

The Residential School “Monster”: Indigenous Self-determination and Memory at Former Indian Residential School Sites

by

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Abstract

Indian residential school (IRS) sites are physical reminders of the Canadian settler-colonial system’s support of sustained violence against Indigenous peoples. Using archival research, I will demonstrate commemorative strategies at IRS sites that have contributed to the construction of collective memory surrounding residential schools and are examples of the role that sovereignty over IRS sites plays in IRS memory construction. My project foregrounds four case studies: the Mohawk Institute, Alberni IRS, Beauval IRS, and the St. Eugene Mission School; in these cases, IRS buildings have undergone reuse and destruction and represent what the Tseshah, Haudenosaunee, Ktunaxa, and Dene have prioritized in their memorial projects. Different treatments of physical evidence at IRS sites, including reuse and destruction, are ultimately both forms of memorialization. I argue that engagement with the tangible history of residential schools by Indigenous peoples provides spaces for self-determination, contributing to the productive formation of collective memories of IRS sites and experiences.

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Chapter 1: The Residential School “Monster”: Project Overview

I hate you residential school, I hate you.

You’re a monster.

A huge hungry monster.

Built with steel bones. Built with cement flesh.

You’re a monster. (Saddleman, 2013)

In their testimonies, Indigenous survivors of the Indian Residential School (IRS)¹ system imposed on Turtle Island from 1831 to 1996 speak of the moment of arriving at their designated school, which for some was their first exposure to large-scale colonial architecture. Calvin Myerion, a residential school survivor, describes his moment of arrival:

And when I got to the residential school, I seen this big *monster* [emphasis added] of a building... I’ve always called it a monster, I still do today, because of not the size of it, but because of the things that happened there (Truth and Reconciliation Commission: Survivors Speak, 2015, pp. 35-36).

The IRS buildings facilitated the trauma and cultural loss that Indigenous people continue to suffer today, and so the specter of the building remains in the memory of survivors as representative of their trauma. The embodied trauma of IRS history continues to deeply affect not only survivors but also continues through the descendants and family members of those who attended IRS. As someone with family members who attended the Mohawk

¹ Although the term used throughout this thesis is “Indian Residential School”, survivors are Indigenous, which includes Inuit, Metis, and First Nations.

Institute, an IRS outside Brantford, ON where I grew up, the school buildings stand as a physical reminder of my own relationship to IRS.

Most of these “monsters” in their physical form, are gone now, having fallen victim to decay or demolition; of the ca. 139 buildings found across Canada, 15 to 20 remain (Bein and Iqbal, 2019). These buildings – as well as the land on which demolished buildings sat – serve as potential sites of commemoration and healing for survivors and their families and communities. This project demonstrates how Indigenous communities choose to repurpose IRS sites, how these decisions are determined, and what they mean in regards to collective memory formation and Indigenous self-determination. These questions are explored in the context of four case studies exemplifying different treatments of IRS sites, including the conservation of some sites and the demolition of others by the Indigenous nations on whose traditional lands these schools were built and operated: the Mohawk Institute (Six Nations of the Grand River Reserve, ON), St. Eugene Mission (Ktunaxa, B.C.), Alberni Indian Residential School (Tsaheh, BC), and Beauval Indian Residential School (English River First Nation, SK). Arguing that demolition and re-use constitute acts of memorialization, this thesis examines how the choices by Indigenous communities of appropriate methods for memorialization at IRS sites are assertions of Indigenous self-determination. The IRS space was originally intended to divest Indigenous children from their cultures and Indigenous peoples from their sovereignty; the reintroduction of Indigenous control to these spaces challenges this historical dynamic.

Indigenous sovereignty includes not only political authority over people and territories, but also authority over the development and conservation of Indigenous

histories and memories. IRS spaces are ones where Indigenous sovereignty is asserted over territory, through decisions about the future of the physical IRS remains, but also over the memorialization of IRS history in these spaces. This thesis uses the lenses of collective memory and heritage studies to suggest that the different ways that communities choose to remember the difficult histories of residential schools have the potential to create fruitful relationships based on respect and recognition of past and current injustices. By recognizing the negotiation inherent to collective memory, the memorialization process for IRS can be understood as a reframing of IRS spaces into places where Indigenous people control the framing of this history and future understanding of it.

Here then comes an opportunity for conciliation – rather than reconciliation – as proposed by Garneau (2012). Instead of reconciliation – a concept that is rooted in Catholic traditions that assumes individual fault and seeks a return to an elusive past state of harmony – Garneau proposes the concept of conciliation, a coming together of non-Indigenous and Indigenous people to build new relationships that acknowledge and accept past injustices and their influence on the present day (2012, p. 36). Reconciliation is generally used, as in the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, to describe the improvement of the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians, especially in light of settler-colonial violence such as IRS. I choose to use the term conciliation instead of reconciliation throughout this thesis to differentiate between the restrictions that are often imposed on state-sanctioned reconciliation processes and a process of conciliation that acknowledges the harm done and builds new relationships

within that context.² Although the processes and results of conservation and demolition look different at the IRS sites studied, these processes are assertions of self-determination for the purpose of memorialization. Respecting these processes is key to building conciliatory relationships built on respect and cultural difference.

While literature in the fields of heritage conservation and memory studies suggests that the conservation of the material evidence of the difficult history of IRS is necessary, this thesis shows that memorialization by Indigenous nations does not *require* conservation. The buildings that occupied, and in some cases continue to occupy, former IRS sites stand in many survivors’ minds as “monsters” that represent IRS memory. The memory of the IRS space as a monster is negotiated with the new meaning that Indigenous nations implement at the site. The transformation of these buildings and sites can be seen to mirror the shift in power and control over the site to Indigenous nations, as these nations assert their sovereignty over these spaces and over memorialization. Through analysis and comparison of these case studies, I aim to illustrate how Indigenous nations exercise their self-determination over the IRS space, contributing to the formation of collective memory.

Indigenous self-determination has resulted in a variety of projects at IRS sites that have differed in practice, but ultimately have been implemented for the purpose of memorialization. Two of the cases examined in this thesis have resulted in the conservation of the IRS buildings on site. The Mohawk Institute, which sits on

² For a working definition of some of the key terms I use throughout this thesis, including conciliation, please reference the glossary.

