

Exhibit: National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls		
Location/Phase: <u>Parts 2/3 Iqaluit</u>		
Witness: <u>Lightfoot &amp; Redfern</u>		
Submitted by: <u>Shelby Thomas</u>		
Add'l info: <u>P02-03 P01 P0301</u>		
Date: <u>SEP 12 2018</u>		
Initials	I/D	Entered
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Predators Without Reprisal:  
Abuse of Native Women

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December 8, 2008  
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The purpose of this paper is to deal with colonialism by two tactics that have affected L'nu (Indigenous ) women the most. While there are others these are the two that are the focus of this paper. Where L'nu women in the past were respected in our history before these two tactics: environmental racism and racialized/ sexualized violence, where environmental racism breeds the latter, they degrade and objectify women the most. It is viewed this way specifically due to the idea that reproductive roles are important to the survival of a people. Thus to attack or exploit them is to inflict harm on the people as a whole. "Colonial relationships are gendered and sexualized and sexual violence functions as a tool of racism and colonialism" (Smith, 2005, p.220).

Within today's written documentation of the experience of 'Canada's' Indigenous women the vast majority of research is focused around domestic violence against women. Not much attention is given to the case of racialized/sexualized violence against these women, which is often the result of the claim that, "there are no available statistics on racially motivated attacks on Indigenous women" (The Canadian Panel on Violence Against Women, 1993, p 134). However, if one is careful the information is out there just not necessarily where you expect to find it. For purposes of this document racialized/sexualized violence is understood to mean, "Violence perpetrated against Indigenous women because of their gender and Indigenous identity" (Native Women's Association of Canada, 2007, [www.nwac-hq.org/en/background.html](http://www.nwac-hq.org/en/background.html)). One of the possible confounding reasons as to why some of this information is not readily available maybe due to the fact that, "most [victims] do not seek justice because they know they will be met with inaction or indifference. 'Women don't report because...why report

when you are just going to be revictimized?’ says Pauline Musgrove, Director of spirits of hope coalition (Niemira, 2007, [www.amnesty.org.au/svaw/comments/2241](http://www.amnesty.org.au/svaw/comments/2241)).

It is this experience of colonization that pushes Indigenous women to bear the brunt of violence and then to be further victimized, as their voices are made silent. “Time after time, however, women who make this case are hit with gestures of denial, dismissal, trivialisation, condescension” (Rose, 1996, p12). In the context of the greater experience of L’nu women they are not only kept quiet in their experiences of violence sexually but also in the way of environmental racism (it shuts them out of community decisions) where the environmental racism makes sexualized/racialized violence a potential for each woman. Furthermore,

The erasure of the power and presence of women in the context of a public hearing about the spiritual, cultural and social bases of land ownership is a form of violence; it obscures and tends to nullify the living presence of indigenous women ...women [that] already are marginal (Rose, 1996, p12).

It is in this context that this document will look at the specific case of the Innu of ‘Labrador’ and their struggles in land negotiations, the impact on gender relations and what it means in the larger picture.

I argue that it is the colonization of Indigenous people (in ‘North America’) under capitalism that breeds environmental racism, which perpetuates a cycle where Indigenous people are degraded. Hence L’nu women become open targets for sexualized/racialized violence. The devaluing of land leads to degradation of women who are materially tied to it. “Indigenous women were raped by settlers and soldiers in attacks that were not random or individual, but were the tools of conquest” (Niemira, 2007, [www.amnesty.org.au/svaw/comments/2241](http://www.amnesty.org.au/svaw/comments/2241)). This experience is not only a historical one but an ongoing one. Furthermore this paper will examine these cases from

a historical material point of view and not one that relies on the individual emotive contents of the aggressors/ aggressees.

First before we begin to look at the experiences there is a need to understand what racism is, what it is not, and then to look at how 'Canada's' colonization has impacted Indigenous people. Roland Chrisjohn says that racism is;

An ideology of dehumanization (there are others e.g., sexism and ageism) deployed to conceal and deny the material content of dispossession (theft), discriminations and prejudice...discrimination: non or sub-human beings have no presumption of comparable treatment (under law, morality, or ethics) ordinarily accorded to human beings" (Chrisjohn, 2008, notes).

