Doutaghi, H., & Courchene, A. (2021, June 15). The shared struggles of Muslim Canadians and Indigenous peoples. Rabble. https://rabble.ca/anti-racism/shared-struggles-muslim-canadians-and-indigenous-peoples/



The shared struggles of Muslim Canadians and Indigenous peoples

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Helyeh Doutaghi (/about/bios/helyeh-doutaghi)
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June 15, 2021

OPINION (/CATEGORY/NEW-STORY-TYPE/OPINION)
ANTI-RACISM (/ISSUES/ANTI-RACISM)
MEDIA MATTERS (/ISSUES/MEDIA-MATTERS)



The violence embedded in Canada's structures has once again resurfaced.

The Islamophobic massacre of the Afzaal family in London, Ontario, only a few days after the horrific discovery of the mass grave of 215 First Nation children at a former residential school in Kamloops, B.C., are the latest manifestations of the hate and racism that are foundational to settler colonialism in Canada.

In light of these tragic events, many are contemplating the hypocrisy of Canadian leaders who condemn human rights violations elsewhere while failing to recognize their own misdeeds.

For example, **David McDonald** (https://theconversation.com/canadas-hypocrisy-recognizing-genocide-except-its-own-against-indigenous-peoples-162128) compares Canada's actions to condemn China for its alleged crimes against Muslims with its inactions regarding the 215 First Nations children in B.C. Similarly, **Andrew Mitrovica** (https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2021/6/7/a-mass-grave-justin-trudeau-and-gaza) highlights the hypocrisy of Justin Trudeau's words and actions regarding the 11-day bombardment of Gaza, asserting that the prime minister prefers to "spin agreeable, picture-postcard-pretty myths about who and what he is" rather than address the root causes of the issues at hand.

While these articles rightly focus on the words and actions Canadian politicians, this hypocrisy is reflective of a much larger system that relies on Canadians to consume these horrific news stories each cycle as if they each exist within their own vacuum.

The media cycles in which Islamophobic killings crowd out stories about Indigenous children killed in residential schools suggests competition among different groups of victims. Yet these forms of violence have the same roots and none of them are isolated.

The interrelatedness of these violent events means Canada is implicated in a much larger system of global capitalist imperialism that relies on the hypocrisy and lies of its leaders and media to maintain this illusion of an "agreeable, picture-postcard-pretty country."

former prime minister Stephen Harper's 2009 statement (https://vancouversun.com/news/community-blogs/really-harper-canada-has-no-history-of-colonialism/) which falsely claimed Canada does not have a history of colonialism. We now fully know, thanks to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the objective of the Indian Residential School system was to "take the Indian out of the child," as stated by the system's founder, John A. Macdonald.

However, Canadians have yet to fully acknowledge that the residential school system was part of a larger capitalist colonial project to expel Indigenous peoples from their lands by fragmenting Indigenous socioeconomic, familial, political, and legal orders.

This is because most often, Canadians chalk residential schools up to a "dark chapter" in the history of Canada.

This narrative, perpetuated and reinforced by mainstream media, assumes that the processes and structures of settler colonialism have somehow disappeared, or somewhere along the line, there was a resolution reached between Indigenous nations and the Canadian state regarding the theft of land.

Neither could be further from the truth. Legal scholar Kent McNeil has shown that Canada has never convincingly answered the question as to how it gained legitimate authority over Indigenous territorial sovereignty.

The story of land dispossession cannot be told without acknowledging the institution of chattel slavery in the United States that brought millions of African people to this continent against their will. In *The Apocalypse of Settler Colonialism,* Gerald Horne outlines how Black slavery and Indigenous dispossession laid the foundation for almost every aspect of settler-colonial society, which truly highlights the interrelated histories of Black and Indigenous peoples.

Yet, as Joy Spearchief-Morris **writes** (https://www.theglobeandmail.com/opinion/article-indigenous-and-black-communities-have-a-shared-past-of-injustice-they/) in her opinion on Black and Indigenous solidarity, the history of racism makes us believe that there is a scarcity of power between groups, which prevents us from creating stronger bonds with one another.

This is yet another lie meant to perpetuate the settler-colonialism and the lie extends far beyond the reaches of the Canadian border.

How is the lie maintained globally?

Canadian foreign policy is an extension of its domestic lies.

Canada continues to financially and politically benefit from war and destruction in the global south. The state is invested in and an active participant of capitalist imperialism.

territories and the ethnic cleansing of Palestinian people; its imperialist expansion through NATO in resource rich, Muslim dominant countries under the pretence of the "war on terror" are only a few examples of Canada's expansive imperialism outside its borders.

All of these policies reinforce hateful rhetoric within Canada. The justification of Canada's imperial actions requires Black, Indigenous, Muslim, and other racialized communities to be continuously perceived as existential threats to Canada.

From the criminalization of **Indigenous land defence** (https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/dec/20/canada-indigenous-land-defenders-police-documents), to the introduction of **xenophobic legislation** (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2021/04/20/quebec-canada-religious-hijab-turban-ban/) that disproportionally targets Muslim women, to the i**ncreased violence against Asian people** (https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/reports-of-anti-asian-hate-crimes-are-surging-in-canada-during-the-covid-19-pandemic-1.5351481) in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, and the **relentless stereotypes about Black men** (https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5004736/) that are used to justify police murders, all unmask the performative nature of Canadian concepts like reconciliation and multiculturalism, rendering them completely meaningless in the face of Canadian imperialism.

