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Cultural Genocide in Joe Sacco's *Paying the Land*

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Abstract: This article explores the representation of cultural genocide in the case of Canada's Indigenous peoples in Joe Sacco's documentary graphic narrative *Paying the Land*, which focuses on the Dene in the Canadian Northwest Territories. Specifically, the article discusses Sacco's depiction of perpetrators in the so-called Indian Residential School System (IRSS), which is contrasted with portrayals of intracommunal violence and Indigenous perpetrators. Through graphic narrative means, *Paying the Land* presents the latter as an aftereffect of the former and extensively explores how cycles of domestic violence and substance abuse were initiated through the attempted destruction of Indigenous peoples as a group, a process in which the residential schools played an important role. In doing so, Sacco specifically addresses a North American audience as implicated subjects who, like himself, are entangled in settler-colonial histories. He investigates the complexities of perpetratorship and accountability that involves not only the policymakers and residential school staff but also North American society at large. In respect to intracommunal violence among the Dene, *Paying the Land* seeks to shift public perception from inherently 'deficient' Indigenous culprits toward an understanding of the colonial policies that have purposefully eroded social cohesion among Indigenous peoples.

Keywords: documentary comics, cultural genocide, residential schools, Canada, implication

Introduction

Veteran comics journalist Joe Sacco's 2020 documentary graphic narrative book *Paying the Land* employs the comics form to present an oral history of the Indigenous Dene peoples in the Canadian Northwest Territories and to document the consequences of Canada's settler-colonialist policies in the present day.[1] Like previous graphic reportages by the same author, *Paying the Land* employs a two-fold narrative strategy: one narrative strand presents a chronological account of Sacco's investigation on

I would like to thank the two anonymous peer reviewers and Susanne C. Knittel as well as Charlotte Lerg and Birgit Däwes for their insightful feedback that broadened my understanding of the issues covered here.

1 On documentary comics as a medial form, see Hillary L. Chute, *Disaster Drawn. Visual Witness, Comics, and Documentary Form* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2016); Nina Mickwitz, *Documentary Comics: Graphic Truth-Telling in a Skeptical Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016); and Johannes C. P. Schmid, *Frames and Framing in Documentary Comics* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

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site and includes the interviews that he conducted there. This strand incorporates Sacco himself as a character, signalling his own role as a contemporary observer. The other narrative strand is set in the past and presents historical explorations. This strand prominently features the witness accounts about the past, narrated by his interview partners. By returning to Canada's settler-colonial history and the 'slow violence'[2] it exerts on Indigenous communities, both in terms of cultural genocide and environmental destruction, *Paying the Land* seeks to provide answers for contemporary issues, such as resource extraction, particularly fracking, and the environmental costs it brought to the region, but also substance abuse and poverty in Indigenous communities.[3] The book offers an outlook on possible futures for Indigenous peoples concerning the use of their native land and presents a stark critique of globalized capitalism. As part of this investigation, Sacco seeks to unravel the settler-colonialist attempts of the Canadian government to eradicate Indigenous cultures and languages by forcing their children into the so-called Indian Residential School System (IRSS). Although the policy was formalized in 1894 and attendance was mandatory until the late 1940s, the system effectively began in the 1830s, with the last schools closing in 1998.[4] Sacco also documents cases of intracommunal violence, including domestic abuse, sexual abuse, child neglect, but also rampant cases of suicide and substance abuse. He explicitly presents this violence as an aftereffect of the trauma caused by the IRSS, which produced a generation bereft of their social ties. Unable to understand and address this trauma, violent and neglectful behaviors thus affected their parenting and were passed on to the next generation.

2 The concept of 'slow violence' was developed by Rob Nixon to describe 'violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all.' Rob Nixon, *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), p. 2. Pauline Wakeham adopts the term to describe the effects of settler-colonialism: Pauline Wakeham, 'The Slow Violence of Settler Colonialism: Genocide, Attrition, and the Long Emergency of Invasion', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 24.3 (2021), 337-356 <https://doi.org/10.1080/14623528.2021.1885571> [accessed 26 June 2022].

3 For discussions focusing on this aspect of *Paying the Land*, see Dominic Davies, 'Terrestrial Realism and the Gravity of World Literature: Joe Sacco's Seismic Lines', *Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Inquiry*, 8.3 (2021), 301–322; James Scorer, 'Comic-Strip Mining: Neo-Extractivism and Land Conflicts in Joe Sacco's *Paying the Land* (2020)', and Nelly Luna and Jesús Cossio's *La guerra por el agua* (2016)', *IdeAs: Idées d'Amériques*, 19 (2022), pp. 1-18.

4 The Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada, 'Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada', www.trc.ca, 2015, <https://ehprnh2mwo3..com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf>, p. 70 [accessed 6 October 2022].

Whereas the fields of perpetrator studies and genocide studies until recently have been largely concerned with mass killings as 'time-intense direct violence enacted with explicitly declared intent' with the Holocaust as a crucial historical precedent,[5] *Paying the Land* addresses the 'genocidal practices of forced exclusion and assimilation'[6] also referred to as 'settler colonial genocide'.[7] The IRSS was part of a broader set of policies that, as Glen Coulthard (Dene) describes, 'sought to marginalize Indigenous people and communities with the ultimate goal being our elimination, if not physically, then as cultural, political, and legal peoples distinguishable from the rest of Canadian society'.[8] 'Colonial policy […] recognized that the destruction of Indigenous women and children was the fastest way to remove Indigenous Peoples from the land. It is the fastest way to destroy nations. So policies were designed to target children', explains Leanne Betasamosake Simpson (Anishinaabe).[9] Following The Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada (TRCC), Joe Sacco adopts the term 'cultural genocide' for these policies, a concept that will be discussed in more detail below.[10] Officially established in 2008, the TRCC sought to inform the Canadian public about the IRSS by documenting the experiences of its survivors. Its final report was published in 2015 and constitutes a resource extensively cited by Sacco. Moreover, journalist Marie Wilson, one of the TRCC's three commissioners, is a prominent interview partner in the book. Along similar lines as the report, Sacco presents an oral history of the IRSS told by its survivors and outlines its traumatic effects on the Dene community through his established documentary comics journalism approach. Despite this focus on genocide, Sacco also employs the documentary comics genre to let his interview partners tell their stories of 'survivance', which according to Gerald Vizenor (Anishinaabe) entails

5 Wakeham, p. 338.

6 Glen Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), p. 4.

7 Wakeham, p. 338.

8 Coulthard, p. 4; see also Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, 'A Homegrown Genocide', *briarpatch*, 23 July 2013, n.p. <https://briarpatchmagazine.com/articles/view/honour-the-apology> [accessed 26 June 2022]; David B. MacDonald, *The Sleeping Giant Awakens: Genocide, Indian Residential Schools, and the Challenge of Conciliation* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019).

9 Simpson, n.p.

10 The Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada, p. 1; see also Elisa Novic, *The Concept of Cultural Genocide: An International Law Perspective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

> an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent. Survivance is greater than the right of a survivable name. Survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry.[11]

Moreover, Sacco contextualizes the intracommunal violence as a distinct outcome of colonial genocide by exploring both historical context and individual biographies, as will be shown in detail below. To this end, he uses the affordances of the comics form, such as the form and composition of panels and grids but also cartooning drawing style, to visually frame the depicted experiences as an ongoing history that still very much shapes Canada's present. As a spatial medium, comics is defined by the co-presence of different scenes on the same page; hence, every panel is read in light of its surroundings and how different elements are positioned in relation to each other. Similarly, the elements within the individual panels are also arranged in relation to each other, which carries further semantic implications. These strategies rely on a reader who is active in the meaning-making process: 'Comics makes a reader access the unfolding of evidence in the movement of its basic grammar, by aggregating and accumulating frames of information,' as Hillary Chute points out.[12] In this way, '[c]omics offers attention both to the creation of evidence and to what is outside the frame. It invokes visual efficacy and limitation, creating dynamic texts inclined to express the layered horizon of history implied by "documentary"'.[13]

Using such graphic narrative means as well as narrative arrangements, Sacco notably presents the violent behaviors of residential schoolteachers as systemic rather than individual. The nuns and priests that make up the teaching staff of the residential schools are the group of perpetrators most extensively explored in the work, as they feature prominently in the eyewitness accounts of Sacco's now adult interviews partners. The historical policymakers that initiated the IRSS are only briefly included. In this way, *Paying the Land* is less concerned with the malicious mindsets of individual top-level decision makers than with the more ordinary individuals that partake in a malicious system, perhaps without any intent to harm. Hence, although, as in Sacco's earlier works that deal with mass

11 Gerald Vizenor, 'Aesthetics of Survivance', in *Native Liberty: Natural Reason and Cultural Survivance*, ed. by Gerald Vizenor (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2009), pp. 85–103, p. 85.