This definition of racism stands in opposition to common held ideology of racism that says it is, "fundamentally a vicious kind of racially based disregards for the welfare of certain people. In its central and most vicious form, it is a hatred, ill-will, directed against a person or persons on account of their assigned race" (Garcia, 1990, p 399). This type of definition is problematic in that it falls into the trap of methodological individualism which asserts that the problem is within individuals. It makes the error of homunculus theories where a being is put inside the heads of individual people, which are said to then drive the person's actions. (Kenny, chp 6). This notion is nonsensical and unneeded. By putting racism as a fault within individual people it makes the situation appear that in order for racism or racist institution to exist they need an emotive motivation, which is not the case. The Residential School System is known to have been operated on the basis of wanting to destroy Indian people's way of life (to make Indians not Indians). It dehumanized, dispossessed, and victimized a group of people for material profit. It makes much more sense to look to the historical material circumstances than it does to put invisible/non observable beings into people's heads in order to explain what racism is. In



the situation where racism is thought to be an individual problem then the task at hand becomes to fix the individual racist instead of looking to the bigger picture as to why racism exists where it does.

Furthermore, to even engage in the idea that there are 'races', that is different 'kinds' of people on the basis of biology, skin colour, etc, is misleading in and of itself. The scientific community has already come forward and made it clear that 'race' is an idea, one that is socially constructed. In addition Roland Chrisjohn says there are two positions with respect to racism, "if you believe that there is such a thing as race, you're a racist" (Chrisjohn, 2008, notes). However, the majority of 'Canadians' have yet to accept this and thus still you find distinctions made on the idea of a race or racial difference/superiority. It is within this context then that it is not erroneous to examine violence or discrimination made against one group of people on the basis of them being of a different nationality. What I mean is that we are not saying that they are different kinds of people but that they are different groups based on their status of being the first peoples of 'North America' or people who are descendants from colonialists who came from Europe. This says nothing to their internal, physical, personal, or individual characteristics and therefore it does not make the same error that people who follow the ideology that there are races make.

From here it is easier to see why looking at these two groups of people makes more sense to view it from a historical material point of view. Historical Materialism here is used in the idea that everyone has come to be the way they have due to the world/society being the way it is (Chrisjohn, 2008, notes). Also, it is that prior known world which acts on the individual to shape them as they are and not the other way

around. What this means in context to this document is that we exist in a system of capitalism in 'North America' that was erected through the colonization of the continent and its Indigenous peoples. It is an ongoing colonization and occupation that perpetually oppresses Indigenous people in every facet of life.

The colonization of 'North America' has made it so that Indigenous people no longer have control over many aspects of our lives. The colonizers and 'Canadian' government have sent L'nu people to live on reservations, or forced relocation into sedentary communities most often in areas or lands that are not fit for self-sufficiency or survival. It has therefore made dependency on 'Canadian' services necessary as a means of survival due to the eradication of our forms of life by the same alien government system. (Fox & Sugar, 1989, p 475). Due to this L'nu people face genocidal tactics in the guise of 'economic development programs which purport that if they just give up their land to resource development (fisheries, logging, mining, hydroelectric dams, etc) that their band/nation/community will prosper. To people living in poverty it is often seen as their only choice, it is either submit or starve. What the corporations/government do not explain to L'nu's is that often their lands are going to be polluted, outright stolen from them, and they will not have access to their traditional forms of life. In essence they steal the livelihood of L'nu people by pretending to help them out in a system that was set up to destroy their people in the first place. In addition, while this is all going on there is another phenomenon that occurs, either they will not be consulted, or it will be done only with a select few often seeing women shut out of the discussions (Kuokkanen, 2008, p 217). It exists in a way that makes women specifically negligible in the equation of environment and cultural survival but it does so because, "the erasure of women's power