Haudenosaunee territory and the Six Nations reserve in Ontario, houses the Woodland Cultural Centre (WCC) that celebrates Haudenosaunee art and culture. The WCC also intends to convert the old school building into an immersive museum, as the “definitive destination for information about the history of Residential Schools in Canada” (Woodland Cultural Centre, n.d.). The reinterpretation of the Mohawk Institute as a cultural centre and museum is similar to that of St. Eugene Mission School in the Ktunaxa territory in British Columbia. The original building that was used as a school at St. Eugene has been repurposed into a golf and country club with a casino, owned by the Ktunaxa Kinbasket Tribal Council; in the basement of the former school building is a cultural and memorial space (Carr, 2009a, p.130). These two nations chose to conserve the IRS buildings at these sites as representative of IRS history. Conversely, the Beauval Indian Residential School in Saskatchewan and the Alberni Indian Residential School in British Columbia show that memorialization does not necessarily require conservation. Beauval Indian Residential School sat on Dene territory, the English River First Nation reserve in Saskatchewan, and was operated by the Meadowlake Tribal Council prior to its demolition by the community in 1995 (Niessen, 2017, p. 46). The original site of the school is marked by a memorial stone; clearly the community is not seeking to completely erase the history of the site, but the physical remains of the building do not factor into their memorialization strategy. Similarly, on the Tsahaheh reserve of the Tseshaht people, much of the former Alberni Indian Residential School has been demolished, including the Peake Hall dormitory which was demolished in 2009 (Hathilth-Sa, 2009a). As with many other nations that housed IRS buildings, the Dene and Tseshaht sought demolition as an appropriate means of engaging with the buildings’

histories within their community, finding alternate methods of memorialization. These four nations have uniquely memorialized IRS history in their territories – a powerful statement considering the history of these spaces as ones that sought to divest Indigenous peoples from their sovereignty. The memorialization at these sites attempts to put both the memory of the past and the undetermined future of the sites under the control of the Haudenosaunee, Ktunaxa, Dene, and Tseshaht.

The Mohawk Institute, as the IRS I am most personally connected to, has followed a certain path of conservation post-closure. My early research sought to examine the path that other communities had chosen for their IRS sites. I quickly discovered that rather than being forgotten, Indigenous communities had been making decisions and caring for these spaces in ways that were new and unfamiliar to me, but undeniably were all representative of Indigenous sovereignty. My methodology in this thesis involved an exploration of materials available in local and national newspaper archives, Library and Archives Canada to demonstrate that the individual ways in which communities engage in IRS sites reassert sovereignty over the sites and the memory work itself. I also drew on literature about memorialization and commemoration and IRS sites, which guided my understanding of these sites’ transformation over time and the possibilities for self-determination that they represented. This was supplemented by conversations with local community members from Brantford ON and Six Nations, as well as conversations with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars. While informal in nature, these discussions shaped my thinking and my approach to this work. This work is aimed at both an academic audience, who may find value in considering the role of memorialization at IRS sites in expressions of Indigenous sovereignty, and to community

members who may find this compilation useful in considering the potential of IRS sites in their communities. Due to the varied nature of my potential audience, I strived to write this thesis in an accessible tone to avoid alienating non-academic readers.

Through this thesis, I position myself as a researcher who has carefully negotiated this research as riddled with trauma, yet research that is required for future understandings of Indigenous sovereignty, autonomy, agency and recovery. Although my family history and association with the Mohawk Institute has undoubtedly structured my understanding of these spaces, I feel that my analysis of work done at these IRS sites does not require my identity as an Indigenous person to be centred. Rather, the actions of the Indigenous nations at the IRS sites discussed here are centered as their sovereignty does not require outside approval.

I intend for this thesis to be used as not only a demonstration of IRS sites as sites of trauma that have been transformed and adapted by Indigenous peoples in spite of the history of these sites as ones of cultural erasure, but also as a potential guide for other Indigenous nations who may be considering adapting their IRS sites. These spaces provide an opportunity for Indigenous nations, regardless of the chosen method of adaption, to assert their right to control over IRS memorialization on their own terms and timelines. There is an opportunity for healing in a reclamation of these sites for survivors and Indigenous nations, through the assertion of ownership of these spaces and IRS history more generally.

Survivors and Indigenous people may find that the actions taken at the IRS sites in this thesis reflect their own experiences of a shift in power dynamics at the IRS site as guided by and for other Indigenous people. These cases also challenge non-Indigenous

people to recognize the long-lasting effects of IRS and their place in the settler-colonial state, as well as recognizing the work that has already been done by Indigenous people to transform these spaces of trauma. IRS were intended to erase Indigenous sovereignty, and their adaptive reuse today by Indigenous communities today challenges this past, moving the sites toward a new future guided by Indigenous needs and traditions.

1.1 Chapter Breakdown

In chapter 2, “Historical Context and State Memorialization”, I establish the historical context for IRS and highlight main features and considerations for each of the sites that inform this thesis: the Mohawk Institute, Beauval Indian Residential School, St. Eugene Mission and Alberni Indian Residential School. In chapter 3, “Grappling with IRS through Memory”, I contextualize IRS memorialization through an exploration of memory studies and the formation of memory surrounding events of difficult history. Collective memory, as I use it here, embodies the ways in which groups of people come to understand their shared histories through the negotiation of individual memories. When it comes to difficult histories like IRS, survivors and others must recognize the role of witnessing these difficult histories, as well as the role of apologies in the development of collective memory. Chapter 4, “Relations with IRS Spaces over Time”, examines the social negotiation necessary for collective memory practices, particularly in relation to IRS site treatment. I explore those negotiations in the case studies of the Mohawk Institute, Alberni IRS, Beauval IRS, and St. Eugene Mission as examples of commemorative practices that combine tangible and intangible cultural heritage. These sites underwent transformation while they operated as schools, through the fires that

frequently occurred, and which predated the eventual transformations that Indigenous nations have enacted. The role of the archive in the collective memory of IRS and the transformation of the sites is also explored. The documentation surrounding various iterations of each IRS is conserved in the archive, often divorced of its greater context, but this documentation is still relevant to demonstrate the evolution of the site. The archive has the additional role of acting alongside the physical site, allowing demolition without complete historical erasure. In Chapter 5, “Taming the “Monster”: Indigenous Self-Determination Over Memorialization”, I draw connections between the roles that IRS sites play as the settings for Indigenous self-determination (despite the settler-colonial history of the sites), and the formation of collective memory. I illustrate how the inversion of power relations around IRS – from sites created to “contain and control” Indigenous cultures to site controlled and managed by Indigenous communities – reflects the conciliation that characterizes settler-Indigenous relations at the start of the twenty-first century, particularly post-TRC. These sites hold power as places which sought to divert Indigenous peoples from their sovereignty, but which now play a role as spaces that serve the needs of the nations who care for them. Finally, in Chapter 6, “Moving Forward: IRS Sites and Conciliation”, I envision how the work of commemoration at the IRS sites work towards conciliation for Indigenous individuals and nations, and the Canadian state and settler society.