12 Chute, p. 2

13 Ibid., p. 17.

killings, *Paying the Land* similarly keeps perpetrators largely anonymous to prioritize the victims' stories, it deals with a different kind of perpetrator figure, as will be discussed in more detail below. Furthermore, the notion of a victim and perpetrator binary is complicated by the fact that members of the Indigenous communities affected by cultural genocide become perpetrators as well, as they pass on their trauma to the next generation. This way, they become involved in the perpetuation of harmful power structures. Finally, *Paying the Land* explicitly asks its readers to consider their own entanglement within colonialist systems of domination, addressing them as what Michael Rothberg calls implicated subjects: individuals who benefit from such power structures without necessarily being directly responsible for acts of violence.[14]

Joe Sacco's Representations of Perpetrators

Throughout his career as a comics journalist, Joe Sacco has represented perpetrators in numerous conflicts, most prominently the Yugoslav War and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sacco has portrayed warlords and political leaders, such as Bosnian Serb war criminal Radovan Karadžić, whose prosecution Sacco detailed in 'Christmas with Karadzic' and later in a report about 'The War Crime Trials' at The Hague in 1998. *Paying the Land*'s exploration of the IRSS applies many of the strategies that Sacco has used most notably in his seminal *Safe Area Goražde*, which documents the genocide in Bosnia in the 1990s. Laurike in 't Veld explores the presentation of perpetrators in comics in terms of 'moralization' on a spectrum 'that runs from Manichean depiction of extraordinary evil on the one hand, to an exploration of the "ordinariness" of perpetrators and their reasons for participation on the other'.[15] Concerning *Safe Area Goražde*, she argues that '[b]y oscillating between images of sadistic perpetrators and strategies that nuance this view, Sacco offers a complex negotiation between the two models'.[16] What these two reportages share is that they explore perpetratorship distinctly through an oral history pieced together from the victims' witness accounts. Other works, in contrast, include more extensive and nuanced but also intimate,

14 Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), p. 1.

15 Laurike in 't Veld, *The Representation of Genocide in Graphic Novels: Considering the Role of Kitsch* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), p. 83.

16 Ibid., p. 84.

sometimes even empathetic portraits of war crime perpetrators. In his metajournalistic *The Fixer* (2003), Sacco documents his Sarajevan fixer Neven's recollections of the Yugoslav War, some of which are highly dubious. These include accounts of looting civilian homes involving Neven and praise for criminal warlords he was associated with. Likewise, in *Footnotes in Gaza*, Sacco interviews the Hamas fighter Khaled who, by his own admission, killed Israeli civilians, showing his anxiety about being assassinated by the Israeli military in a page-spanning series of close-up portraits.[17] Both narratives extensively explore the motivations of these men and contextualize their crimes as part of their complex biographies, considering their own experiences of victimhood as well as structural problems as possible causes for their perpetratorship.

Sacco's self-proclaimed aim is to offer a more nuanced rendering of foreign conflicts to Western, especially North American audiences than the mainstream news channels.[18] Depictions of perpetrators are often put in this service: Whereas *Safe Area Goražde* criticizes the indecisiveness of Western responses to the Bosnian genocide, *Footnotes in Gaza* attempts to present a diverse and nuanced account of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sacco seeks to award voice and visibility to groups victimized by physical violence and forced displacements in recent military contexts in both cases. *Paying the Land*, however, addresses crimes that lie at the heart of North American history: settler colonialism and the forced assimilation of Indigenous Peoples, in this case, Canada's First Nations. Hence, *Paying the Land* explores notions of collective guilt concerning the majority group that Sacco himself identifies with and is, therefore, decolonial in scope and ambition. In its representation of settler-colonial violence and genocide, Sacco is, however, less focused on the more distant past and mass killings in the sense of 'frontier homicide'[19] and privileges the witness accounts of living survivors of twentieth-century genocidal attempts as well as their accounts of possible futures. Likewise, although Sacco also addresses the physical abuse involved in the IRSS, the mass deaths that the system entailed, as well as the ongoing problem of substance-abuse-related deaths, *Paying the Land* is primarily concerned with the attempted group destruction of the Dene in psychological and cultural terms.

17 Joe Sacco, *Footnotes in Gaza* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2009), p. 178.

18 See, e.g., Aryn Bartley, 'The Hateful Self: Substitution and the Ethics of Representing War', *MFS Modern Fiction Studies*, 54.1 (2008), 50–71 (p. 54); Schmid, *Frames and Framing in Documentary Comics*, p. 230.

19 Patrick Wolfe, 'Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native', *Journal of Genocide Research*, 8.4 (2006), 387–409 (p. 387).

The IRSS and Cultural Genocide

As opposed to Sacco's earlier representations of genocide, most prominently Srebrenica, *Paying the Land* rests on the notion of 'cultural genocide', adopting this term from the TRCC, which argues that

> [p]hysical genocide is the mass killing of the members of a targeted group, and biological genocide is the destruction of the group's reproductive capacity. Cultural genocide is the destruction of those structures and practices that allow the group to continue as a group.[20]

Similarly, Yvonne Donders writes, 'cultural genocide refers to the destruction by the state or state organs of the culture of a community'.[21] Sacco introduces the term halfway into the story, on the final page of the chapter 'A Savage Who Can Read'.[22] This chapter bisects the book: In Sacco's own words, the preceding chapters primarily outline the 'effects' of 'something' that 'has been circling above these stories, in fact, haunting this entire project'.[23] At this point, the reader has already been confronted with Indigenous perpetrators of intracommunal and domestic violence, which will be discussed further below.

As the chapter concludes, this haunting 'something' is identified as 'cultural genocide', and, citing the TRCC, Sacco states that 'the Canadian government and the churches had been guilty' of it.[24] The graphic narrative framing of this scene is both striking and typical of Sacco's style: the statement is placed in a text box with a thick black frame that underlines its gravity, much like an obituary. Several other text boxes lead the gaze toward it, across the upper part of the last image overlapping with the depiction of a shouting nun ushering a group of children in the direction of the onlooking perspective. While the nun's face is slightly obscured by the text box, the children present the quite literal bottom line of the page and the chapter: their faces are clearly visible and several create a sense of what Gunter Kress and Theo van Leeuwen call 'direct address', that is, a sense of simulated eye contact that places a 'demand' on the reader.[25]

20 The Truth and Reconciliation Committee of Canada, p. 1.

21 Yvonne Donders, 'Cultural Genocide', in *Culture and Human Rights: The Wroclaw Commentaries*, ed. by Andreas J. Wiesand, Kalliopi Chainoglou and Anna Sledzinska-Simon (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017), pp. 132–133 (p. 132).

22 Joe Sacco, *Paying the Land* (New York, NY: Metropolitan Books, 2020), pp. 121–149.

23 Ibid., p. 121.

24 Ibid. p. 149.

25 Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen, *Reading Images: The Grammar of Visual Design* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 188; see also Aryn Barley, 'Staging Cosmopolitanism: The Transnational Encounter in Joe Sacco's *Footnotes in Gaza*', in *Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives: Comics at the*

In *Paying the Land*, this demand is generally for readers to confront the diachronic realities of cultural genocide and to acknowledge their own implication in the system that generated it. In this way, the focus of the larger work also lies on the victims, not the perpetrators, whose perspective is only marginally considered, as will be discussed below.

