance, including anti-Semitism, is allowed to thrive.** Canada must honor and implement the TRC's *Calls to Action*, the National Inquiry's *Calls for Justice*, as well as federal legislation to implement the *UN Declaration*, to uphold a strong framework of anti-racism.

Conclusion

Racism, intolerance, and bigotry have escalated in North America in response to a socio-political climate hostile to visible minorities and empowering to violent extremist groups. In Canada, this climate becomes extremely volatile and dangerous for Indigenous peoples when Neo-Nazi related ideology merges with settler colonialism. White supremacy is used to reinforce beliefs and discourse that frames Indigenous peoples as “beneficiaries” of colonialism, leading to the minimization or outright denial of Canada’s history of marginalizing Indigenous peoples. A significant danger is a form of nationalism in Canada that feeds off of xenophobic, pro-Nazi, or racist views and is fundamentally antithetical to Canada’s attempts to align its policies and laws with the *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples*.