Chapter 2: Historical Context and State Memorialization

IRS sites hold power as places which sought to divest Indigenous peoples from their sovereignty, but which are now spaces that serve the needs of the nations who care for them. The original context of IRS buildings – such as those examined in this thesis – within the greater IRS system must be explored in order to better understand the heritage value of residential school buildings and sites. These buildings were originally part of a broader policy by the Government of Canada to eradicate and assimilate Indigenous peoples, starting with breaking Indigenous children’s links to their families, cultures, and languages (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 1, 2015, p.3). Indian residential schools, funded by the federal government and run by a variety of Christian churches, are one element of a long history of attempts by the Canadian settler state to control and eradicate Indigenous peoples. In recent years, pressure on the settler state by Indigenous people has resulted in greater acknowledgement of this part of the history of colonialism.

Early relations between European settlers and Indigenous peoples were marked by the fur trade and complex diplomatic relations (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 1 Part 1, 2015, p. 10). Initial relations were mostly economic in nature: nations interacting through trade and negotiations with parties benefitting in different ways. On July 1, 1867, the Dominion of Canada was formed under the British North America Act (now the Constitution Act), unionizing the provinces, and dividing provincial and federal responsibilities; the goal of the BNA Act was to protect the Crown’s interest in North America from the threat of annexation by the United States of America. As a product of this dominion, the Crown assumed control over Indigenous affairs in these territories

(Waite, 2019). Relations between Indigenous nations and the Canadian government began to degrade most significantly as the new nation of Canada sought to assert itself by increasing settlement. Canada’s nationhood was formed in part through the idea that the wilderness needed to be civilized (Mackey, 1999, p.29). Indigenous peoples were likened to this wilderness, as a disappearing, less developed form of human society (Mackey, 1999, p.42) and so the civilizing force of IRS was turned towards them to integrate them into Canadian society. The Crown sought to divest Indigenous nations of their sovereignty and incorporate them into the nation, relocating them from their territories and absolving the Crown of its treaty responsibilities (Coulthard, 2014, p.4). Part of this strategy of assimilation was aimed at Indigenous children, through the creation of the IRS system.

Prior to Confederation, the vast majority of schools for Indigenous children were church-run operations intended for conversion and as a civilizing force (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 1, 2015). Only two of these schools were residential schools, Mount Elgin School at Muncey (or Muncceytown), Ontario, and the Mohawk Institute in Brantford, Ontario (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 1, 2015, p.63), and, although these schools suffered from many failings, the method of cultural assimilation of Indigenous children through education was adopted as a federal project. While education in the newly-confederated Canada became a provincial responsibility, due to the policies embedded in the Indian Act the federal government maintained and continues to maintain responsibility for the education of registered Indians on reserve (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 1, 2015, p.151).

Education became key in negotiations between Indigenous nations and the Crown, but each party had different motivations. Indigenous peoples saw the advantages of settler education for their children, and each of the treaties signed in the 1870s had provisions for education (Miller, 1996, p.100). These nations saw the benefits of having their children educated in settler institutions, especially as the number of settlers increased in the territories. From the perspective of the federal government, the greater purpose of these schools was to erase Indigenous culture and identity, which was part of a broader strategy to assimilate Indigenous peoples (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 1, 2015, p.3). The federal government viewed the schools as a cost-efficient method of civilizing Indigenous peoples, as the schools would be run by various churches and non-denominational organizations such as the Aborigines Protection Society (Miller, 1996, p.70). Ostensibly, these groups and churches were deeply interested in the spiritual and material wellbeing of Indigenous peoples (Miller, 1996, p.70). The federal government wanted the benefits of the schools as an assimilative force with minimal investment, while Indigenous peoples wanted their children to be educated in order to be able to earn a livelihood as the federal government asserted itself as a force over their lives and territories.

The assimilation of Indigenous peoples was assumed to be a forgone conclusion (Mackey, 1999, p.42) and so the federal government chose not to direct too many resources to that project. In an 1882 memorandum to Prime Minister John A. Macdonald, the Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs, Lawrence Vankoughnet, advised that the federal government's responsibility was to maintain day schools for Indians but not to construct them, and that if they were to be constructed then this should be done inexpensively

(Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 1, 2015, p.152). Indifference towards student conditions lead to the dilapidated state of the buildings (Miller, 1996, p.596). Residential school buildings were “poorly located, poorly built, and poorly maintained,” and once constructed, the buildings operated until they were either burned down or simply fell into ruin (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume 1, p.162). Within this context, the IRS sites that remain are physical indicators of settler-colonial history and its present-day effects. In this era of increased attempts to acknowledge this history, what role do these sites play, if any?

Over the twentieth century, Canada continued to assert policy that sought to minimize Indigenous peoples’ sovereignty and dispossess them from their territories, despite immense personal and collective Indigenous resistance (Coulthard, 2014, p.4). Indigenous political action was particularly galvanized in response to the 1969 White Paper which sought to assimilate Indigenous peoples (Coulthard, 2014, p.5). Tense relations between Canada and Indigenous nations continued, including highly publicized conflicts such as the conflict at Oka in 1990 (Simpson, 2014) which set the stage for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) in 1991. The RCAP sought to identify what would be necessary to improve relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada (Government of Canada, 2010). It also identified the many failed attempts by the Canadian federal government to assimilate Indigenous peoples by undermining Indigenous governance, economies, languages, and cultures; these failed attempts are the foundation of ongoing strained relations between Indigenous peoples and the federal government (Government of Canada, 2010). The RCAP also identified the significant damage that residential schools had done to Indigenous peoples, resulting in

the filing of several civil lawsuits (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 1 Part 2, 2015, p.551). The great number of lawsuits and the pressure this was putting on the federal government resulted in the negotiation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA) in 2006, and its implementation in 2007 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 1 Part 2, 2015, p.552).

The IRSSA compensated students who attended any of the 139 federally-recognized schools and was implemented in September of 2007 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume 1, 2015). The IRSSA was a joint agreement between the legal counsel of residential school survivors, legal counsel of the Churches, various Indigenous organizations, and the Government of Canada (Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, 2006). The IRSSA remains the largest class action settlement in Canadian history (Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, 2006), and part of its mandate was the formation of a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Summary, 2015, p.vi). The TRC sought to foster reconciliation between school survivors, Indigenous communities, and Canadians in light of IRS history (Government of Canada, 2019). The TRC also called for action on the part of the federal government to commemorate the experiences of IRS survivors (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Summary, 2015). The testimonies collected as part of the IRSSA, as well as for the reports from the TRC in 2015, have played a role in the broader strategy to preserve the intangible histories, the stories of survivors and the effects that this experience has had on their lives and the lives of subsequent generations. As Cooper-Bolam (2020) points out, it is important to recognize that IRSSA testimonies represent only a small fraction of the total experiences of survivors; IRSSA testimonies

must be considered in conjunction with other survivor testimony, records and other artifacts, and the former school sites, in order to provide a more complete understanding of this subject (pp.90-91). Similarly, the funding set aside by IRSSA for memorialization efforts does not fully account for larger memorialization efforts and processes.