As an explanatory frame for the IRSS, the concept of cultural genocide is not uncontroversial and has been highly politicized from its very inception. The term was originally proposed by Polish lawyer Raphael Lemkin who coined the term 'genocide' and included cultural genocide as a form of it. However, the 'concept eventually did not survive [the UGNC] treaty negotiations in the 1940s and lay dormant until the 1990s'.[26] As Leora Bilsky and Rachel Klagsbrun argue, when the participant nations wanted to implement a legal basis to prosecute genocide, they also sought 'to keep it in strict boundaries so that it would not be used to review the discriminatory policies of democratic states against domestic minorities and indigenous peoples'.[27] Hence, a legally binding application for genocide to settler colonialism has been actively impeded and, accordingly, 'cultural genocide', as used by TRCC and Sacco, is 'a qualified term not recognized in international law'.[28] Being established by the Canadian government in 2016 after the TRCC, The National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (MMIWG), warns in its 2019 findings that a qualification of '"cultural genocide" as distinct from "real" genocide' is harmful.[29] As Patrick Wolfe points out,

> the practical hazards that can ensue once an abstract concept like "cultural genocide" falls into the wrong hands are legion. In particular, in an elementary category error, "either/or" can be substituted for "both/and," from which genocide emerges as either biological (read "the real thing") or cultural—and thus, it follows, not real.[30]

Crossroads, ed. by Shane Denson, Christina Meyer, and Daniel Stein (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), pp. 57–82 (p. 71); Schmid, *Frames and Framing in Documentary Comics*, p. 143.

26 Leora Bilsky and Rachel Klagsbrun, 'The Return of Cultural Genocide?', *The European Journal of International Law*, 29.2 (2018), 373–396 (p. 374).

27 Ibid., p. 395.

28 Wakeham, p. 340.

29 The National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 'Supplementary Report: Genocide', 2019, p. 7 <https://www.mmiwg-ffada.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Supplementary-Report_Genocide.pdf> [accessed 08 April 2022].

30 Wolfe, p. 398.

In any case, applying the term genocide to settler colonialism demands specific attention to its larger historical dimensions. Even though Lemkin's concept of cultural genocide explicitly sought to expand the notion of genocide beyond temporally distinct mass killings, the fields of perpetrator studies and genocide research are primarily modelled on such cases. In contrast, the MMIWG argues:

> Unlike the traditional paradigms of genocide, such as the Holocaust, the Armenian Genocide, and the Rwandan Genocide which took place over the course of 12 years, 8 years, and 3 months respectively, colonial destruction of Indigenous peoples has taken place insidiously and over centuries. The intent to destroy Indigenous peoples in Canada was implemented gradually and intermittently, using varied tactics against distinct Indigenous communities. These acts and omissions affected their rights to life and security, but also numerous economic, cultural and social rights. In addition to the lethal conduct, the non-lethal tactics used were no less destructive and fall within the scope of the crime of genocide.[31]

Pointing to the 'slow violence of settler colonialism', Pauline Wakeham likewise argues that these 'particular historical injustices cannot be understood outside of the *longue durée* of settler-colonial invasion—an invasion which persists to this day', hence, 'although genocidal processes in settler colonial contexts include time-intensive violence, slower, attritional modes of destruction' need to be considered as well.[32] Similarly, Wolfe argues that group destruction is a fundamental aspect of settler colonialism, which operates on a 'logic of elimination' in order to gain access to territory.[33] Nevertheless he warns:

> Keeping one eye on the Holocaust, which is always the unqualified referent of the qualified genocides, can only disadvantage Indigenous people because it discursively reinforces the figure of lack at the heart of the non-Western. [...] On historical as well as categorical grounds, therefore, the hyphenated genocides devalue Indigenous attrition.[34]

The concept of genocide, modified or not, carries unquestionable weight. In the Canadian context, it serves to acknowledge that 'the IRS system was not just a "dark chapter" in Canadian history – it *is* the story of Canada –

31 The National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, pp. 10-11; see also MacDonald, p. 6.

32 Wakeham, pp. 338.

33 Wolfe, p. 388; see also Wakeham, p. 347.

34 Wolfe, p. 402.

and the system was integral to our country's foundation'.[35] As the MMIWG points out, 'genocide is both a crime that entails individual criminal responsibility and a wrongful act that entails state responsibility'.[36] Hence, framing the IRSS as an attempt at cultural genocide serves as an element of reparation. It also directly shapes the understanding of perpetrators, which, in the context of perpetrator research, tends to be defined more narrowly as 'any individual who contributes directly and substantially to genocide (or other mass atrocities)'.[37] The label of 'genocide' thus frames those involved in the IRSS as perpetrators akin to those who carried out orchestrated mass killings in line with the dominant definition of the concept. In their taxonomy of perpetrators, Uğur Ümit Üngör and Kjell Anderson position IRRS teachers at the back end of a perpetrator spectrum, arguing: 'Perpetrators of genocide, for example, can range from Nazi bureaucrats to Rwandan farmers to (arguably) teachers in Canadian residential schools'.[38] Üngör and Anderson, moreover, differentiate between 'top level (architects), mid-level (organizers), and bottom level (killers)'.[39] Although such a distinction is valuable, their wording also exemplifies that the concept of genocide essentially rests on the act of killing. However, Üngör and Anderson also point to genocide's cultural dimension, stating that such a 'far-reaching social project requires ideological justification: the victims must be destroyed because of who they are, their fundamental essence'.[40]

According to Elisa Novic, the concept of cultural genocide, moreover, 'allows for the analysis to be refocused— particularly in terms of its legacy and reconciliation— on the wider societal and cultural dimension'.[41] Novic discusses recognition and application of the concept 'as a measure of satisfaction' in the sense of reparations, but points to its reliance on 'political subjectivity', 'since it implies the transcending of the closed relationship between the perpetrators and victims and the involvement of the whole society'.[42] Novic warns that an 'exclusive "State or individual perpetrators versus victims" approach' would risk 'leaving the rest of the population completely outside the equation of reparations' because

35 MacDonald, p. 7.

36 The National Inquiry into the Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, p. 4

37 Uğur Ümit Üngör and Kjell Anderson, 'From Perpetrators to Perpetration: Definitions, Typologies, and Processes', in *The Routledge International Handbook of Perpetrator Studies*, ed. by Susanne C. Knittel and Zachary J. Goldberg (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 7–22 (p. 7).

38 Ibid., p. 8.

39 Ibid., p. 7.

40 Ibid., p. 8.

41 Novic, p. 234.

42 Ibid., p. 235.

> [f]ocusing exclusively on victims in the absence of any effort to raise the majority or dominant group's awareness may then hamper the actual effects of reparation [...]. It may even reach the opposite result by fostering the idea that the victims constitute a financial burden on the wider society, a rhetoric that is often echoed in societies where indigenous peoples have endured long-lasting discrimination and obtained reparation in the form of financial compensation and rehabilitation.[43]

Paying the Land largely avoids this pitfall and does not assign blame to individual IRSS perpetrators in such a way that their crimes are portrayed as outcomes of personal idiosyncrasies or perversions. In accordance with the concept of genocide, Sacco puts the representation of perpetrators primarily in the service of emphasizing the systemic nature of the crime. Understanding the IRSS as an attempt at cultural genocide, moreover, offers a resource to counter what Miranda Fricker calls 'hermeneutic injustice', which ensues 'when a gap in collective interpretative resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences'.[44] Fricker connects this to the notion of 'hermeneutical marginalization', which causes 'structural prejudice' against particular social groups by obscuring the experience from collective understanding.[45] Fricker's discussion arises from feminist scholarship, but the implications are transferable. Taking cases of sexual harassment as an example, Fricker argues:

> For something to be an injustice, it must be harmful but also wrongful, whether because discriminatory or because otherwise unfair. In the present example, harasser and harassee alike are cognitively handicapped by the hermeneutical lacuna—neither has a proper understanding of how he is treating her—but the harasser's cognitive disablement is not a significant disadvantage to him. [...] By contrast,the harassee's cognitive disablement is seriously disadvantageous to her. The cognitive disablement prevents her from understanding a significant patch of her own experience: that is, a patch of experience which it is strongly in her interests to understand, for without that understanding she is left deeply troubled, confused, and isolated, not to mention vulnerable to continued harassment.[46]

43 Novic, p. 236.

44 Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), p. 1.

