

COLONIAL GENOCIDE AND HISTORICAL  
TRAUMA IN NATIVE NORTH AMERICA

Complicating Contemporary Attributions

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**My research, situated in** clinical, community, and cultural psychology, grapples with the ideological implications of providing mainstream mental health services in (post)colonial American Indian settings (Gone 2007, 2008; Gone and Kirmayer 2010; Gone and Trimble 2012). Few doubt that the remnant indigenous communities of the United States and Canada continue to suffer from behavioral health disparities that affect nearly every extended family throughout Native North America. The most salient response to these problems has been the state-sponsored application and extension of various forms of human services for a burgeoning Indigenous clientele. But culturally distinctive clients can require novel kinds of institutional knowledge for guiding professional assessment, referral, and rehabilitation. One important source of this new knowledge relative to Indigenous community behavioral health is the expanding cadre of formally trained researchers in the psy- disciplines and health sciences who themselves identify as Native or Indigenous. In the second decade of the new millennium, such individuals are no longer fringe exotics in the fields of psychology, social work, public health, and nursing. Instead they are producing novel and influential knowledge that impacts the discourses and practices of human services professionals in tangible fashion. Most of these researchers remain dedicated to advancing Indigenous well-being through their professional contributions by challenging the injustices of the status quo and by engaging the lived experiences and shared ambitions of their own kin and communities.

As a consequence Indigenous researchers in the “psy-ences” (Raikhel 2012) have sought to account for contemporary tribal disparities in behavioral health problems by contextualizing these disorders within historical experiences of

European colonization. In this regard contemporary psychosocial distress in Indigenous communities has increasingly been attributed to *historical trauma* (HT). The concept of HT (and the synonymous term *soul wound*) entered the mental health literature in the 1990s as an explanatory frame for rampant substance abuse, trauma, violence, depression, pathological grief, and suicide in present-day American Indian communities (Braveheart-Jordan and DeBruyn 1995; Duran 1990; Duran and Duran 1995; Terry 1995). HT has been theorized as a form of embodied vulnerability to mental health problems stemming from ancestral suffering that has accrued across generations into formidable legacies of disability for contemporary descendants. In tracing the origins of current problems to collective experiences of European colonization, the advocates of HT seek to counter paralyzing self-blame within Native communities and foster collective empowerment toward healing and recovery from overwhelming distress (Duran et al. 1998; Evans-Campbell 2008; Gone 2009, 2013; Sotero 2006; Walters et al. 2011; Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski 2004; Whitbeck et al. 2004). Nevertheless by wedding *psychological trauma* to *historical oppression* in this fashion, proponents of HT inadvertently promote a discourse that misrepresents the true range of Native subject positions in response to colonization and that pathologizes Indigenous identities as essentially wounded or damaged by history (Gone 2014; Maxwell 2014; Waldram 2004).

In this chapter, however, I am concerned less with the prospects and pitfalls of embracing and promoting the discourse of indigenous HT (instead see Gone 2014) than with the routine references to colonial genocide that so frequently accompany discussions of HT. Specifically this literature regularly advances the sweeping assertion that Indigenous HT originates from tribal experiences of *genocide* as historically perpetrated against Native peoples by European settler populations: "What was done to indigenous people in the Americas had all the characteristics of genocide and . . . evoked similar responses to trauma that researchers observe not only in people who survived genocide, but also in their children and grandchildren" (Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski 2004: 7). According to Evans-Campbell (2008: 321), "These [predisposing] events are not only human initiated and intentional but also fall under the category of genocide (e.g., physical, cultural, or ethnocide), making them particularly devastating." Whitbeck et al. (2004: 119) invoked "more than 400 years of genocide, 'ethnic cleansing,' and forced acculturation," yielding what Duran and Duran (1995: 152) identified as "post-traumatic stress disorder as a consequence of the devastating effects of genocide perpetrated by the U.S. government." Brave Heart and DeBruyn (1998: 62) wrote, "Like the transfer of trauma to descendants from Holocaust survivors, the

genocide of American Indians reverberates across generations," all as a result of colonial "policies of genocide and ethnocide," according to Walters and Simoni (2002: 520). In sum almost anyone who promotes HT in the academic literature makes explicit reference to genocide, by which they intend to signify in the North American context the violent subjugation of Indigenous peoples by European colonizers.