The federal government, as part of the IRSSA legal agreement, provided 20 million dollars, used for 144 different regional and national commemorative projects (Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, 2006). The funding directly supported efforts on the part of different nations to memorialize IRS history, and several nations had monuments placed at former IRS sites (Commemoration 2011-2012, 2013; Commemoration 2012-2013, 2013). The nations discussed in this thesis did not have IRSSA funding for their IRS site projects³ (Commemoration 2011-2012, 2013; Commemoration 2012-2013, 2013), and some of the memorialization efforts predate the IRSSA funding. The efforts of the Dene, the Tseshaht, Haudenosaunee, and Ktunaxa outlined here were self-directed, outside of the federal efforts for reconciliation and memorialization, and are examples of Indigenous self-determination. These nations saw a need in their communities and in their territories and did work to satisfy those needs. As Coulthard (2014) suggests, Indigenous nations must ground themselves in Indigenous political traditions separate from their interactions with the settler state (p.179). These Indigenous nations have been exercising – and continue to exercise – their authority over IRS memorialization outside of the federal government’s projects.

³ The Tseshaht received funding for an IRS remembrance park and garden, but this is separate from the Alberni IRS (Commemoration 2012-2013, 2013).

The memorialization of IRS history has in some ways become a substitute for larger conversations about the impacts of the settler-colonial system that continue today. Commemorating IRS history is easier when that history is viewed as a singular event or series of events with a specific end date, rather than as part of a larger system that continues to affect the lives of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people today. The IRS sites can set the stage for the conservation of this memory and as places of witnessing, where the visitor becomes conscious of the site as both one of trauma and as indicative of larger settler-colonial strategies of forced displacement and attempted assimilation of Indigenous peoples.

The actions of the colonial government to assimilate Indigenous peoples enacted damages that are evident today, alongside the continued pressures of the settler-colonial system on Indigenous nations and their sovereignty. Any memorialization of IRS will occur within ongoing settler-colonial pressures and the continued assertion of inherent Indigenous sovereignty. IRS sites set the stage for the assertion of Indigenous sovereignty, where Indigenous people have the right to choose the presentation of their histories, a presentation that may involve the transformation of space. Those who have inherited this history must decide how to memorialize it. Indigenous nations have sought to assert their sovereignty over former IRS spaces, and the treatment of IRS sites is one example of sovereignty over the development of memory surrounding this aspect of settler-colonial history.

The individual circumstances of IRS sites today vary despite their shared role in the larger IRS system. The intended purpose of IRS sites was to strip away the sovereignty and culture of Indigenous peoples, and recognizing this provides a

background on why it is so powerful for Indigenous nations to assert their sovereignty specifically in these spaces. I have selected four case studies of contemporary uses of former IRS sites, two of which represent sites on which IRS buildings are currently in use, the Mohawk Institute in Six Nations, ON, and St. Eugene’s Mission School in Ktunaxa, BC, and two sites on which the IRS buildings have been demolished, Alberni Indian Residential School in Alberni, BC, and Beauval Indian Residential School in La Plonge, SK. All of these sites are now owned or co-owned by local First Nations, and sit on reserve land. The buildings of the Beauval IRS and Alberni IRS were both demolished prior to the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015, in 1995 and 2009 respectively, but the buildings on both sites were still being used by local Indigenous communities prior to their demolition. The Mohawk Institute and St. Eugene Mission are examples of school buildings that are currently in use by Indigenous communities. These case studies are examples of the choices made to conserve or to demolish these buildings, taking into account their history and also their potential future use.

2.1 St. Eugene Mission

Our case studies begin with the St. Eugene Mission School, also known as the Kootenay Indian Residential School, or the Cranbrook Indian Residential School. Located in Ktunaxa, BC, this IRS operated from 1890 to 1970, associated with the Roman Catholic St. Eugene Mission (Government of Canada, 2005b, p.1). Permission from the Crown was originally granted for the construction of an industrial school “situated on the right bank of the St. Mary’s River, East Kootenay,” (“Order of Oblates”, 1898) and in 1910,

the Canadian government funded and constructed the Kootenay Indian Residential School (St. Eugene Golf Resort and Casino, n.d.).

The building was in poor condition for most of its existence as a residential school, having ongoing issues with their water system and access to clean water; these environmental deficiencies lead to significant health issues in the students (Government of Canada, 2005b, pp.2-3; Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 1, 2015, p.434).



Figure 1 St. Eugene Mission, 2017. [Photo]. Unknown. Kootenay Biz.
https://kootenaybiz.com/cranbrook/article/the_ktunaxa_are_proud_owners_of_segrec

By 1970, the school closed, and in 1973 the land was transferred to be held jointly by the five local bands (Government of Canada, 2005b, p.4)⁴. Between 1973 and 1975, the province of British Columbia intended to lease the site but this fell through (Government of Canada, 2005b, p.4) and the building sat empty for twenty years, in deteriorating condition and as an object of vandalism (About us, culture and heritage, 2020), prior to its transformation into the resort and country club it is today.

2.2 Beauval Indian Residential School

Beauval Indian Residential School was operational between 1860 and 1995, associated with the mission at Lac la Plonge, and like St. Eugene, was run by the Roman Catholic Church (Niessen, 2017, p.46). Originally opened at Ile a la Crosse, the school

⁴ These bands are four Ktunaxa communities, ʔakisq̓nuk First Nation, ʔaq̓am, ʔakinkum̓asnuq̓iʔit (Tobacco Plains), yaq̓an nukiy (Lower Kootenay) and one Shuswap band - Kyaknuq̓+iʔit (Ktunaxa Nation regains ownership of St. Eugene, 2017).

began receiving government funding as a boarding school in 1897, and the school was moved to Lac la Plonge in 1906 (Niessen, 2017, p.46; Government of Canada, 2005a, p.2).⁵



Figure 2 Beauval Indian Residential School, La Plonge, Sask. (1908). [Photo]. Canada. Dept. of the Interior. Library and Archives Canada.
[https://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3315633&title=R.C.](https://collectionsCanada.gc.ca/pam_archives/index.php?fuseaction=genitem.displayEcopies&lang=eng&rec_nbr=3315633&title=R.C)

The school caught fire in 1920, and again in 1926 (Niessen, 2017, p.46),⁶ and when it caught on fire for the third time in September of 1927, nineteen boys and the nun in charge of the boys’ dorm died (Niessen, 2017, p.46; Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Volume 4, 2015, p.3). The school was rebuilt, completed in 1932; the federal government “covered the entire cost of the reconstruction of the new main school building... and was responsible for its subsequent maintenance.” (Government of

⁵ Although the school’s early incarnation is sometimes referred to as the Ile a la Crosse school, it should not be mistaken for the Ile a la Crosse Residential School, which served Metis students and was left out of the IRSSA (Niessen, 2017, p.48). The schools operated closely together, along with the public school located in Beauval, SK (Government of Canada, 2005a, p.12). Ile a la Crosse Residential School was demolished in 2016 (CTV Saskatoon, 2016).