45 Ibid., p. 155.

46 Ibid.

Here, the victim is put at an 'asymmetrical cognitive disadvantage' since they are left unable to make proper sense of their situation.[47] Similar dynamics apply in the case of the IRSS, in which the institutional nomenclature's positive framing that this 'education' should 'benefit' the affected children would lead to a similar cognitive disablement that prevents them from making sense of their actual experiences. *Paying the Land* employs academic terminology as a strategy to counter this hermeneutical lacuna by introducing explanatory frameworks for the structural violence, deconstructing the painfully euphemistic concept of 'residential schools'. Besides cultural genocide, this also includes lateral violence – violence directed toward other members of a marginalized group rather than toward the oppressing group – as will be discussed further below. Hermeneutical injustice, in Fricker's conceptualization, entails that 'the relevant gap in hermeneutical resources has genuinely reduced the communicative intelligibility of the speaker in one way or another' and, therefore, '[t]he point is to realize that the speaker is struggling with an objective difficulty and not a subjective failing'.[48] Documenting the process of Canada's First Nations' shifting awareness of these dynamics lies very much at the heart of Sacco's reportage and informs its representation of perpetrators.

Narrative Context in *Paying the Land*

Paying the Land exhibits several of Sacco's well-established graphic narrative strategies: The essentially two-fold narrative structure embeds graphic narrative witness accounts of past events into a story of Sacco's investigation in the present, establishing an explanatory framework for its central conflicts by arranging and framing the witness accounts. Including the story of the investigation, usually with his own avatar distinctly visible, serves to disclose Sacco's documentary practices, editorial decisions, and subjective reactions.[49] On the page, graphic narrative renderings of his interview partners and their accounts are visually co-present. This technique heightens awareness

47 Fricker, p. 161.

48 Ibid., p. 169.

49 Cf. Gary Groth, 'Joe Sacco, Frontline Journalist', in *Safe Area Goražde: Special Edition*, authored by Joe Sacco (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 2011), pp. 231–254 (p. 237); in 't Veld, p. 14; Schmid, *Frames and Framing in Documentary Comics*, p. 204.

of the book's oral history makeup and ties the represented accounts to specific individuals who prominently feature in talking-head style panels. In contrast to his earlier works, though, *Paying the Land* does not separate witness accounts through black page frames. Hence, no formal distinction between past and present occurs. Moreover, Sacco employs visual framing techniques to blur the distinction between past and present in his representation of trauma by combining temporally removed events within the confines of one panel or having characters or speech balloons extend across temporal divides.[50] Accordingly, in *Paying the Land*, the representation of perpetrators is distinctly embedded in this logic of oral history and meta-documentary awareness. However, compared to earlier works, Sacco's investigation, his role as documentarian, and his subjective response take up less room, his avatar being less often visible.[51] The implicit gesture appears to cede narrative authority to his Indigenous interview partners and have them tell their stories with minimal intervention. In contrast to his previous works, Sacco largely refrains from meta-journalistic elaborations or introspection concerning his own experience during his investigation to give his interview partners space on the page. Likewise, the book's final chapters relegate the authority to outline different, even contrasting possible futures to diverse Dene voices. For the final page, Sacco employs a Dene hand game, in which the opponent must guess in which hand the player keeps a token to win, as metaphor: one player is 'not out yet' and 'could still be here today!'[52] This way, Sacco not only foregrounds survivance but also symbolically cedes the agency to determine the future outcome to the Dene player.

As stated above, IRSS perpetrators only appear halfway through the book, after an extensive exploration of the present situation of the Dene. First, however, the book opens with a quasi-prologue named 'You Find Yourself in the Circle', which depicts an account by Dene journalist, former Tulita Chief and Dene Nation Vice President Paul Andrew that presents his childhood memories of the traditional Dene lifestyle, which ends abruptly when he is forcibly taken to a residential school – a fact that the reader learns only later. For this account, Sacco omits panel frames, evoking a sense of flow and timelessness, in line

50 Maureen Shay, 'Framing Refugee Time: Perpetuated Regression in Joe Sacco's Footnotes in Gaza', *Journal of Postcolonial Writing*, 50.2 (2014), 202-215; Chute, pp. 234-235.

51 Cf. Davies, p. 305.

52 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 260.

with what the book's back cover blurb calls 'time immemorial'.[53] Later, however, Andrew gives '… tents, stoves, guns, knives, maybe plates…' as examples when asked for 'the specific things you had from the Euro-Western world that you would bring into the bush with you'[54], emphasizing the coevalness of this lifestyle. As James Scorer points out, '[t]he lack of straight lines mirrors Andrew's comments about the cycles of work and being in "the circle of that community"'.[55] Dominic Davies, moreover, argues that without the 'colonial lines' introduced later,

> Sacco's graphic novel draws readers both literally and figuratively into a terrestrial point of view. By doing away with the page's architectural frames in this way, Sacco brings us closer to the ground of the Dene story, his hand-drawn lines attempting to emulate their precolonial relationship with the land.[56]

Set against a stark black background, portraits of Andrew giving his account to Sacco disturb the idyll of striking black-and-mostly-white landscapes. The scene ends with the yet unseen Sacco interrupting Andrew in a tone of mock-impatience: 'Okay. This is very fascinating. But I guess we should get to the point where a plane shows up'.[57] Andrew's account of the traditional Dene lifestyle is thus established as an initial equilibrium whose upheaval will be the ensuing narrative's primary focus.

Starting on page 121, the chapter 'A Savage Who Can Read' returns to the crucial point when Canadian government officials seize Andrew as a boy and take him away from his family to a residential school. Sacco prefaces this chapter: 'Dear Reader, something has been circling above these stories, in fact, haunting this entire project. Perhaps I should have mentioned it before. All I have described thus far are its effects, but now we must look its way'.[58] He raises the question of why 'the indigenous peoples of the Northwest Territories seem adrift, unmoored from the culture that once anchored them' and answers that '[u]nmooring the indigenous people—in fact, erasing the essence of their indigeneity—was long Canada's official policy'.[59] Throughout 'A Savage Who Can Read', Sacco draws an oral history of the residential school

53 See Schmid, *Frames and Framing in Documentary Comics*, p. 186.
54 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 19.
55 Scorer, p. 13.
56 Davies, pp. 312–313.
57 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 22.
58 Ibid., p. 121.
59 Ibid., pp. 121–122.

system from the witness accounts of several of its victims. A sense of lingering trauma is invoked by placing interviews in the present and the account of the reported experiences in the past within the confines of the same panel, visually blending them and thus complicating any neat distinction. As part of this oral history, Sacco includes three types of perpetrators: First, largely unidentified government officials who are represented in a way that largely aligns the readers with their perpetrator perspectives; second, abusive nuns and priests who are represented in a way that the children might have perceived them; and third, orchestrators of cultural genocide, i.e., top-level perpetrators whose representation is more distant.

The Reader as an Implicated Subject

Paul Andrew's account of how he was taken away from his family is a striking case of the first type of perpetrator representation. As he narrates his experiences in talking-head panels, the visual perspective in the historical scene is cast in such a way that we see the two Canadian government officials – a Mounted Police officer and a man in a checkered jacket and cap, presumably, a so-called Indian agent – moving toward Andrew's family from outside the frame of the page.[60] This composition leaves the two men unidentified, and it also positions the reader's gaze with the intruders.

The next page follows a similar pattern: at the top, young Andrew is first dragged from an unframed position on the page into a sequence of three panels. Candy is thrown into his face from this position, and he is finally hauled outside the page by an arm wearing a checkered jacket. On the bottom half of the page, a slanted panel shows Andrew and a group of fellow Indigenous children being moved toward the plane; the Mountie is carrying one child and, again, a disembodied arm with the checkered jacket reaches for them from the very edge of the page and urges them forward while the man's body is left unseen.[61] In this scene, Sacco's panel framing evokes a sense of confinement in the immediate case of the abduction and, on a larger scale, contrasts the unframed, 'timeless' representation of the traditional Dene lifestyle with framed and thus fragmented settler-colonial modernity.[62] Likewise, the

60 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 124.
61 Ibid., p. 125.
62 Schmid, F*rames and Framing in Documentary Comics*, p. 188; see also Davies.

disembodied representation of the abductor's hand emphasizes Andrew's panicked perception of this traumatic moment that was incomprehensible to him. As a witness, the adult Andrew remains very much in control and in focus during the scene: his talking-head portrait is at the center of both pages, simulating eye contact with the reader, demanding that they witness his testimony. This story is about Andrew, not about the perpetrators who do not exceed the status of unidentified props. At the same time, the reader's perspective is positioned in such a way that a sense of connection to the group of perpetrators is created.