And yet, from its origins as a neologism some seven decades ago (Lemkin 1944), the term *genocide* as taken up by scholars and circulated through popular discourse has come to reference the most extreme forms of group-based violence. Thus, for a host of rhetorical, political, and ethical reasons, sweeping attributions of genocide remain a controversial business. In this chapter I critically consider the general applicability of the term to the colonization of Native North America. Allow me to acknowledge at the outset, however, that *genocides (plural) against Indigenous peoples did indeed occur during the European settlement of North America* (for examples, see Madley, this volume; Whaley, this volume). Therefore my concern in this chapter is *not* whether genocide actually happened during European colonization (because it did) but rather whether genocide can be appropriately claimed *to characterize the overarching pattern* of European dispossession of Indigenous peoples throughout the history of North American contact. I thus consider the problem of defining genocide prior to engaging the question of what is at stake in generalizing the attribution of genocide to the colonization of North America. Specifically, in keeping with ideas promoted by earlier generations of scholars in genocide studies, I propose that the concept of genocide is best reserved for instances of *group-based mass murder*. On this basis I observe that genocide was only one among several patterns of colonial dispossession that therefore warrants more restrained attribution than is typical of routine overgeneralizations by some Indigenous scholars, activists, and their allies. Finally, I argue that such restraint is more ethically, politically, and rhetorically conducive to productive developments in intergroup exchanges relative to the future of Native and non-Native relations.

#### Defining Genocide in the Context of European Colonization

Any determination of the applicability of the term *genocide* to widespread forms of Indigenous suffering in the wake of European colonization substantively turns on questions of definition. Unfortunately academic consideration of abstract definitional issues in the face of the incomprehensible loss of Indigenous life—not to mention associated forms of colonial agony and anguish—can seem a pitiless endeavor. And yet it is this very regard

for the ultimate sanctity of each human life that would seem to require a well-elucidated means for differentiating and distinguishing human culpability in the deaths of others (akin to common conceptual distinctions between murder, voluntary manslaughter, and involuntary manslaughter). Unsurprisingly questions of definition are not new to the field of genocide studies. In his seminal textbook on genocide, Jones (2011) constructed a table of some twenty-two scholarly definitions of genocide proposed during the past fifty years. In reviewing these definitions Jones highlighted six key domains that most definitions of genocide appear to address in various fashion: "agents, victims, goals, scale, strategies, and intent" (21). For example, according to Jones, *agents* are often identified as state authorities and the *victims* as social minorities. The *goals* typically include the destruction of the targeted group; the *scale* varies as to whether total or partial eradication is attempted; and the *strategies* refer to either direct or indirect actions in all of their specificity. Finally, Jones cited a virtual consensus among scholars that such actions must be undertaken with purposeful and deliberate *intent*. Obviously variations across these domains are what lead to different definitions of the concept. For example, in his recent review of second-generation scholarship exploring various historical examples of genocide, Straus (2007) found that independent researchers actually selected in common very few historical cases for comparative analysis. This fact led him to conclude that "genocide is a complex, contested, and ambiguous concept, and comparative research on the topic suffers as a result" (495).

One possibility for explaining this conceptual ambiguity is inspired by classic research in cognitive psychology about how humans categorize objects in nature (Medin 1989). One approach to formulating categories is *criterial*, in which necessary and sufficient features (e.g., capacity for flight) for membership in a category (e.g., "birds") are applied to the objects in question. In this regard Fein (1990: 25) proposed five "necessary and sufficient conditions for a finding of genocide": attempted physical destruction, organized perpetration, targeting based on group membership, victim vulnerability, and murderous intent. The classification task that follows from such definitions is merely a logical assessment of whether a proposed instance of genocide does or does not meet all of the criteria. In other words, criterial categories possess sharp boundaries, leading perhaps inevitably to debates about defining features and the validity of resultant lines of demarcation (e.g., in biology, how to classify flightless birds). An alternative to the criterial approach to formulating categories is the *prototypical* approach. This kind of classification centers on representative exemplars that manifest all the attributes of the category (e.g., a robin), while additional instances of the phenomenon in question