constitutes the left hand of colonization. It creates absence where there was once presence” (Rose, 1996, p 12). if you can systematically take out women’s roles in history and the present it sends the message to the masses that women’s roles are malleable and really of no value. “Disassociation with participation in political and social decisions in their communities [leads to a]...disorientation of culture and tradition,’ and a total disrespect for their roles within their communities” (Jacobs & Williams, 2008, p 121). It is due to this real everyday experience of L’nu women that it is easy to see, “No culture, no land, no survival. In this way, an argument about what men do to women masks what white people have done and continue to do to Indigenous peoples and the role that sexual violence has played in these colonial encounters” (Razack, 1998, p 62). It is understood then that the racialized/sexualized violence that L’nu women face today starts with the fall of the first domino. This is the domino where L’nu women/elders are undermined and shut out of community making decisions where they were once respected. Ramifications of this relationship show, “the historic view of Euro-American colonizers was that women were chattel and were owned by their husbands” (Pierpoint, 2000, p2). In communities where a colonial authority has taught that L’nu women are not worth as much and further that if their abuse is acceptable it is easy to see that it gives way for the colonizers to get away with equal and worse crimes. This means that the way of life for L’nu women is one where, it is dangerous just to be an Indigenous woman (institute for the advancement of Indigenous women, 2004, <http://www.iaaw.ca/pdf/WHCEIndex2.pdf>). Therefore it is common knowledge that perpetrators of these types of crimes most often will not be charged or convicted. Therefore it becomes mainstream ideology that says Indigenous women are easy prey. It

is no wonder then, “to a sexual predator, the failure to prosecute sex crimes against American Indian women [all Native women] is an invitation to prey with impunity” (Niemira, 2007, [www.amnesty.org.au/svaw/comments/2241](http://www.amnesty.org.au/svaw/comments/2241)). The statistics say that 80% of attacks on L’nu women will be one at the hands of non-native men (Lincoln, 2008, <http://www.indianlaw.org/en/node/246>). I argue that this is a direct result of the past relationship between the early colonizers and the Indigenous people of ‘North America’.

The historical narrative shows us that early relations in ‘North America’ saw Europeans colonizing the peoples and lands. Some started with the premise of the fur trade, which brought about the material take over of all aspects of Indigenous people’s life. “During the fur trade, colonists used Indigenous people for their hunting and trapping abilities to exploit Canada’s natural resources from commercial gain” (Canadian Panel on Violence Against women, 1993, p122). To people who were tied to the land for every aspect of their lives to get away with this type of theft and violence there was a need to break the people from their ways of life. The way this was accomplished was through indoctrination and harsh laws that make it illegal for them to sustain themselves as they would have traditionally. Religious indoctrination started very early and was easily upheld by the military force and alien government (known as ‘Canada’). Where most pre-existing societies were more equal in their gender relations prior to contact in which both sexes relied on each other colonization told them that women were unequal; unintelligent, property to be owned, replaceable, etc. Furthermore, colonization taught them that Indigenous people; were in general of no value, stupid, backward, unequal, etc. so to add being a woman on top of being Indigenous plants the seeds for real problems. It was the goal of the colonizers to get L’nu’s to believe their propaganda so that they



would change their way of life in the whole to make it easier for L'nu's to accept the material theft of their lives. "To the extent that the Jesuits succeeded in establishing Christian marriages and their own power to enforce them, they also succeeded in establishing new, and oppressive, standards for relations between men and women" (Anderson, 1988, p 570). They changed relations so that women were property to be used and abused when they spoke up or stepped out of line (p 571). If this is what their home experience is it has to be easier to get away with en mass by non-natives who continue to uphold the colonial relationship.