⁶ I cannot find any other formal records for these fires, but a number of fires prior to the one in 1927 are mentioned by *The Globe and Mail*.

Canada, 2005b, p.5) In the 1950s, the school was deemed a fire hazard (Niessen, 2017, p.47).



Figure 3 Construction of the new Beauval IRS. (1928). [Photo]. Shattering the silence: The hidden history of Indian residential schools in Saskatchewan.

<http://www2.uregina.ca/education/saskindianresidentialschools/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Beauval->

Figures 2-5 show the life of Beauval IRS building and offer the viewer various lenses through which to see this institution. Burke suggests that images enable the viewer to more vividly imagine the past (2001, p.26). For a site like Beauval IRS, which was demolished, the archive grants the viewer a visual timeline of the school’s operation and eventual demolition. These photos of the buildings that Beauval IRS occupied, shown together, illustrate shifts at the site of asserted power, adaptive reuse, and destruction; furthermore, the changing contexts in which these photos were taken also informs our readings of them.



N2730.tif

Société historique de Saint-Boniface_OMI

Figure 4 Beauval Indian Residential School. (1951). [Photo]. Shattering the silence: The hidden history of Indian residential schools in Saskatchewan. <http://2.bp.blogspot.com/-oCKbkLst5ac/Tr4Z2QaBXYI/AAAAAAAAAGkE/3O9lwLbXMGM/s1600/beauval+school+1951+N2730.jpg>



Figure 5 Image of Beauval demolition.(1995). [Photo]. Shattering the silence: The hidden history of Indian residential schools in Saskatchewan. <http://portagelaloche.blogspot.com/2011/11/beauval-residential-school.html>

Although made invisible through the passage of time and the loss of their names, the photographer of images should not be viewed as impartial. The social and political context of certain photos means that the image is designed to appeal to the sympathy of the viewer (Burke, 2001, p.27). The photographers of the image from 1908 (Figure 2) and from 1931 (Figure 3), likely a government worker or school staff member, have different contexts than that of the photographer of the image of the demolition (Figure 5). This is relevant considering that at the time of demolition, the school was operated by Meadow Lake Tribal Council, and the photographer was likely a member of the community. The Indigenous photographer would have a different relation to the IRS site than a non-

Indigenous school staff member, which would be reflected in the intended meaning and context of the photo.

Figure 2 of Beauval IRS taken in 1908 is of particular interest to the collective memory of the school as that building burned down in 1927. The school was rebuilt as depicted in Figure 3 and completed in 1932. Figures 2 and 4 both depict Beauval IRS despite being separated by about eighty years and being completely different buildings. The idea of the school exists both in physical form and in memory, which the archive supplements. The IRS is conceptualized both within and beyond its physical structure, and the archival photos enable the viewer to access this conceptualization and embed it into their own understanding. The essence of the IRS remains, even as the site evolved in its appearance and structure, and all of these are a part of the memorialization process.

There is also a powerful comparison between the image of the school during operation (Figure 4) and the image of the school mid-demolition (Figure 5). The image of the school mid-demolition shows the ultimate defeat of the physical building, removing its capacity to intimidate or physically contain the Dene as it did during operation. Instead, the “monster” is defeated through demolition, and exists only in archival materials and in memory. Indigenous sovereignty guided the transformation of the site, turning a site of trauma into one that reflects the power the community holds over the site post-closure.

2.3 Mohawk Institute

Due in part to its central location both to the city of Brantford and the Six Nations reserve, as well as the site’s long history, there is a wealth of archival material available

about the Mohawk Institute. The Mohawk Institute was opened in 1828 in Brantford, ON, run by the Anglican Church; it was run as a day school for boys from the nearby Six Nations of the Grand River reserve and was called the Mechanics’ Institute (The Anglican Church of Canada, n.d). By 1834, the school was formally made into a residential school and began accepting both boys and girls (The Anglican Church of Canada, n.d). The school burned down and was reconstructed at some time from 1854 to 1859 (The Anglican Church of Canada, n.d).



Figure 6 Mohawk Institute, 1884. [Photo]. Unknown.
<http://central.bac.lac.gc.ca/.redirect?app=fonandcol&id=3309647&lang=eng>

In 1895, the federal government issued the “Report on the Mohawk Institute and Six Nations Board Schools” written by Indian agent Martin Benson. He describes his arrival at “a large, three story, white brick building... reached by a broad well-kept drive with a row of young maples on either side” (Benson, 1895, pp.12-13); this building is

depicted in Figure 6. His overall impression of the school is very positive, as evident in his frequent compliments on the conduct of the students and the school itself: “The barns, sheds, stables, sties, barn-yards and grounds were neatness personified, while everything in and about the building was scrupulously clean and tidy.” (Benson, 1895, p.17).

This celebrated building of the Mohawk Institute burnt down eight years after Benson’s visit, in 1903, leaving “only the walls standing” (“Blaze at Brantford”, Apr. 20 1903). The various responses to the reconstruction of this building illustrate conflicting views of its purpose and who should control it. Even before the ashes had settled, on May 6, 1903, the New England Company had announced via telegram their intentions to rebuild the school (“Mohawk Institute to be rebuilt,” May 6, 1903). However, in an opinion piece by J. O. Brant-Sero⁷ published in *The Globe and Mail* on May 9, Brant-Sero proposed that the Six Nations band council should take a key financial role in the building of the school. He suggested that “the mission of the [New England Company] is to educate the heathen Indians, a term which cannot apply to the Iroquois,” and he also argued that the community was recognized as having a good income and growing population (“The Indians and the Institute”, May 9, 1903). Despite Brant-Sero's recommendation, in September of 1903 the federal government endorsed the New England Company’s plans for a new building with a budget of thirty thousand dollars (“Mohawk Institute to be rebuilt”, Sept. 3, 1903). It is this building that remains today (see Figure 7).

⁷ Presumably John Ojijatekha Brant-Sero, a Mohawk, and the grandson of Joseph Brant.



Figure 7 Mohawk Institute main building, 1917. [Photo]. Unknown. Library and Archives Canada. http://collectionscanada.gc.ca/ourl/res.php?url_ver=Z39.88-2004&url_tim=2020-05-28T06%3A25%3A56Z&url_ctx_fmt=info%3Aofi%2Ffmt%3Akev%3Amtx%3Actx&rft_dat=3309653&rft_id=i

Between 1945 and 1964,⁸ the conditions at the Mohawk Institute were reported by the Supreme Court of Ontario as being “deplorable,” naming specifically the dilapidated condition of the barns and dormitories, as well as having insufficient and outdated fire prevention equipment (“Conditions ‘deplorable’ at Mohawk Institute”, n.d.). The school buildings were in a deteriorated state for a considerable amount of time, but effort has been put in by the Woodland Cultural Centre, a Haudenosaunee cultural organization, to maintain the main building.