possess some but not all of the attributes of these prototypes (e.g., an ostrich). Whether an object is classified as a category member depends on the *degree to which it resembles exemplary instances*. In other words, prototypical categories possess fuzzy boundaries, leading to debates about inclusion, particularly at the category margins, where much fewer of the prototypical attributes are shared. Thus in genocide studies the Holocaust is virtually always classed as an exemplary instance of the phenomenon (though scholars in this field increasingly seek to destabilize the hegemony of this particular case); in contrast the devastation of European colonization for Indigenous peoples has long been conceptually positioned near the fuzzy margins of category membership.

Unlike constructions of classifications about the natural world, however, constructions of genocide are free to expand and contract on the basis of discourse alone. Nevertheless the key contribution of viewing genocide as a prototypical category rather than a criterial category is the recognition that *development of a consensual definition of the concept is simply not possible*; rather ambiguity and contestation at the margins of category membership are intrinsic to the conceptual problem at hand. Moreover conceptual expansion and contraction have been readily visible throughout the history of genocide studies. For example, Lemkin's (1944) original formulation of the concept construed genocide as not only or always in reference to the extinguishing of group lives but also or alternatively in reference to the destruction of a group's collective way of life (see Benvenuto, this volume; Powell and Peristerakis, this volume). In the subsequent formulation of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide as ratified by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948, Lemkin's proposed conception was substantially curtailed, reflecting what some have argued is a "methodologically individualist ontology of the social" (Powell and Peristerakis, chapter 3). More specifically such critics contest the politically liberalist assumption that individual lives are more fundamental and essential than collective social existence and affiliation, and therefore urge reconsideration of what precisely genocide is assumed to kill. Nevertheless even the United Nations Convention on Genocide reflects a construal of the term that remains more expansive than early scholarly delineations (and resulting dictionary definitions) of the concept, defining this crime as the "intent to destroy" a group as such, inclusive of practices such as "forcibly transferring children of the group to another group" (Jones 2011: 13). Such qualifiers afford interpretation well beyond customary references to mass killing and death (which persist even among recent scholars who, despite their conceptualization of colonial genocide as a "dynamic process," nevertheless continue to reference "murder, or attempted murder, of groups" [Moses 2000: 90]).

My point here thus far is that a definition of genocide is (1) necessary for an assessment of claims about the colonization of Native North America, (2) contestable in light of arbitrary or fuzzy boundaries that circumscribe the concept, and (3) contingent on historical factors that can be recognized as influencing various constructions of the concept since its initial formulation. As a consequence, in searching for a working definition I am particularly interested in what the term has come to signify since Lemkin's (1944) initial introduction of the word. More specifically I believe that important lessons may follow from briefly considering what genocide now means in everyday discourse as a result not only of Lemkin's initial formulation but also of the analyses and arguments of earlier generations of genocide scholars. After all, once a neologism finally arrives at the vernacular stage, there is perhaps good reason to attend to its colloquial usage as one analytic lens for appreciating its referential, aesthetic, and pragmatic functions (which, of course, is not to argue that scholars cannot or should not attempt to contest or disrupt such popular definitions when warranted). In this regard Google Dictionary defines genocide as "the deliberate killing of a large group of people, especially those of a particular ethnic group or nation." That is, genocide in colloquial usage refers to instances of attempted or enacted *mass murder*. Furthermore, when not used in this conventional sense, such invocations are frequently qualified (as in *cultural genocide*) in order to differentiate what is denoted from common parlance. I see this as important because the term *genocide* has come to serve both *descriptive* and *evaluative* purposes in everyday usage, and its evaluative function of indexing the most extreme form of morally reprehensible intergroup violence would appear to *simultaneously constrain* its descriptive function. More specifically the appeal of the word is based on the fact that it occupies the extreme end of a continuum of moral evaluation relative to group-based violence that would be effectively undermined by expanding its descriptive function to instances beyond mass murder proper.