While we know this to be the case, the reports of this kind of treatment have built a foundation for today's abuses of L'nu women where either they are under reported (if reported at all) or they were reported in such a way that the reality of what was done becomes obscured. For example in the past in the case of one Inuit woman named Mikak from 'Labrador' her people were slaughtered by British and then she was kidnapped along with her son, after her husband had been murdered (Borlase, 1993, p 157). After being kidnapped she was taken forcibly to England but was eventually brought back to 'Labrador' in hopes that her indoctrination through duress would be a catalyst to help her people to be colonized easily. Under law today we would say that she would be understood to be a victim, however her story has been reprinted into textbook from in such a way that she is presented as just being an Inuk that wanted peace between her people and the Europeans (Borlase, 1993, p 173). She is not respected in the context of how the situation really was like for her. In 1803 a similar situation occurred when a Beothuck woman was also kidnapped (Upton, 1977, p 141). The way these cases are reported is disturbing in that the use of the word capture somehow makes the situation

appear as a game. But what you really have is Indigenous women being kidnapped and brought into a foreign racist group, often while her people are being murdered by that same group. If this occurred today she would have her decisions/actions understood to be made in the context of being under duress. However this is not the story relayed throughout recorded text. These maybe just two cases but they are definitely not the only ones. We repeatedly see cases where Indigenous women are victimized as a result of colonization that has taught people that L'nu women are victimizable without fear of reprisal.

I argue that this maybe due to the stereotype of Native women that grew out of early colonization. This is one where L'nu women are degraded and labelled by the derogatory word 'squaw' (Green, 1975, 711). During early contact 'North America' saw the colonizers send back stories and songs of their encounters with Indigenous people from the continent. What grew out of this has been a long withstanding demeaning view of L'nu women as something less than human. Therefore common perception of L'nu women was taught so, "as the squaw, her physical removal or destruction can be understood as necessary to the progress of civilization" (714). So if this is the underpinning in context to how these L'nu women were to be subsequently treated, she is understood as a tool to be manipulated as colonizers see fit. Consequently, the stories brought back to the colonizing nation then are ones where L'nu women are, "understood as mere economic and sexual conveniences for the men" (711). Hence they are rapable and replaceable in the name of conquest or 'civilization'.

Even though this article was written in 1976 (reflecting historical attitudes) it does not mean that these damaging stereotypes have disappeared or necessarily changed.

‘North American’ society today continues to perpetuate negative views of L’nu women. Almost more sinisterly now instead of being done just through books and songs capitalism as brought us more media outlets in order to indoctrinate the masses with ease. What we witness now is the commercialization of ‘North America’s Indigenous genocide in convenient packages of movies, music, video games and countless other merchandise items. On October 13<sup>th</sup>, 1982 a video game was produced by Mystique for Atari 2600, called Custer’s Revenge. It is the goal of this game to rape an Indigenous woman who is tied to something, the main player being Custer ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Custer's Revenge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Custer's_Revenge), 2008). While someone could argue that 1982 was a while ago and attitudes toward L’nu women could have changed since then I would like to point out that this game sold 80,00 copies ([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Custer's Revenge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Custer's_Revenge), 2008) of which quite a few are still in circulation and still being played and broadcasted as ‘fun’ to other views who choose to watch it on [www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com). But this is also indicative of the larger issue in which media systemically treats Indigenous women and Indigenous s in general as if these things done happen or that they are not important. “It begs the question: when will it stop? At a human level over two centuries the vanquishing and murdered and humiliations of Indians...has been and remains America’s most basic story and Hollywood’s most prolific gravy train”(Lang, 2007, 196). Back to the game, another problem with the information about this game is biased language used to describe the video. An individual can easily go onto wikipedia and find out all about this game. The problem with wikipedia is that not only can anyone just go on and change the content of anything on the website, but also mainstream education has indoctrinated people so

successfully that people often unquestionably swallow the information given to them.

The site reads, “[the game] has received significant criticism because of its crude simulation of an apparent rape of a Native American woman”

([http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Custer's\\_Revenge](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Custer's_Revenge), 2008). The use of the term apparent makes it seem as if it may not be the case that maybe it is just sex. There is no discussion around the fact that she is bound and therefore could not give consent (if she were real). No consent means that it is rape. So as we seen above modern media is basically getting away with profiting off of the abuses of L’nu women without having to question or deal with the ramifications of what this really means for Indigenous people. This is a dangerous situation as it sets up further swallowing of the ideology that Indigenous women have no value and therefore do not deserve the same justice as other women.