How to share our struggles?

These issues are not discontinuous and continue to affect Black, Indigenous, Muslim and other racialized folk on a daily basis. Any talk about competition for victimhood is mistaken. Acknowledging the common roots of each struggle are crucial in understanding the need to fight collectively. It requires us to act beyond racial, generational, and even spatial lines to dismantle the violent systems that reproduce and recentre the colonialism/imperialism, racism, islamophobia that is embedded in the global capitalist order.

This is a tall order.

Yet as **Harsha Walia** (http://www.coloursofresistance.org/769/moving-beyond-a-politics-of-solidarity-towards-a-practice-of-decolonization/) suggests, building solidarity and support with one another is about taking responsibility and leadership for our own self-determination. Walia notes that support and solidarity are not the same, but both require building relationships with one another that cuts the settler-colonial state out of the equation. Since colonialism arranges one type of relationship between humans and erases/oppresses others, we can rearrange our relations with each other based on sharing our community's experiences, ideals, and visions for a decolonial society by building an understanding of the basic commonalities within our respective struggles.

Unless we see the global capitalist order for the lie that it is, we will be forced to defend ourselves from imperial violence in isolation.

Helyeh Doutaghi is a Muslim-settler, organizer, and a doctoral candidate in Law and Legal Studies at Carleton University.

Image credit: Doutaghi and Courchene/used with permission.

FURTHER READING

Racism's place in Canada (https://rabble.ca/news/2021/06/racisms-place-canada)
When will my hijab be the symbol of peace it is meant to be rather than a target for hateful people?

Why did it take the Kamloops discovery to accept what we've known for decades? (https://rabble.ca/news/2021/06/why-did-it-take-kamloops-discovery-accept-what-weve-known-decades)
Survivors have been sharing the ugly truths of the so-called residential "schools" for many years. Who was listening?

Why we need Africentric education (https://rabble.ca/columnists/2021/06/why-we-need-africentric-education)
How many otherwise bored, overlooked, or alienated African-Canadian kids could teachers inspire if they taught a "Wakanda" curriculum connecting the fictional content to its real-world inspiration?

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Nope, Erin O'Toole is still not pro-choice

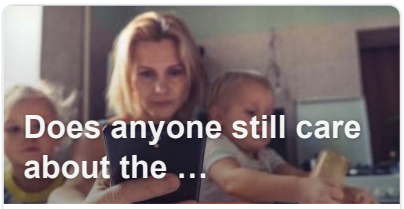
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Clara McNee • 3 months ago

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1 • Reply • Share ›

Sunny Sands • 3 months ago • edited

Celeste Varley • 3 months ago • edited

Finally!!!!! a cogent assessment of most of the continuing blindness and racism in Canada. Well done Rabble.

Reply • Share ›

Sunny Sands • 3 months ago • edited

When Israel promotes immigration of more settlers, and puts many of them on land claimed by the indigenous Palestinians, progressives recognize that it's a crime.

When Canada promotes immigration of more settlers, and puts them on land claimed by the indigenous First Nations, progressives applaud it.

Let's put real action ahead of identity politics lip service and place a moratorium on immigration until indigenous land and rights issues are solved.

2 • Reply • Share ›

zalm ↗ Sunny Sands • 3 months ago

Well, this certainly is an odd comment! Are you saying Canada is evicting natives from their own houses to house immigrants coming into Canada? Do you mean to conflate the issue of nation-building in Israel and Palestine with the issue of nation-erasing in Canada? I don't think you're going to find anybody anywhere happy with that kind of argument, never mind "progressives", whatever slur you intend by that.

Quite apart from the fact that you have completely erased the nuance in the arguments that both sides admit is present in those conflicts, you've now set the needs of immigrants against the needs of aboriginals, as if Canada can only focus on one thing at a time. If you really think that, then perhaps Canada should just go back to providing a justice system and a military and let everything else be decided by the market, like the libertarians would like.

2 • Reply • Share ›

Maria Gatti ↗ zalm • 3 months ago

Most immigrants settle in urban areas. Yes, of course those locations were once either inhabited or used by Indigenous peoples, and it is important to recognise that and remove the most egregious insults to these memories (here in Montréal, rebaptising the shameful "rue Amherst"...). But Indigenous demands concentrate on far more immediate goals.

In general, immigrants and their descendants have contributed a great deal.

I do have a feminist suspicion of ALL fundamentalist religious groups, certainly Christian and Jewish ones as much as Muslim ones. These are certainly not the majority among any of the monotheists, and I doubt it is the case among other faiths present here.

2 • Reply • Share ›

zalm ↗ Maria Gatti • 3 months ago

Ah, yup... but does that mean you take issue with my reply to sunny, or something else? I think we see eye-to-eye on the need to acknowledge aboriginal sovereignty and compensate for some of the land seized, but would you agree that sunny now wants us to pull up the drawbridge now that we're here, or would you say he's just playing his Republican card?

1 • Reply • Share ›

problems as the housing crisis.

The housing crisis much be fought through political and social action for social housing (not only for the very poorest) and a war on speculation.