By way of example, consider the following vignette from the workshop on colonial genocide that gave rise to the edited collection in which this chapter appears. In his keynote presentation that inaugurated the workshop, Justice Murray Sinclair addressed the question of genocide relative to the residential school experiences of Aboriginal Canadians. As chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada—which was tasked with reporting on the impacts of assimilative education for Aboriginal children (see Patzer, this volume)—Sinclair recounted that in their testimonies before the Commission many survivors of these repressive institutions had characterized their mandatory schooling as genocidal. He conveyed as much to the media several months prior to the workshop, setting in motion a fierce national controversy

about the applicability of the term to the Canadian residential school system. During his keynote address Sinclair set forth a cogent argument for ascribing genocide to residential schooling on the basis of the section of the United Nations Genocide Convention that references the forcible transfer of children as one of the indicators of genocide. Sinclair's logic was unassailable: if one privileges the reference to forcible transfer of children from the Convention, then one can conclude that the residential schools were genocidal. But what most caught my attention in his address was his reported reaction to the media frenzy surrounding this public characterization. During his address Sinclair recounted his subsequent outreach to a Jewish survivor of the Nazi concentration camp at Buchenwald to "apologize" for perhaps offending those who had experienced "true genocide." The Holocaust survivor was apparently respectful of Sinclair's attribution, but it was Sinclair's instinctive move to offer an apology that I believe is most telling: it indexed the common understanding that genocide most properly applies to the most extreme form of group-based violence, namely, physical extermination (as opposed to coercive assimilation, no matter how reprehensible the latter might be).

Thus Sinclair's instinct reflects the deep contradiction between the descriptive and evaluative functions of the term *genocide*. On one hand, following a particular interpretation of the United Nations Genocide Convention, he sought to trace the descriptive contours of the genocide concept well beyond mass murder to coercive cultural assimilation; on the other hand, in deference to commonplace understandings of the term, he sought to qualify the evaluative contours of the genocide concept by apologizing for his application of the term to residential schooling rather than to "true" instances such as the Holocaust. In itself, of course, this vignette does not preclude the extension of the concept of genocide beyond instances of group-based mass murder, but in doing so it reveals a *necessary trade-off* between the term's descriptive and evaluative functions. That is, once the concept is expanded to accommodate phenomena beyond mass murder, the moral force of the attribution is attenuated. As a result the term's ready reference to the extreme end of the moral continuum relative to group-based violence is diminished. Moreover there already exists a host of concepts for describing related forms of group-based violence that occupy a less extreme, more encompassing segment of the evaluative continuum: "crimes against humanity," "human rights violations," "ethnic cleansing," "colonization," "massacres," "forced assimilation," and so forth. Thus what seems to be distinctive about the term *genocide* is its reference to the "crime of all crimes," namely, group-based mass murder. Nevertheless some will continue to argue for expansion of the concept in service to some purpose or another. If so, then it strikes me that we will still require (and

will therefore need to designate) some new term—another neologism?—to occupy the extreme end of the continuum of moral evaluation with reference to group-based violence. Why then abandon the term *genocide* in this regard when it has already (finally) come to occupy precisely this evaluative location in common parlance?

#### Attributing Genocide in the Context of European Colonization

Based on this reasoning I believe that the term *genocide* is best reserved for references to attempted or enacted group-based mass murder. It is my purpose in this section to consider to what degree genocide in this sense characterizes the colonial dispossession of Indigenous peoples of North America. In reviewing a handful of discussions about the case of Indigenous peoples by genocide studies scholars, I was most struck by the degree of ambivalence and qualification expressed in these analyses. For example, in glaring contrast to the titles of other essays in the collection, Hitchcock and Twedt (2009: 420) titled their chapter “Physical and *Cultural Genocide of Indigenous Peoples*” (italics added), demonstrating how “most writers” of the scholarly literature on Indigenous peoples “use a fairly broad definition of the concept of genocide.” Similarly in Fein’s (1990: 80) consideration of “*Ethnocide, Genocide and Mass Death of Indigenous Peoples*” (italics added), she allowed that, “although many studying genocide refer to the genocide of the American Indians . . . , no one has documented an over-all pattern of genocide by the government of the United States in the post-colonial period.” In this regard she favorably cited Chalk and Jonassohn (1990: 195): “The case of the American Indian in the nineteenth century is one of the most complex in the history of genocide. . . . Very few American leaders wanted to annihilate the American Indian; the government-organized murder of peaceable Indians with the intention of destroying tribes in whole or in part rarely occurred.” Interestingly in the most authoritative reference work about Native peoples in the United States, the Smithsonian Institution’s definitive fifteen-volume *Handbook of North American Indians*, the 838-page volume dedicated to “Indian-White relations” (Washburn 1988) contains only one reference to genocide, which appears in the chapter dedicated to representations of American Indians in English literature.