Back to the argument that this came out in the 1980’s and things have changed. Upon doing a little search for this game anyone can access youtube.com and type in the video games name. What pops up is a number of videos showing people playing it referring to it as fun and attempting to get ‘high scores’ on the game. At the bottom of every video you can view the comments left behind by other viewers. If you think attitudes have changed you are sadly mistaken. Here are a few of the comments left behind:

- LatinoPlayboy619 (1 year ago) “screwing a native american woman against a cactus while dodging arrows like rain..while only wearing a cowboy hat and boots...sounds like my saturday nights..”
- rickrudd (10 months ago) “This game rocks - I didn't realize that there were THIS MANY raging pussies on the youtube forums. Who doesn't like sex with tied up Indians? I for one submit that we need more sex and less "Grand Theft".



- DemonicScreams666 (10 months ago) I know people cry about this game, but me and my friends find it fun and funny, everytime someone new comes to my apartment I show them the game and they laugh, even girls try it out lol
- It sucks, yet it's so frickin funny XD

(WCWite, 2007, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FVDWQui6idA>)

The comments continue on and get worse and more and more inaccurate this makes enough of a point. These are just a few examples of the easily accessible racist comments that are out there for anyone to consume. It is not shocking to see that if people view it as acceptable, then the rape of real L'nu women would likely be as acceptable. However this is just one area that marginalization of Indigenous women is felt.

In the present day context we see L'nu people having a common experience of having their lands stolen and further that their poverty (which is a direct result of the colonial system) makes them readily exploitable. Extreme poverty often forces Indigenous people's hands in that if they do not sell off their lands it means systematic poverty for their people, and to people already in this situation it means a death sentence. The catch in these situations however is that while these 'economic development' plans are put forth as the solution it means the exploitation of their territory in exchange for short-term monies. This really means something different from what Indigenous people are being promised. While they're proposed under the mask of providing jobs to the impoverished community what they hide is that they will only be menial jobs, definitely not the jobs that give good pay (Sampson, 2003, p152). In order to get those good jobs you need specialized training something that not many Indigenous people have as a result of the colonial history that has been inflicted upon them. It is one in which they have been born into, not one that they choose as a people. (The Canadian Panel on

Violence Against Women, 1993, p 124). What you have then is a case where a group of people (Indigenous ) have been under a regime that has had as its goal the destruction of that group, so that material 'North America' can be exploited without a fight. This group is left out of the decisions about what is to happen to their traditional territory (Sampson, 2003, p110). They are forced to deal with the exploitation after the fact and then only some of the people are given the demeaning jobs, while outside non-Indigenous workers are shipped into these communities. In the big picture then people who have also been indoctrinated to believe in the exploitation of L'nu people/lands are put into Indigenous territory to work, the impact on the community is definitely going to be felt.

The speed of growth of the tar sands, the quantities of money that will be infused to develop them, and the vast influx of migrant workers from other parts of Canada and beyond trigger social breakdown in varying degrees. Alienated, unhappy work forces will abuse drugs and alcohol, leading to violence, prostitution, elder and spousal abuse and children fathered by workers who are long gone" (Stainby, 2007, p35).

From what we know of the fur trade era this was much the common experience. Consequently if this experience continues then so will the racialized/sexualized violence against Indigenous women due to the easy transport in and out of communities of not only extra racist colonial forces (who make sure exploitation continues without a hitch) but also racist workers who grew out of a capitalist/colonialist society. It has been argued by some like Rosemary Brown that, "the oil and gas frontier was a negative and stressful experience for Lubicon women" (Brown, 1997, p103). But the situation applies to other Indigenous women as a whole due to their shared colonial histories.