Throughout the book, Sacco makes clear that he addresses a Western audience and urges them to accept collective guilt and responsibility for these crimes. Early on in the book in a discussion about Dene participation in resource extraction, Dene entrepreneur Darell Beaulieu calls out the Western hypocrisy, stating: 'If you don't like development of oil and gas, you don't like fracking, you don't like mining, then stop driving your car or stop using your iPhone'.[63] This allegation is underlined by a rendering of a polluted city full of cars and people using mobile devices, confirming the general implication of Western individuals in the climate catastrophe. Close to the end of the book, in one of Sacco's last appearances, he visits a deserted mine in which 237,000 tons of arsenic trioxide, a highly poisonous byproduct of gold mining, are permanently stored. This leads him to draw the following conclusion:

> I will leave here with many unanswered questions about my indigenous hosts, but right now [...] my biggest query is about my race, about us. What is the worldview of a people who mumble no thanks or prayers, who take what they want from the land, and pay it back with arsenic?[64]

These words are accompanied by a depiction of Sacco leaving the mine in a truck, driving toward the light of day, as the last words figuratively remain in the dark of the mine. The arsenic is both literal proof of and metaphor for the poisonous legacy of settler colonialism. Both Sacco and the reader are being explicitly implicated by the first-person plural, implying that the crimes that *Paying the Land* addresses are not to be attributed to individual perpetrators but are framed as a matter of collective guilt. Earlier in the narrative, Sacco already includes a reflection of his subject position as a Westerner. When he faces a request

63 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 43.
64 Ibid., p. 249.

by Indigenous interview partners to be paid, he learns from a local social scientist that he should 'reflect on [his] inquiry through the lens of colonization'.[65] He states, 'I listen with teeth clenched, but doesn't she have a point? After all what's the difference between me and an oil company? We've both come here to extract something'.[66] This insight is accompanied by the visual metaphor of an oil drilling rig placed into a man's head with is top removed. Set against a black crosshatched background at the bottom of the page, the panel only shows the man's eye area, nose, and ears, but leaves out his mouth. This significant absence renders him unable to speak for himself, effectively becoming an object of exploitation rather a conversation partner on equal footing. This way, Sacco acknowledges his own positionality as a member of a majority group while doing his investigation and the difficult histories and power imbalances that inform the relationship to his documentary subject.

Such narrative framing aligns with Sacco's rendering of Paul Andrew's witness account, which positions the reader's gaze with the group of perpetrators. As readers we do not occupy the first-person perspective of the perpetrators, but the visual perspective within the composition of the scene positions the onlooker in such a way that they witness the events from the vantage point of the group of perpetrators. This way, Sacco 'implicates' the reader in the sense proposed by Michael Rothberg, who argues that '"implication," like the proximate but not identical term "complicity," draws attention to how we are "folded into" (im-pli-cated in) events that at first seem beyond our agency as individual subjects'.[67] Beyond the binary of perpetrator and victim, the reader is addressed as an implicated subject whose position is

> aligned with power and privilege without being themselves direct agents of harm; they contribute to, inhabit, inherit, or benefit from regimes of domination but do not originate or control such regimes. An implicated subject is neither a victim nor a perpetrator, but rather a participant in histories and social formations that generate the positions of victim and perpetrator, and yet in which most people do not occupy such clear-cut roles.[68]

At the same time, 'implicated subject' forms a complex category that is context-specific and dynamic: 'In other contexts—with respect

65 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 107.
66 Ibid.
67 Rothberg, p. 1.
68 Ibid. p. 1.

to other histories and other structures—we might also (or instead) be perpetrators or victims or descendants of victims'.[69] In *Paying the Land*, implication is a form of address that constructs a prototypical readership that is entangled in the colonial legacy. 'Modes of implication—entanglement in historical and present-day injustices', Rothberg argues, are 'essential to confront in the pursuit of justice'.[70] Sacco's graphic narrative reconstruction of Andrew's experience forces the reader into such a confrontation. Although not directly positioned as the perpetrator or assigned an identifiable first-person perspective, the reader's gaze is nevertheless aligned with the group of perpetrators while, at the same time, the victim is the primary object of the gaze. In the present of the investigative storyline Andrew is presented as directly addressing the reader, demanding that the reader receive his testimony. This way, the visual perspective for the reception of Andrew's experience is not that of an impartial bystander but rather that of an implicated subject. Through their co-presence on the page, with panels overlapping and being folded into each other, past experience and present explanation intertwine, thus, visualizing the diachronic dimension of cultural genocide and the Western reader's implication therein. As Rothberg argues,

> Without a link to the present, historical injustices do not implicate us; they remain of strictly antiquarian interest. At the same time, what we consider the present is itself the outcome of historical processes thathave created the world in which we live. [...] implication emerges from the ongoing, uneven, and destabilizing intrusion of irrevocable pasts into an unredeemed present.[71]

Using the comics grammar to conflate past and present in the composition of the page, Sacco makes legible the ongoing effects of history and its diachronic implications.

The IRSS as an Environment of Systemic Violence

In his representation of IRSS perpetrators, Sacco retains some of the strategies that he used in his earlier works. As in 't Veld describes for a witness account of atrocities in *Safe Area Goražde*, '[t]he anonymity

69 Rothberg, p. 8.
70 Ibid., p. 12.
71 Ibid., p. 9.

of perpetrators is further contrasted with the individuality of the eyewitness […]'.[72] Here, 'Sacco's obscuring strategies could function as nuancing gestures, as no evil, individualised perpetrators are singled out, and their appearance is not markedly different from that of his victims'.[73] In *Goražde*, Sacco furthermore 'tends to quite uniformly draw the Serb perpetrators as one-dimensional figures'.[74] In 't Veld specifically points to Sacco's strategy of obscuring the eyes of perpetrators: 'The eyes form the connection with the humanity of the perpetrators and by not showing them, Sacco can evade the motivation behind their behavior'.[75] She argues:

> By denying a full view of the perpetrators in favour of the visual manifestation of the victims, Sacco re-humanises those who have been dehumanized through the war and individualizes those who have been subsumed in the abstracted numbers of global news coverage.[76]

Although in *Paying the Land* it is not so much news coverage, but rather Western historiography, the same dynamic applies in the representation of perpetrators, who are depicted as anonymous agents of structural violence rather than as individuals.

Throughout the chapter, various depictions of nuns and priests can be found in which they tower ominously above the children, grabbing, shoving, hitting, or yelling at them from the margins of the respective panel. Often, they are visually individualized, but they remain unnamed. They are primarily recognizable by their Catholic habit, with priests dressed in black cassocks with white clerical collars and nuns in black tunics with white coifs. This way, they mostly function as ominous agents of a hostile environment, as they, for instance, punish the children for speaking their native languages.[77] A double page that represents corporal punishments experienced by Valerie Conrad and Paul Andrew stands out: disembodied hands from outside panel slap the children, enhancing the sense of a constant danger.[78] Again, the perpetrators are only metonymically referenced. As Conrad explains, 'you never know when you're going to get a shot in the head or a ruler

72 in 't Veld, p. 112.
73 Ibid., p. 112.
74 Ibid., p. 113.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid.
77 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 134.
78 Ibid., pp. 138–139.