⁸ The news article is undated, but it would have been during the tenure of the final principal at the school, W.J. Zimmerman, between 1945 and 1970, and while Chief Justice McCruer was Supreme Justice, between 1945 and 1964.

2.4 Alberni Indian Residential School

Alberni Indian Residential School was built in Port Alberni, BC for children first from the Tseshaht nation, and later also students from other nations across BC (The United Church of Canada Archives, n.d.). This IRS operated from 1892 to 1972, first by the Presbyterian Church, and then the United Church. Like the Mohawk Institute, the school was close to the local Tseshaht community, exposing the community to the school’s assimilatory efforts while also offering opportunities for the community to more directly resist the school (The United Church of Canada Archives, n.d.). According to the school’s administration, community resistance to the school took the form of disruption and potentially arson (The United Church of Canada Archives, n.d.).



Figure 8 Alberni Indian Residential School, 1920. [Photo]. The United Church of Canada. <https://thechildrenremembered.ca/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/alberni-building.jpg>

Similar to other residential schools, including the Mohawk Institute and Beauval IRS, the Alberni IRS burnt down, once in 1917 and again in 1937 (The United Church of Canada Archives, n.d; Government of Canada, 2004). The school staff resisted the

installation of fire escape stairs between the boys’ and girls’ dormitories, fearing behavioural issues and children travelling between the dormitories (The United Church of Canada Archives, n.d; Government of Canada, 2004). At the time of the fire in 1937, there were 112 children attending the school from various nations (Government of Canada, 2004), and as time went on the number of students from more distant communities increased (The United Church of Canada Archives, n.d). The school was rebuilt in 1941 with accommodations for two hundred students (The United Church of Canada Archives, n.d).



Figure 9 Alberni Indian Residential School (1942). [photo] James Coleman. Library and Archives Canada. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/CollectionSearch/Pages/record.aspx?app=fonandcol&IdNumber=3381493>



Figure 10 Albani main building, front right. [Photo]. Albani Valley Museum. <https://portalalbani.pastperfectonline.com/photo/7FF0AAA5-7F2F-480C-BCD5-931263421435>



Figure 11 Peake Hall Dormitory at Albani Indian Residential School, mid-demolition. (2009) [photo] Hashilth-Sa Newspaper. <https://hashilthsa.com/archive/news/2012-11-13/tseshaht-hosts-survivors-demolition-peake-hall>

Multiple incarnations of Alberni IRS are pictured here (Figures 8-11). The schools that burned down exist now only through archival images and the memories of survivors. Figure 10, taken in 1983 depicts the main building, mid-demolition. The Tseshahat band allowed individuals to remove the bricks they could then sell, ideally allowing the building's foundations to be dismantled more cheaply (Alberni Valley Museum, 1986). The main building had been empty for many years at this point. Like the image of Beauval IRS mid-demolition (Figure 5), the building is depicted falling into ruin, a building that can no longer be used to contain children.

Figure 11, depicting Tseshahat Elder Willard Gallic in front of Peake Hall, was taken during the initial ceremonial demolition of the building. The article describing this event takes pleasure in describing the ceremonial destruction, where “an old building, a monster lurking in the hearts and minds of Native people across B.C. and beyond,” was destroyed with “a shocking noise, but satisfying to some, old nails squeak and groan as faded wood panels are ripped away from the building's exterior. Crowbars pry at window sills. The glass on a set of doors explodes” (Steel, 2009). For survivors witnessing this destruction, the demolition of the school was a victory against a system that sought to eradicate them, and involved traditional methods of healing (Steel, 2009). Figure 11 depicts a triumph, a survivor in front of the defeated “monster” that contained him and sought to erase his culture. The survivor could be said to represent the greater nation, who survived the time of IRS and now can reassert itself in that very same space. The demolition of the building was a cathartic act for Tseshahat survivors who asserted their individual agency and the will of the community over the space.

Consider the difference between the archival images which demonstrates the school as an active force (Figure 8 and 9) compared to the later photos post-closure that depict the building as falling to ruin (Figure 10 and 11). The Tseshahat asserted their authority over the former Alberni IRS site, where the IRS system and the buildings to perpetuate it were installed without permission, and now, the community decides the future of the land and buildings.⁹ The Tseshahat assert their sovereignty over this space, despite its past as one intended to erase their sovereignty. The sight of the building falling into ruin is an example of the community transforming the space by allowing the site to deteriorate. The choice to use an indirect method of slow deterioration allowed the community to decide, over time, what they wanted out of the site and to determine its future. This is particularly important when compared to state-sanctioned memorialization projects which often have deadlines for applications and decisions; in this case, the community had the opportunity outside of these processes to take their time to make the right decision for their community.

These four IRS sites are physical reminders of the impact of the IRS system on students and their families. The choices by local communities to demolish the buildings – in the cases of Beauval IRS and Alberni IRS – or conserve them – in the cases of the Mohawk Institute and St. Eugene Mission – reflect the different relationships that communities have to the IRS sites that sit on their territories. The journey that Indigenous nations take to assert control over these former IRS are products of the history that these

⁹ All four of the sites mentioned here sit on reserve territory, which causes conflicting emotions. On one hand, Indigenous communities and nations assert their authority here, but the reserve system is also an imposed one that distances nations from their larger control over traditional territories.

sites embody, and reflect the needs of the community for not only memorialization, but also control over the form that memorialization takes.

Chapter 3: Grappling with IRS through Memory

When discussing IRS sites and the history of IRS more generally, it becomes clear that remembering this history is important but also deeply complex. The different participants, the long lasting effects, and the tangible and intangible remains of IRS must be negotiated in order to move into a future of improved conditions for Indigenous peoples, as well as better Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations. This chapter will first consider the process of memory and how it negotiates historic conflict. Then, I will explore past research that has been done on the physical remains specifically of the difficult history of IRS, and challenges and successes that have occurred in the attempted transformation of these spaces. Finally, I will consider how past witnessing and apologies from the federal government have been largely unproductive in improving relations between Indigenous nations and the Canadian federal government. The memorialization of IRS requires an understanding of the power dynamics in settler-colonialism and their expression over the process of memory formation, in order to understand why it is important that Indigenous nations have expressed control over IRS sites and IRS memory formation.

3.1 Memory Studies and Difficult History

In light of the context of IRS sites as evidence of an imposed settler-colonial system which sought to assimilate Indigenous peoples, I draw on the field of memory studies, which attempts to understand and interpret difficult histories. As Indigenous nations assert sovereignty over the physical place of the IRS, they also assert sovereignty over the way that their memory and history is developed. The field of memory studies itself developed following World War II as scholars sought to address and commemorate

some of the more difficult events of the war (Olick and Robbins, 1998, p.121); as such, memory studies has always been very closely associated with the history of the Holocaust (Rothberg, 2009, p.6). In understanding memory studies as related to difficult histories and the emergence of collective memory, it serves as a useful framework for understanding how group members come to relate to one another and their difficult history. As Jeffery Olick argues, collective memory is often used as a catch-all term to describe a wide variety of commemorative processes; he writes: “Collective memory has been used to refer to aggregated individual recollections, to official commemorations, to collective representations, and to disembodied constitutive features of shared identities” (1999, p.336). Scholars have adapted collective memory to their own work, which has resulted in a wide array of definitions and applications.