Given this trend, one might wonder how genocide ever came to be generically associated with the European colonization of Native North America. Certainly few would dispute the overwhelming degree of colonial suffering experienced by Indigenous communities in the wake of contact and dispossession. For example, no one doubts the fact that Native North Americans

experienced catastrophic loss of life on a truly massive scale in the wake of European colonization, primarily from disease (Thornton 1987). Furthermore colonial policies in the United States were expressed through sustained campaigns of brutal dispossession, removal, and containment, including the deployment of military force that at various times erupted in the wanton slaughter of Indigenous noncombatants (as examples, Hitchcock and Twedt [2009] cited massacres of Cheyennes and Arapahos at Sand Creek in 1864 and of Lakotas at Wounded Knee in 1890). Indeed a subset of these violent campaigns—including well-documented examples from the settlement of California and Oregon (Madley 2008, this volume; Whaley, this volume)—involved coordinated actions by settlers with governmental support that qualify as genocides by almost any definition. Finally, once Native peoples were settled on reservations, deep ambivalence about federal expenditures for meeting basic community needs, combined with systematic graft by personnel in the Indian service, resulted in inadequate support, yielding starvation and other forms of desperate suffering (Hagan 1988). None of these facts—or the appraisals of them as gross injustices—appears to be in dispute. Rather the question is whether such experiences together constitute an overarching pattern that might properly warrant the sweeping assertion that the colonial settlement of North America was genocidal.

Perhaps the most influential scholar to advance this claim is Stannard (1992), who consistently asserted in his book *American Holocaust: Columbus and the Conquest of the New World* that European settlement not just of North America but in fact of the entire “new world” was genocidal. Beginning with the arrival of Columbus to Hispaniola in the late fifteenth century, Stannard recounted in grueling detail the wide range of horrors visited upon the Indigenous inhabitants of the Western Hemisphere across the centuries in the wake of contact. Although he acknowledged the primary role of disease in Indigenous depopulation (responsible for the deaths of over 90 percent of these communities), Stannard emphasized the wanton slaughter of Native peoples by, first, the Spanish conquistadors and, later, English traders and settlers. He attributed these depredations to Old World formations grounded at the intersection of Christianity, empire, and racism, and on this basis characterized the overarching pattern of European conquest over time and across regions as genocidal. In response to this argument, some distinguished historians cried foul; both Elliott (1993) and White (1993) dismissed Stannard’s sweeping attribution of genocide as overheated polemic. For example, White (1993: 33) countered that Stannard “takes the horrible and seeks to make it worse.” Citing virgin soil epidemics of disease as the primary source of Indigenous decline, White questioned Stannard’s precontact Indigenous

population estimates and chided him for conflating unintentional exposure to deadly pathogens with intentional killing of Indigenous peoples by Europeans. Furthermore White noted the shifting and complex history of white-Indian alliances that furthered Indigenous dispossession, complicating contemporary assessments of moral culpability. In sum White faulted Stannard for his oversimplified pursuit of a “verdict of mass murder” in the colonization of North America when “manslaughter” is perhaps the more appropriate judgment (34).