in the hands'.[79] Andrew confirms that 'you got hit and you never know why you got hit…' which led the children to internalize the anger, 'And then pretty soon you begin to believe what they say, that you're not good enough. You're not good enough. That's why we got to remake you. Because you're not good enough'.[80] These sentences are superimposed on a portrait of young Andrew with a nun and a priest towering and yelling behind the character, visually emulating his experience of past abuse but also rendering them as metaphorical voices lingering in young Andrew's head. The same panel also includes the adult Andrew explaining the situation in his testimony. The parallelism between child and adult characters and especially the sentences in individual text boxes extending from the child toward the adult emphasize the sense of lingering trauma. Andrew confirms: '…it's that emotional, that spiritual, that mental abuse that really sticks with you forever and ever'.[81] Although depicted frontally with individualized faces, the nun and the priest appear as figurative ghosts from Andrew's past that haunted his childhood. Additionally, this depiction echoes and counteracts the colonial practice of before-and-after photographs of Native children as proof of successful assimilation by foregrounding the resulting trauma.[82]

Individual perpetrators are rarely singled out. Margaret Jumbo reports a nun who 'was very strict' and who would violently beat her.[83] Jumbo recounts how she did not want to cry but realized that she would be hurt until she started. This moment is displayed in a large panel that features three likenesses of the nun and the child forming a vector from top to bottom with the characters looming consecutively larger. The panel is drawn from a below angle so that both Jumbo's and the nun's face are clearly visible: the girl weeps heavily as the older woman glares at her head and, coincidentally, in the last incarnation, also in the direction of the reader. Although the nun is unnamed, her face stands out due to her glasses and her broad, darkened nose. Otherwise, the character remains just as flat as the other nuns and priests.

In the described cases, the representations of perpetrators primarily illustrate the subjective experience of the witnesses and their trauma, without exploring any individual motives of these perpetrators. Largely,

79 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 138.

80 Ibid., p. 139.

81 Ibid.

82 See, e.g., Carlisle Indian School Digital Resource Center, 'Analyzing Before and After Photographs & Exploring Student Files', <https://carlisleindian.dickinson.edu/teach/-and-after> [accessed 26 June 2022].

83 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 138.

it is systemic violence rather than individual perpetrators that Sacco represents. Their representations are individualized to the extent necessary to make clear that they stand for actual people who participated in this system, not uniform lackeys or dehumanized monsters. Yet, it is their Catholic habit that most clearly identifies them as a group.

Explorations of the perpetrator perspectives and cases of 'good' residential schoolteachers take up little space in *Paying the Land*, but they are not entirely absent. In addition to an earlier portrayal of the priest René Fumoleau who learned the Native languages and later would become a social justice advocate for the Dene,[84] two counterexamples are included in the chapter discussed here: Valerie Conrad mentions one teacher that she found 'really wonderful, wonderful'[85], and Stephen Kakfwi refers to a Swiss priest who learned their language and 'made us feel like we were worth something'.[86] To compare, in her discussion of *Goražde*, in 't Veld points out the case of a supportive Serb neighbor who serves as a counterexample but is included in a nuanced way rather than being a token 'righteous person' who by way of singular exception 'ultimately proves the rule that perpetrators are inherently depraved […]'.[87] This man is not portrayed as the 'singular exception to the rule' and instead is 'positioned as playing an active part in the persecutor community […]'.[88] His involvement in the rescue of Sacco's witness from the genocide is explored over more than an entire page, his face being distinctly visible.[89] In *Paying the Land*, however, the two characters are not individualized and are either only shown in an obscured profile view or from farther away, reducing the face to a grimace. Hence, in the absence of nuancing gestures, these two teachers fall more into the category of singular exceptions. Through their clear visual attribution to the IRSS, Sacco makes clear that despite their beneficial roles in some children's experiences, their active participation in this harmful system implicates them nonetheless, if not making them complicit in the sense of criminal guilt.[90]

84 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, pp. 51–57.
85 Ibid, p. 142.
86 Ibid., p. 142.
87 in 't Veld, p. 114.
88 in 't Veld, p. 114.
89 Sacco, *Safe Area Goražde*, pp. 113–114.
90 Cf. Rothberg, p. 13.

These cases set up speculations by Marie Wilson that the nuns might have 'felt victimized themselves'[91] as they were forced into the convent by Quebecoise family traditions. Wilson offers a gender-conscious perspective on IRSS perpetrators, stating: 'I'm sure there were people who were forced into sexual denial, who were frustrated beyond all measure, and probably some of them had love interests which they were torn from…'[92] The next page features three parallel panels that portray an unspecified nun in the foreground with groups of uniformed and distraught Indigenous children encircling her in the background. For three panels, the position of the nun is unchanging, her anxious expression frozen in time, but her face wrinkles and ages dramatically.[93] The nun's eyes are roughly cast in the direction of the reader, but they do not simulate eye contact, gazing off into the distance instead. In contrast, the final image shows the children look from behind her both at her and the reader with expression ranging from consternation to outright anger. This way, the nun's perspective is presented more abstractly and with less potential to generate empathy than the many representations of Indigenous children that establish direct address. Likewise, the accusation implicit in the children's gazes and the nun's inability to meet them suggests an awareness of accumulated guilt. These panels include textboxes in which Wilson outlines the nuns' situation as she sees it: their youth, their exploitation, and the lack of resources to properly teach and feed the children. She also highlights that, despite teaching English, their Native language would have been French.

This exploration of this imagined nun's perspective and her dramatic bodily decline might be considered a speculation on 'perpetrator trauma', which may be roughly defined as the 'psychic repercussions [that perpetrators experience] as a result of the commission of their crimes'.[94] Importantly, however, this scene represents Wilson's personal assessment, whereas no witness accounts by nuns are included, leaving the narration entirely to Indigenous voices. Moreover, the page that considers the Quebecoise nun's perspective is followed by two panels that contrast Wilson's point of view with Margaret Jumbo, pairing the faces at opposite ends of parallel panels. Wilson states, 'There's a part of me as a grown woman that has a heart as well for those women who lost

91 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 143.
92 Ibid., p. 143.
93 Ibid., p. 144.
94 See Erin McGlothlin, 'Perpetrator Trauma', in T*he Routledge Companion to Literature and Trauma*, ed. by Colin Davis and Hanna Meretoja (London: Routledge, 2020), pp. 100-110 (p. 100).

it… That's not to say anything that happened was right, but I'm saying wrong things don't happen outside a context'.[95] Sacco picks up this point in what he positions as a rebuttal: 'Context aside, Margaret Jumbo tells us, "'I just couldn't get along with the nuns… I didn't like the way they treated the other kids,… [saying] they're no good and that they're savage and stuff like that."'.[96] Although Jumbo's statements do not contradict Wilson directly, Sacco's set-up explicitly stresses that considering the perpetrator perspective as part of a larger context is a choice to be made by the survivors to whom he assigns the narrative authority.

Finally, the perpetrator ideology is most prominently included in very brief sketches of its historical top-level perpetrators, that is, the politicians who instigated the policies amounting to cultural genocide: Canada's first prime minister Sir John Macdonald[97] and Deputy Superintendent of Canada's Department of Indian Affairs Duncan Campell Scott.[98] Sacco has both characters recite original historical statements that he contrasts with the accounts by Marie Wilson and Margaret Jumbo. Macdonald's statement to the House of Commons in 1883 bluntly introduces the notion that Indigenous peoples are 'savages' and that 'Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence' so that 'they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.' Duncan 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…'[99] Macdonald is drawn from a slight below angle, his hands are folded, and his eyes are closed, which evokes a sense of smugness and false piety. Campell's representation is similar; both men are prominently depicted in their historical attire and environment, making them seem positively antiquated. Both appear self-righteous and detached but not distorted or especially cartoonized. Framed by Indigenous oral history drawn by Sacco, their original statements alone which, in their original context, might have been understood as benevolent measures to facilitate uplift via education and enfranchisement, now suffice to reveal what is presently understood as White supremacist settler-colonial ideology and expressly stated genocidal intent. Accordingly, Sacco introduces this first statement by writing mockingly, 'But let's let Sir John Macdonald

95 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 145.
96 Ibid., square brackets in original.
97 Ibid., p. 127.
98 Ibid., p. 128.
99 Ibid.

[…] explain the idea'.[100] These quotes alone serve as historical evidence of these men's roles as top-level perpetrators and their reprehensibility is supposed to be taken for granted by contemporary readers. Hence, no further condemnation or exploration of their motives is included or needed, leaving space for Indigenous accounts instead. The effects of this cultural genocide, which prominently include accounts of violence within the Indigenous community, are introduced before and after the representation of residential school testimonies.