Maurice Halbwachs (1950) defines collective memory something that exists in the minds of groups and individuals. Olick emphasizes the ways in which individual memory and collective memory reflect one another, as “two sides of the same coin,” where members of the group form their own memory and at the same time create memories in relation to the group and its other members (1999, p.342). There is no “mystical group mind,” but rather collective memory is composed of a series of social interactions and processes (Olick and Robbins, 1998, p.112). As Paula Gunn Allen writes, “Everything has an interactive capacity with everything else,” (2008, p.139) and all of these interactions lend themselves to the collective. Collective memory emerges from the ways in which people interact with group members, and with other groups, non-humans and places.

Olick and Robbins propose that collective memory is part of the larger field of social memory studies (1998, p.106). Memories are formed through a process of social mediation, and conceived in relation to the different groups that individuals are a part of (Assman and Czaplicka, 1995, p.127), where individual memory is reinforced through social interaction. Memory is socially arranged and guided by the interactions of individuals within their larger groups and through interaction with other groups (Olick, 1999, p.334).

Assman and Czaplicka propose ‘cultural memory’ as a kind of collective memory that directs behaviour through repetition of societal or group interactions (1995, p.126). Olick and Robbins seek to narrow their use of collective memory by referring to specific mnemonic memory practices in order to identify the role of memory in the past and present (1998, p.112). This provides an opportunity to understand collective memory as both collective and individual; a process that is made productive through the interaction of the individual with the group (Olick, 1999, p.44). Memory thus is a process that changes over time (Olick and Robbins, 1998, p.122). The process of collective memory involves the interactions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous individuals, as well as Indigenous nations and the Canadian state. The unequal power dynamics that are often enacted between these individuals means that those power dynamics inform collective memory. This in turn means that when Indigenous nations control or guide the formation of collective memory, it can be understood as an expression of Indigenous self-determination and the right to control that memory.

The interactions that form collective memory are not without contestation over the past, and these interactions demonstrate how memory is created and recreated in the

present (Olick and Robbins, 1998, p.128). Memory is malleable, made up of a variety of mnemonic structures, which are shaped by and shape other structures (Olick, 1999, p.346). This multitude of social practices and interactions between personal and collective memory lead to a multitude of collective memories, created by different groups and by different individuals within the same group (Olick, 2016, p.55). For this reason, collective memory is formed precisely through a negotiation of remembrances and understandings of difficult pasts; this is key when discussing the contrast between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples’ memory of IRS.

Through actions that assert Indigenous sovereignty, IRS sites are transformed into spaces that honour Indigenous survivors, memorialize IRS history, and challenge the assumed authority of the federal government that allowed the IRS system to occur in the first place. The memorialization processes hold significance because they demonstrate what communities find important to remember, and how they seek to witness the past. Memorialization efforts at IRS sites acknowledge that the physical space has importance alongside the events that occurred within, as both contribute to what the community and others remember about this history. Recognition of the role that both the physical site and the intangible stories about lived IRS experiences play is crucial to a holistic development of memory.

Collective memory as a concept has been widely adapted and refined for different purposes and for different disciplines, and often embodies politics, whereas individual memory reflects emotions (Brace, 2012, p.44). Collective memory thus combines both political and emotional needs of the group and individuals. This emotional response is especially evident in competitive memory that involves a struggle for recognition

(Rothberg, 2009, p.3). Rothberg suggests that rather than a competitive process, memory is multidirectional, an expansive productive force that requires negotiation (2009, p.3). Multidirectional memory allows for a comparative approach between different memories without competition (Rothberg, 2009, pp.6-7). The goal of multidirectional memory is to move beyond competitive memory, as well as the reductive use of the Holocaust as the sole archetype of difficult memory (Rothberg, 2011, p.540). Collective memory is expansive and can allow for a multitude of purposes that may conflict but still have the capacity to be formed alongside one another. Difficult histories, of which there are many, do not require comparison to be integrated into collective memory, but comparative conversations provide an opportunity to consider larger understandings of intersectional histories and encourage solidarity. Multidirectional memory provides the opportunity to allow for a wide array of treatments of IRS sites, which move beyond assumptions of the appropriate treatment of sites of difficult history. The case studies here demonstrate the multitude of ways Indigenous communities have asserted memorialization processes in the IRS sites.

The assertion of self-determination in the memorialization processes at IRS sites resists the pressures of settler-colonialism. The Indian Residential School system is part of the history of settler-colonialism imposed on Indigenous peoples and so its tangible remains must be addressed. Cooper-Bolam (2020) engages with curator and cultural theorist Roger I. Simon’s nascent methodology that he called the “Terrible Gift”, a methodology he developed when exploring the function of testimony and its relation to social justice in difficult history. The “Terrible Gift” suggests that part of witnessing difficult history is a recognition of one’s inheritance of this history as a gift, as well as

recognizing one’s implication in the enactment of history in daily life (Cooper-Bolam, 2020, pp.14-15). Cooper-Bolam suggests that although Simon focuses on ‘images and words’ as that which should become the physical reminders of the “Terrible Gift”, other sources of testament, including spaces and heritage practices, can transmit this same knowledge and recognition (pp. 15-16). The varied conditions and uses of IRS sites today are demonstrations of the interactions between IRS history, Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations. The different types of treatment of the “monsters”, the physical buildings of the IRS, are assertions of Indigenous self-determination over memorialization, and demonstrate the variety of forms that memorialization takes.

IRS sites have largely fallen to the wayside in the greater national efforts for the memorialization of residential schools. This memorialization has been centered in many ways around the IRSSA and the TRC, with survivor stories being prioritized due to survivors’ ages and the fact that testimonies have legal significance. Once closed, IRS sites were used in a myriad of ways by Indigenous nations prior to the renewed national attention on IRS history. Brace completed an in-depth examination of IRS sites and the treatments applied to them by both Indigenous communities and outside groups (2012, p.20). Brace found information to classify 54 of the 139 federally- recognized school sites; of these, 27 were adapted for reuse for at least some time, and 43 had been destroyed, 5 of which were demolished ceremonially (2012, pp.32-33). Those former IRS buildings that are still standing today serve a wide range of purposes, speaking to the complex relationship between these sites and the histories they represent (Carr, 2011, pp.196-197). Even buildings that were demolished were often used by Indigenous

communities post-closure and pre-demolition (Brace, 2012). Despite the fact that IRS sites, as mnemonic spaces, contribute to memory surrounding IRS experiences, these sites are often forgotten and their fates are under-documented.