Critiques of such sweeping attributions of genocide with reference to European colonization seem as relevant today as they did two decades ago because scholars in Indigenous and ethnic studies have increasingly invoked the term with broad reference to Native North America (Churchill 1998, 2002, 2004; Jaimes 1992; Smith 2005). But White’s (1993) and Elliott’s (1993) counterclaim is simply that this multicentury history is so nuanced and complicated that it does not lend itself particularly well to breezy moral dichotomies inspired by contemporary racial politics. If genocide was one pattern of violent dispossession in the colonization of North America, other patterns were evident as well. Nongenocidal warfare was a common occurrence, even when this erupted in appalling massacres perpetrated either by intrusive settlers or besieged Natives. (Indeed Rensink [2009] has drawn on the complex historical record to complicate the question of genocide even with reference to prototypical colonial massacres such as at Sand Creek.) Warfare by allied Natives and Europeans against other Natives and/or Europeans was an additional pattern, as was true of the French and Indian War during the mid-eighteenth century. Ethridge (this volume) illustrated still another pattern in which English traders centered in Carolina enlisted and equipped nearby Indigenous peoples to raid and enslave other Indigenous peoples deep inside the southern colonial “shatter zone” (i.e., a region of “widespread internecine warfare resulting in dislocations, migrations, amalgamations, and, in some cases, extinctions of Native peoples”). According to Ethridge, this expression of European commercial interests—fueled by English orchestration of the Indian slave trade primarily to the West Indies—was responsible for the demise of the mound-building chiefdoms of this region and the resultant rise of new remnant peoples such as the Choctaw, Cherokee, and Chickasaw.

A final pattern involved catastrophic disruptions to Indigenous ways of life resulting from contact that were not necessarily intended or attended by colonizing Europeans. For illustrative purposes, consider briefly the historical context of one region of Native North America, namely, the high northern Plains during the nineteenth century. My own people, the Gros Ventre, were

very significantly affected by colonial disruptions in what later became Alberta, Saskatchewan, and Montana during the 1800s (Flannery 1953; Fowler 1987; Gone 2014). During this period our population catastrophically declined from perhaps three thousand individuals to 595 in total. And yet we never engaged the U.S. Army in combat or suffered concentrated killings of our people by Euro-Americans; in fact our most salient experiences of mass violence resembling anything like genocide occurred at the hands of allied Crees and Assiniboines in the Sweetgrass Hills during 1834 and by the Piegans in the Cypress Hills during 1867. Instead colonial impacts during this century resulted from dramatic economic shifts that gave rise to grave power asymmetries between rival Indigenous groups that were competing for control of the regional trade in horses and guns (both originally introduced by Europeans). Indeed Euro-Americans did not exercise military strength adequate for violent subjugation of this region until the bison were finally decimated in 1884. Rather the dominant military powers of the high northern Plains throughout the nineteenth century were the Blackfoot Confederacy, the Cree and Assiniboine alliance, and the Teton Sioux. The last were especially influential during the post-Civil War era, when they effectively outmaneuvered U.S. troops to close the Bozeman Trail and later routed Custer at the Little Bighorn (Utley 1988). Owing in part to their occupation of territories that afforded ideal ecological resources for maintaining large horse herds, the Lakota’s westward expansion toward the dwindling bison herds during the latter half of the nineteenth century signaled their emergence as a “hegemonic power” in this region (Hamalainen 2003: 860).

This was the context for military engagement of Native peoples by the U.S. Army throughout this period, during which national policy was consistently and primarily concerned with confiscation of Indigenous lands and settlement of Indigenous groups on reservations, by military force when necessary. In other words, the principal Euro-American commitment throughout most of this history was *dispossession* (centered on *land*) rather than *extermination* (centered on *life*). Generally speaking U.S. troops were strikingly ineffective at achieving these objectives until subsistence hunting in the region was no longer possible. These soldiers did, however, perpetrate intermittent colonial massacres, such as Colonel Baker’s slaughter of Heavy Runner’s band of Piegans on the Marias River in 1870 and Colonel Forsyth’s murder of Lakota noncombatants at Wounded Knee in 1890. (Note that the defeat of the Nez Perce leader Joseph in 1877 within forty miles of the Canadian border is usually not described as a massacre.) But these incidents were not typical of military engagements during this period (and most were not authorized by higher authorities beyond the commanders who took to the field). Instead it may

be that the full force of colonial suffering for these Indigenous groups commenced prior to confrontations with Euro-American military forces when disease and intertribal violence took their toll. Or perhaps such suffering peaked during the reservation era, when human agency, expectation, hope, and purpose were most severely challenged (Lear 2006), a period marked by government policies resulting in community poverty, Christian proselytization, cultural suppression, and boarding and residential school matriculation that advocates of Indigenous HT have consistently identified as “cultural genocide.” But cultural genocide is not genocide (absent qualification and full stop). Instead cultural genocide embodies an odd contradiction; it is akin to murder without death. And yet murder means death. As in *extinguished*—and finally, irreversibly so.