Intergenerational Trauma: Cycles of Addiction and Violence in the Dene Community

A large portion of *Paying the Land* represents accounts that outline the intergenerational trauma that affects the Dene community and the resulting cycles of addiction and abuse. Bereft of their native language and social ties, the traumatized adolescents returning from the residential schools would often succumb to alcohol and substance abuse to self-medicate their pain. Likewise, experiences of sexual abuse in residential schools would lead some victims to become perpetrators later in life, the victims often being their own children. In both cases, harm is passed on to children who themselves struggle with such experiences. Being hardly better equipped to deal with such trauma, they are likewise in danger of perpetuating the cycle of abuse themselves. As stated above, Sacco avoids individualized depictions of Indigenous perpetrators. To protect the concrete victims of abuse, he instead depicts the effects of violence through multi-layered witnessing. In the chapter 'Until I Black Out', he represents the account of teacher Dudley Johnson, which mostly shows Johnson reacting to children's reports of abuse rather than the children themselves. These children are either shown from behind, in profile, or outside the frame in such a way that their faces remain hidden, coincidentally making Johnson's face especially salient. The last row of panels on the page underlines this point further by zooming in on Johnson's distraught face as a student tells him that she will 'get drunk until I black out' so that 'I won't know who abuses me'.[101] The page starts with one panel that shows Sacco interviewing Johnson: the focus is on Johnson's face while Sacco's character is only depicted as a

100 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 118.
101 Ibid., p. 117.

shadowy outline. This opening not only aligns Johnson as witness in the present of the interview with his likeness as part of his testimony but also positions the reader here as observer of Sacco beholding Johnson giving his testimony on that student's account. Scenes of multi-layered witnessing have been a prominent strategy for Sacco;[102] in this case, however, indirectness is taken to an extreme that underlines Sacco's ethical approach of attempting to protect the victims.

In one of the few more graphic depictions of domestic violence within the Dene community, Sacco omits the faces of both perpetrator and victim, only showing their (half-) naked bodies.[103] The body as the locus of abuse is in focus; likewise, Sacco again includes a childhood likeness of his interview partner, radio host Lawrence Nayally. Indeed, young Nayally and his friends are placed at the center of the oblong bottom panel in-between a hatchet-wielding male aggressor on the right and a fleeing female victim left of the panel. While the children's faces and their shocked expressions are visible, the faces of victim and perpetrator are obscured by the edge of the page and another panel respectively. Nayally's account appears to present a typical rather than a concrete case; its main point is the effect a scene such as this one would have on the witnessing children, who, as the panel's spatial visual metaphor suggests, are 'caught in-between'. Escalating this approach, the next page then shows another typical childhood experience for Nayally: 'Or you go into a friend's house, and you walk in on something you weren't supposed to see'.[104] In this case, renderings of young Nayally and his likeness at the time of the interview are placed alongside each other within the same panel, drawing past and present together. Where the child averts his gaze in an expression of shame, the grown-up man's gaze seemingly meets the reader's gaze. As he talks of the (mostly) physical abuses, he concludes, 'A lot of lateral violence. Crabs in the bucket, I guess'.[105] Hence, these depictions of intracommunal violence are explicitly framed by the concept of lateral violence, which links this violence to racism and oppression: As Lee Maracle (Stó:lō) explains, '[b]y its very nature, racism only permits the victimized race to engage that hatred among its own. Lateral violence among Native people is about our anticolonial rage

102 Cf. Chute, p. 237.

103 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 118.

104 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 119.

105 Ibid. The metaphor of 'crabs in a bucket', sometimes also labelled 'crab mentality', refers to the behavior of crabs caught by fishermen of preventing each other from escaping a bucket they are placed in.

working itself out in an expression of hate for one another'.[106] A similar point is made when Marie Wilson describes cases of rape of newcomers to residential schools by older students, referring to a 'prison psychology of the survival of the fittest', which 'completely breaks down any notion of collective well-being…'[107] As an illustration, a naked boy is shown cowering against a wall, with two sets of clothed legs visible in front of him. Such a notion is invoked again when Wilson addresses the problem that 'those who were abused in residential schools sometimes visited the same crimes upon their kin'.[108] As Sacco outlines, '[t]hese victims of the victims told her' accounts that would reveal 'disturbing rates of domestic abuse and incest'.[109] Wilson calls this 'transference of dysfunction'[110] – a notion that is illustrated by a panel that shows a young girl gravely looking at the reader. While her face is clearly visible, a female and a male figure with their faces cast in shadows loom behind her left and right. This constellation implies both the absence of parental protection and the complicity of many more adults in creating conditions ripe for abuse and, as the context specifies, perpetratorship; unlike the cases of residential school abuse, however, without visualizing or otherwise definitively identifying any individual perpetrator. These situations also complicate the notion of perpetrator and victim as the context makes clear that though some Indigenous parents become agents of harm, the ultimate responsibility lies with the slow structural violence they themselves have been victims of. These individuals do contribute to the regime of domination and are crucial to its perpetuation, although, as members of the victimized community themselves, they certainly do not benefit from it. Especially in the extreme cases described, the concept of implication ultimately does not fit their entanglement, as their position is indeed clear as both victim and perpetrator, albeit with these categories coinciding. Like in his address of the IRSS, Sacco seeks to represent the system of domination rather than explore individual perpetrators, with one exception discussed further below.

In having Nayalla and Wilson introduce terminology for the depicted experiences, such as 'lateral violence' or 'transference of dysfunction', Sacco includes explanatory frameworks that

106 Lee Maracle , *I Am Woman: A Native Perspective on Sociology and Feminism* (Vancouver: Press Gang, 1996), p. 11.
107 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 141.
108 Ibid., p. 155.
109 Ibid.
110 Ibid.

contextualize the depicted violence in terms of its colonial origins. This way, he shifts the focus from the immediate perpetrator to the historical circumstances and collective societal guilt. In doing so, Sacco arguably seeks to document the cycle of violence within the Dene without succumbing to what Daniel Heath Justice (Cherokee) calls the narrative of 'Indigenous deficiency' that purports that 'Indigenous peoples are in a state of constant lack: in morals, laws, culture, restraint, language, ambition, hygiene, desire, love' and 'presumes that we're all broken by addiction'.[111] It is worth noting that comics have their own history of 'reproducing denigrative stereotypes', including but not limited to 'alcoholics, and preternatural race-betrayers, and criminals' that 'delimit what has happened, what is happening, and what might happen in the future for Indigenous subjects'.[112] In this rendering, however, intracommunal violence is not attributed to any inherent deficiency but is linked to concrete historical causes through the historical narrative strand and is labelled with scientific terminology.

In his representation of lateral violence within the Dene community, Sacco includes an autobiographical account by William Greenland, a facilitator of the 'A New Day' counselling program for men who have become perpetrators of domestic violence.[113] Greenland straightforwardly admits: 'I've been through lots of abusive relationships myself through my alcohol and drugs. I was the perpetrator'.[114] This confession is paired with an image of the younger Greenland glaring and shouting in the direction of an unidentified female recoiling and moving toward the outside of the panel. In turn, Greenland's head exceeds the panel frame. In this way, the rendering of both bodies signals transgression. As Greenland topples a chair, a gloriole underlies his body in front of a black background, symbolizing his rage. Despite the confession, no physical violence is depicted, only a situation that would likely lead up to it, and, although Greenland is presented as threatening, this rendering is paired with a larger portrait of his present-day sober self, calmly recounting these experiences.

111 Daniel Heath Justice, *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter* (Waterloo: Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2018), p. 2.

112 Frederick Luis Aldama, 'Graphic Indigeneity: Terra America and Terra Australasia', in *Graphic Indigeneity: Comics in the Americas and Australasia*, ed. by Frederick Luis Aldama (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2020), pp. xi–xxiii (p. xii).

113 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, pp. 112–115.

114 Ibid., p. 113.

Unlike in other scenes, the perpetrator is the primary focus of attention. However, it is also worth noting that, like in Nayally's account, this scene of violence is a generalized illustration of Greenland's witness account rather than a graphic reconstruction of a specific event.