Today as a result of this ongoing relationship Indigenous women continue to be marginalized and victimized. Like the past women are victimized through environmental racism where they are left out of decisions that impact their communities. For example

the case of the Innu of Sheshtshiu 'Labrador' during the early 1990's when low level flying by NATO forces was occurring the Innu people protested these flights due to its impact on their forms of life. One of the prominent people during this fight was Elizabeth Penashue who kept up the fight and was respected for it; her son was also along side her (Samson, 2003, 110). However now time has past and a new hydroelectric damn is to go into Innu territory. The project has gone ahead without consultation with the Innu (a perfect example of environmental racism) until after the fact. Peter Penashue is now in a position of authority in the new deal. To illustrate the point of how L'nu women become silenced in these situations a CBC radio interview was conducted in which Elizabeth was addressing her concern for the Innu people's way of life and the environment. Elizabeth's concerns were material and not blown out of proportion as Peter Penashue tried to make it appear. On public radio her son berated and trivialized her concern. She is a respected elder in her community and someone who can be considered an expert in this area, but that is not how she was treated (CBC Radio, 2008, talk back interview). As it was stated earlier taking L'nu women out of public hearings and consultations is violence against them in that it "displaces them"(Rose, 1996,p12). The displacement of a person/cutting them off from their form of life/traditions is an act of genocide in that under the genocide convention adopted under Article 2 section c, "Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of lie calculated to bring apart its physical destruction in whole or in part" (United Nations Genocide Convention, 1946).

If the greater 'North American' society experiences this indoctrination as a whole then it is no wonder why L'nu women are so easily victimizable. If they can be cut from history then they are replaceable. If they can be shut out of everyday consultation then



they can be removed from mainstream consciousness just as easy. So is it any wonder then that reports say today there are over, “500 Indigenous women have gone missing in communities across Canada” (Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2007, p 4). Most of these women are missing or murdered. It is not hard to see that they are not just random occurrences when it is the common repeated experience of a group of people. Especially when they are composed of one of the most marginal groups in ‘North American’ society. “The truth is almost too horrific to say- to be an Indigenous woman is to be at risk” (institute for the advancement of Indigenous women, 2004, <http://www.iaaw.ca/pdf/WHCEIndex2.pdf>). When this is the known situation for any group of people then it tells us that something is definitely wrong with the system as a whole.

This begs the question where do we go from here? What is next to be done? While education or re-education is important to help break these systematic misconceptions and burials of Native peoples history the system as a whole is a problem that needs to be taken on. In direct relation to the immediate sexualized/racialized violence that L’nu women face organizations like the United Nations are just now starting to call out governments like ‘Canada’ to, “work with indigenous women’s organizations to identify concrete solutions to address the discrimination faced by Indigenous women and the unacceptable levels of violence that is its consequence” (<http://nwac-hq.org/en/documents/PressReleaseNWACAmnestyCAEFSresponsetoCEDAWNov26-08.pdf> , 2008). And while all of these recommendations are good ones in that they attempt to address the immediate again they are focusing too narrow. They are important



steps to be made to help with the fire but what a few purport is to look to what is igniting the fire. The fire being the incidents of violence against L'nu women, and L'nu people in general. However what is being missed is that these all grow out of the 'institution' called 'Canada' which itself is a colonially imposed idea that is where it is due to the dispossession and displacement of Indigenous peoples. This institution runs itself off the fundamentally racist doctrine, laws and acts that continue to oppress all L'nu people and until this changes I do not think that the situation for L'nu people will improve. What this research has told me is that one law applies for the non-native population and another unequal one for Natives. If it was the seeds of colonization and indoctrination that grew relations as they are now then we need to get to the roots of the weed that is 'Canada'. Give power of determination (real power not just governmental lip service) back to Indigenous people. Let us educate our children in their own languages, something that is supposed to be a recognized right of Indigenous people. Give us our rights back, honour our treaties, let us have access to our lands and let us be able to say no to corporations when they obstruct our rights to follow our forms of life. Until we start to knock down those fences, oppression will continue to be erected in our faces at neck breaking speed. As we are seeing under the increased rates of violence against L'nu people I think we need to fight on as many fronts as we can to really effect change. Fight for policy change, laws, take over the state, fight from the inside without being bought into it. Just because you are forced to be in this system does not mean that we have to be complicit in it...and apart of that not being complicit is demanding (not asking) that things change and governments be held responsible.

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