### Surmounting Genocide in the Context of European Colonization

Beyond exploring the substance of sweeping attributions of genocide in the history of European colonization of North America, I wish now to consider the contemporary significance of these attributions. Before proceeding, however, summary presentation of two points is in order. First, scholarly skepticism toward such sweeping attributions is concerned with the appropriateness of the generic claim that the colonization of Native North America was *fundamentally genocidal* as opposed to the more moderate claim that the colonization of Native North America was *intermittently genocidal* in this or that specific instance. Thus far I have contested the assertion that such genocides—which did in fact occur in various settings—were at all *typical* or *representative* of the European project of colonization, or that colonization can be casually equated with genocide. Rather the historical record has documented that European colonization occurred through a variety of patterned processes, with perpetrations of genocide by European settlers against Indigenous peoples seeming (if anything) the exception rather than the rule. Second, it seems apparent that Indigenous and scholarly promoters of the term themselves harbor implicit reservations about the global applicability of genocide to Native experiences of colonization, leading to evident equivocation in their use of the term (i.e., by alternately or additionally referencing “cultural genocide,” “ethnocide,” “ethnic cleansing,” “forced acculturation,” and the like). This is important because it reveals a *glossing of terms* that invokes other aspects of Indigenous colonization experience beyond mass murder proper. Recognition of such glossing is important for understanding the observations that follow. The point here is that casual overgeneralization of the term *genocide* to the case of colonial dispossession of North America’s

Indigenous peoples—beyond distorting the historical record and perhaps diminishing the ethical enormity of group-based mass murder—threatens to undermine the possibility for Native and non-Native reconciliation.

Given that the European colonization of North America was largely completed by the end of the nineteenth century, commonplace claims about genocide relative to Indigenous experiences of colonization appear to serve *contemporary* rhetorical and political functions. Revisiting the Sinclair vignette described earlier, it seems clear that genocide is frequently invoked in discussions of historical U.S. and Canadian policies that attempted to assimilate Indigenous children into the mainstreams of their respective societies through compulsory attendance at industrial boarding or residential schools (Adams 1995; Churchill 2004; Fontaine 2010; Miller 1996). And yet the application of the term to these educational practices—no matter how misguided and destructive they were—strikes me as particularly discordant given that genocide is so typically characterized by efforts to achieve *physical eradication or extermination* as opposed to *national assimilation or incorporation*. So why do Indigenous critics invoke genocide at all in such discussions? I believe they do so principally to harness the evaluative functions rather than the descriptive functions of the concept; indeed during the workshop that gave rise to this volume, Aboriginal Canadian participants defended their use of the term in the context of residential schooling on the grounds that words such as *colonization* and *racism* were inadequate for capturing the ethical enormity of systematic and coercive cultural assimilation. Yet is it not also the case that expansive overgeneralization of the term risks attenuating the ethical enormity of actual instances of mass murder—some of which occurred during the colonization of Native North America—that were authorized, organized, and directed toward the physical eradication of Indigenous peoples? Is it morally credible or persuasive to class the Indian killer, the buffalo hunter (Hubbard, this volume), and the schoolteacher all together as perpetrators of genocide?

Regardless of how one answers these questions, the increasingly common practice of ascribing genocide to assimilative schooling reveals two additional and interrelated purposes served by such overgeneralized attributions. The first is concerned with expressions of grief and subsequent idealizations of the past, and the second is concerned with expressions of resentment and subsequent assignations of blame for ongoing suffering. Proponents of Indigenous HT have associated “impaired” or “unresolved” grief with this concept since its initial formulation (Brave Heart 1998; Brave Heart and DeBruyn 1998; Duran and Duran 1995; Wesley-Esquimaux and Smolewski 2004). In essence their observation is that Indigenous peoples have endured such swift,