Greenland tells his story as chronological autobiography, starting with his youth and the abuse he witnessed as a child and his early encounters with alcohol. Here, young Greenland encountered his siblings' 'abusive behaviors' and would reason, 'That's the way I'm supposed to be…',[115] which is also the title of the chapter. The story then proceeds to Greenland's alcoholism as an adult, leading up to the moment he chose to quit drinking at the age of forty-five. Greenland went through the withdrawal process without a program and instead did his 'healing in a spiritual way' and 'in the sweat lodge'.[116] Getting sober then allowed him to reconnect with his estranged son, to whom Greenland sought to prove that alcoholism can be overcome. Coincidentally, the largest panel of the sequence shows the younger Greenland meditating upon this wish; above his head in a borderless quasi-thought balloon, the cycle of alcoholism and abuse is drawn as a visual metaphor depicting a whirl of indistinct distorted faces, hands, and bottles.[117] In a reverse-s-shaped sequence of text boxes, Sacco uses Greenland's testimony to lead the reader's gaze from the cycle of the past toward his calm likeness in the present, underlining his determination to break the cycle. The witness account is intercut with several of Sacco's typical 'talking head' portraits of Greenland telling his story: with a calm and matter-of-fact expression and the sense of 'direct address' toward the reader. In this way, Greenland appears very much in control of his own narrative, taking responsibility for his actions while being unashamed of admitting his wrongdoings. Hence, in this case, Indigenous perpetratorship is, again, in a decolonizing effort, presented as an outcome of the larger problem of Canada's settler-colonialist history. Sacco takes pains not to perpetuate any drastic images of Indigenous perpetratorship or victimhood and largely refrains from visualizing concrete cases and individualizing involved parties in a documentary.

Greenland's account qualifies as a textbook redemption narrative, a fact to which there is an ironic twist. The chapter begins with local politician Gordon Yakeleya petitioning Sacco to do 'a comic book

115 Sacco, *Paying the Land*, p. 112.
116 Ibid., p. 114.
117 Ibid., p. 115.

where elders who've kicked alcohol addiction tell how they did it […] Something the youth could read and learn from!'[118] Initially, Sacco states, 'I duck out of his crosshairs. I suggest that he tap local artists'[119]. However, Sacco finds, 'But he is in earnest. […] It used to be his problem'.[120] It is not explicitly stated that he had a change of heart concerning this request – the suggested educational comic book would fall into an entirely different genre – but Greenland's story is exactly this kind of inspirational narrative. His admission, 'I was the perpetrator', is not only a gesture of self-empowerment but also a staple of the redemption story formula: the failure that needed to be overcome. Here, Sacco stresses *survivance* rather than *victimry* and agency instead of inherent deficiency as part of his decolonizing effort. In turn, this story also extends a certain responsibility to members of Indigenous communities, in this case particularly men, who are implicated in the transgenerational cycles of abuse – if not as active perpetrators of violence, then, perhaps, through self-harm and substance abuse – to follow Greenland's example and partake in counseling and similar programs.

Greenland reappears in a later chapter that addresses the problems of residential school survivors of fitting back in with their communities, leading to substance abuse and intergenerational trauma. Greenland, whose parents were taken to a residential school, now shifts his narrative, calling himself 'an intergenerational survivor' and states that he learned that the Dene community is not itself to blame.[121] The tenor of this account is anger: in a sequence of three panels that move closer toward his face, up to an ultra-close-up, he emphasizes the impossibility of closure. As a result, 'I'm always going to be angry. I just know how to manage it now…'[122] This last statement is included in one of the few panels in which Sacco is depicted frontally. Throughout the book, interviews show his avatar in profile at the edges of the respective panel, accounting for his presence as interlocutor without drawing direct attention to his response. In this case, consternation is visible on his face; the same applies to similar scenes. It is apparent that Sacco considers himself to be an implicated subject as well and he presents his avatar in such a way that he becomes a model of how to

118 Sacco, *Paying the Land* p. 109.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid., emphasis in original.
121 Ibid., p. 156.
122 Ibid.

mindfully accept this implication in the encounter with those directly affected by cultural genocide. Although the spectacles of Sacco's avatar remain opaque, as is his trademark, personal shock and guilt appear to be present. This strategy is implemented in order to position his avatar as an empty 'cipher' for the reader to identify with.[123] Clearly, the reader is supposed to accept such anger as the outcome of a policy that implicates them as well. Similarly to the first person singular that Sacco employs when confronted with the arsenic in the abandoned mine, his avatar serves as a stand-in for the implied Western reader. Unlike the reader, though, Sacco could have replied to Greenland's anger but chose not to. Hence, the reader needs to silently witness the anger and, perhaps, reflect on how much it might be justifiably directed at them. Such confrontation is a familiar strategy in documentary comics: *Rolling Blackouts*, Sarah Glidden's exploration of the post-Iraq war refugee crisis in Turkey, Syria and Iraq, opens with a prologue in which the reader assumes the first-person perspective of a Western journalist who is confronted and rebuked by an Iraqi refugee.[124] In making the reader endure such confrontation without having any possibility to interact, such comics reverse power structures by assigning the proverbial subaltern the position to speak while forcing the reader to 'listen'.[125] This way, documentary cartoonists use their first-person narratives to create a sense of implication in history and contemporary systems of domination that they and their implied readership share.

Conclusion

Paying the Land employs diverse strategies in the representation of perpetrators. A fundamental distinction is drawn between Indigenous and settler-colonial violence: Offenders in cases of Indigenous intracommunal and domestic abuse are either completely anonymized or, in the example of William Greenland, given space to contextualize their transgressions both historically and personally,

123 Rachel Cooke, 'Interview: Eyeless in Gaza', *The Guardian*, 22 November 2009, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2009/nov/22/joe-sacco-interview-rachel-cooke> [accessed 08 April 2022]; Tristram Walker, 'Graphic Wounds: The Comics Journalism of Joe Sacco', *Journeys: The International Journal of Travel and Travel Writing*, 11.1 (2010), pp. 69–81 (p. 76).

124 Sarah Glidden, *Rolling Blackouts: Dispatches from Turkey, Syria, and Iraq* (Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2016).

125 See also Johannes C. P. Schmid, 'Comics as Memoir and Documentary: A Case Study of Sarah Glidden', in *Documenting Trauma in Comics: Traumatic Pasts, Embodied Histories & Graphic Reportage*, ed. by Dominic Davies and Candida Rifkind (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), pp. 317–333 (p. 327).

through their own accounts as well as through the larger narrative framing of Sacco's investigation. With reference to concepts such as lateral violence, culpability is shifted from Greenland as an individual culprit to the systemic colonial violence of which he is a victim as his story becomes a model of how to overcome trauma and addiction. Although Greenland is not entirely exculpated, he is positioned as a competent subject. He takes responsibility for his wrongdoings and, coincidentally, voices his frustration as a victim. Thus, in deconstructing the victim-perpetrator binary, diachronic systems of domination and intergenerational trauma are placed at the forefront. In contrast, the concept of cultural genocide is applied to the IRSS, positioning those involved explicitly as perpetrators. Top-level perpetrators such as Sir John Macdonald are only briefly addressed: although minimally distorted through visual perspective, their historical utterances are mostly left on their own and considered significant enough to expose their dehumanizing ideologies. Bottom-level perpetrators are rarely individualized: Here, Sacco focuses on the victims' accounts, for which representations of perpetrators mainly serve to recreate their experiences. Although he addresses the matters to a limited degree, Sacco does not prioritize questions such as, 'What types of people become perpetrators? Are individual perpetrators pathological, or are they shaped by their social context? Is perpetration driven by hate, economic factors, or obedience to authority?'[126] No exploration of 'evil' motives or extraordinary perversions is included. At the same time, Sacco uses both the perspective of and his explicit verbal address to the readers in such a way as to position them as implicated subjects, urging them to confront their entanglements in historical crimes and ongoing structures of oppression as he himself does during his research. In this way, *Paying the Land* falls in line with many other North American works of documentary comics in taking up an activist stance and addressing an explicitly Western readership with the expressed intent to confront their own prejudice and privilege.

126 Üngor and Anderson, p. 7.

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