sweeping, and catastrophic changes during the period of European colonization that there have not been adequate opportunities or means for mourning these stunning losses (especially when many ceremonial mourning practices have been deliberately suppressed). With reference to these group emotional dynamics, proponents have claimed that the end result of unexpressed grief includes widespread psychosocial dysfunction and disability that continue to afflict Native communities today. Zembylas (2011) has traced the important connections between *aporetic mourning* and *restorative nostalgia*. Drawing on Derrida, he described aporetic mourning as “the struggle to deal effectively with a loss of the past” that contains “an impossible-to-resolve contradiction” in the sense that “no memory or mourning can retrieve what was lost” (650). Instead such mourning lends itself to a restorative form of nostalgia that creates “images of an idealized yesterday” in the homogenization of a remembered past that happens to serve distinctive ideological purposes (643). One aspect of the ideological work undertaken by restorative nostalgia is the notion that recollections of history are “connected with ‘traditional’ memories and narratives focusing on claims about ancient bonds of blood, continuity, and fixed categorizations of ‘us’ and ‘them’” (648).

Thus aporetic mourning and restorative nostalgia lend themselves to dichotomous polarizations—say, between Indigene and colonizer—that enable overgeneralized expressions of resentment and oversimplified assignments of blame for Native circumstances. Certainly overly extensive claims of genocide, when extrapolated to actions and occurrences not involving mass murder, appear to express relational antipathy and to reinforce fixed categorizations of “us” versus “them.” Indeed contemporary expressions of resentment by some Indigenous critics appear to shade into what Nietzsche ([1887] 1997) described as *ressentiment*, and yet Zembylas (2011) advocated for a different kind of nostalgia that may allow for a more promising path forward in the face of aporetic mourning. For Zembylas, *reflective nostalgia* cultivates an awareness that problematizes coherent and convenient accounts of the past with the goal of adopting “critical rather than static views of memory and loss” (645). Most important, these concepts herald the possibility “for a renewed politics of relationality”:

The notion of aporetic mourning suggests that social transformation can take place within a context in which sufferers endure pain but are ethically generous in wanting to build an inclusive society. . . . Without refusing to acknowledge the extent of past injustice, subsequent responsibilities are not locked into static identities of *oppressor* and *victim*, *repentant* and *forgiver*. This ethics of otherness constitutes an engagement with history that aims

to interrupt all totalities . . . through one’s infinite ethical responsibility to the other. Such an ethical responsibility is not tied to restorative notions of nostalgia . . . but poses instead a reflective nostalgia that provides space for solidarity with others. (651)

This renewed politics of *relationality*—based on ethical generosity and the allowance of space for solidarity with others—is just one obvious responsibility of the *non*-Indigenous citizens of the United States and Canada, but Indigenous peoples (for our part) would likewise appear to fall under and to benefit from this sweeping ethical mandate as well.

Such a mandate seems incompatible with the casual and overgeneralized attributions of genocide as currently circulated by many Indigenous scholars, including behavioral health researchers who promote the concept of HT. Thus, irrespective of whether HT endures as a compelling explanatory model for rampant psychosocial distress in contemporary Native communities, I have argued that its advocates must attend more closely to the concrete and specific historical events that have shaped the emergence of any contemporary Indigenous community (Gone 2014). In short, my claim in this chapter is that there can be no productive references to “Generokee” Indigenous experiences of colonial genocide in the North American context. Indeed the rhetorical and political efficacy of the overgeneralized attribution of this term remains in serious question, for, as Conley-Zilkic and Totten (2009: 610) observed, “Once the specter of ‘genocide’ looms, debates and discussion about . . . the phenomenon are sidetracked by the single issue of whether or not ‘genocide’ is indeed [the appropriate description].” As a result, beyond those actual instances of group-based mass murder that intermittently occurred during the colonization of Native North America, it may be that understatement will serve Indigenous interests more effectively than hyperbole. Moreover the terms *colonization* and *colonial subjugation* would appear to serve readily enough for general characterizations of the postcontact historical experiences of Indigenous North Americans *without* sacrificing either historical accuracy or scholarly integrity. Most important, neither risks trivializing the intermittent occurrences of murderous settler campaigns undertaken for outright extermination of Indigenous peoples that even today threaten to rend the very fabric of human communality in the United States and Canada.



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*Done*

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**INDIGENOUS NORTH AMERICA**

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