The IRS space plays a role in the development of memory through the past use of the site as an enforced settler-colonial space, and the current use of the site as a space of sovereignty. The field of collective memory has evolved over time, acknowledging the many collective memories that form alongside one another, shaped by social processes and the individual experience. Milosz describes IRS sites as “physical places... on the periphery of a divided collective memory” (2015, p.2). Interaction with IRS sites allows for a sharing of memory that is “diverse... immediate, vicarious, and, potentially, collective” (Milosz, 2015, p.163). Indigenous peoples are actively involved in the articulation of memory in and out of these spaces. The opportunity is there for collective memory to form and encompass IRS history, and the treatment of its physical remains. Collective memory will also encompass the continued impact of the settler-colonial system, and the ways in which Indigenous nations assert their self-determination at IRS sites such as those mentioned in this thesis – a challenge to the assumed control of the settler-colonial system, and the history of the IRS system itself. Efforts have been made on the part of the federal government through the IRSSA funding for memorialization as well as official apologies.

3.2 IRS Sites as Material Evidence

In the past decade, and particularly since the release of the TRC, more authors have begun to explore the role that the tangible elements of IRS sites might play in the

commemoration of IRS histories. Although Indigenous nations have been adapting, reusing, and abandoning IRS sites since the schools’ closure, the role of these sites in the memorialization of IRS history is contentious (Carr, 2009b, p.88). IRS survivors have overwhelmingly spoken for the sharing of their stories and memories, but the physical sites pose greater challenges. Carr explains these challenges this as examples of “painful and unreconciled pasts,” where the “appropriate balance—between commemoration and demolition/forgetting—is a particularly problematic and uncertain process,” due to the “wide variety of social actors (Indigenous and non-Indigenous) [who] hold differing and often conflicting opinions” (2011, p.197). Similar issues occur for commemoration of other instances of genocide and trauma, and so IRS history is not unique in this way. Consider, for example, the work that went into deciding the fate of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Germany, where both the design of the monument and the reasoning behind its installation was a topic of intense debate (Young, 2002, p. 69). Young notes that no single Holocaust memorial site can be representative of all victims, or of all victims and perpetrators (2002, p. 70). Similarly, the 139 federally-recognized IRS sites, let alone those sites which are not recognized through IRSSA but served the same purposes, each represent a different experience, framed by different Indigenous cultures, and so there is a plurality of valid interpretations and ideas for commemoration. Different nations may find, as those discussed here, that their communities seek demolition while others aim for conservation; both responses are expressions of Indigenous sovereignty.

There is the potential for IRS sites to be used by communities as commemorative spaces, and Brace describes a process of “layermaking”, where Indigenous community

members assert their own cultural heritage practices and identities through demolition or alteration and reuse of IRS sites (2012, pp.50-51). The proposal to turn part of the Mohawk Institute into a space housing an exhibition of the IRS experience is an example of this. This project initially did not move forward due to high costs, as well as disagreement among board members over whether this was an appropriate endeavour (Hovey, 2012, pp.94-95).¹⁰ Communities do not always agree that the sites should be transformed, as “the same history that gives the space power as a memorial, makes memorializing it painful for some people, and specifically for some of the people who the memorial is designed to honour” (Hovey, 2012, p.96). Memorializing IRS history is important, but doing so within the residential school site, a space of pain for survivors, may not always be appropriate.

Within memory studies, reframing sites of trauma into sites of conscience has guided accepted conservations practices and approaches (Rothberg, 2011); much of this work has been done relating to the Holocaust, yet is applicable to other sites of trauma such as IRS. For many people contemplating the use and future of IRS sites, the initial instinct for many is that IRS sites should be conserved, yet many survivors and others have conflicting opinions about whether IRS sites should be preserved for their history or destroyed to atone for the negative impact on survivors (Carr, 2011, pp. 239-240). Survivors and communities may struggle with visiting a space that has negatively impacted them especially at a young age. Additionally, like concentration camp sites, the

¹⁰ This proposal was revisited in 2013 along with the formation of the Save the Evidence Campaign, and the intention now is to restore parts of the school to look how it did when students attended.

IRS site itself is “a space for memory designed by the killers” (Young 2002, p. 74). Indigenous communities challenge this history by asserting new meaning at the site through their own memorialization efforts. Both the demolition of school sites and the reuse of buildings and sites can be understood as assertions of control and a demonstration of resilience by Indigenous communities (Brace, 2012 p.44). Indigenous communities have the ability to control the future of these sites in a way that was not possible when the IRS system was operating. Brace identifies how control over IRS sites is particularly important in British Columbia, where these sites have become symbolic of land claim efforts (2012, p.45). Indigenous communities can assert their own sovereignty over these places as they seek to do over their broader territories.

The continued presence of the residential school space provides opportunities for adaptation. These spaces can be opened to the public as sites of conscience to “communicate and affirm [people’s] collective commitment to human rights,” (Cooper-Bolam, 2012, p. 92) in anticipation of reconciliation; however, as Cooper-Bolam emphasizes, identifying these as public sites of conscience must not be privileged over their use for healing by affected communities and individuals. In her curatorial work on the former Shingwauk IRS located in Sault Ste. Marie, Cooper-Bolam identifies the desires that survivors often express:

to simultaneously 1) reclaim, occupy and overwrite places where they experienced trauma as children, and in so doing, to transform them into places of healing, and 2) to create a window into the past such that they may be interpreted as they presented in the moment of trauma – in effect, to freeze them in time (2020, p.168).

In the case of Shingwauk, the material remains of the IRS, alongside the intangible stories of witnesses, support the historical narrative of the school despite tensions with the constructed museum context (Cooper-Bolam, 2020, pp.30-31). These sites remain as testament to IRS history, but their use, supported by the wishes of survivors, adds new meaning. Cooper-Bolam emphasizes the necessity of articulation, where the presentation of an object is accompanied by its interpretation, to bring forward both evident and latent testaments (2020, pp.55-56).

IRS sites sit on the traditional territories of diverse groups of Indigenous peoples who have been forcibly relocated and divested of their inherent rights as caretakers of those territories. In the case of latent testaments, it makes sense that those Indigenous peoples would be the most qualified to bring these forward alongside the history of IRS. As the colonial state separated Indigenous peoples from their land and from their culture through the IRS system, the next step towards conciliation, particularly when it comes to challenging settler-colonialism, is reasserting Indigenous control and sovereignty over the IRS site.

For this reason, community-based tangible and intangible heritage conservation strategies are key for Indigenous communities seeking to transform the IRS site. These strategies allow the community to define their collective identity or identities, assert political power and empower cultural revitalization through conservation-related practices (Smith, 2006, p. 288). While in settler-colonial systems the emphasis is often on Western experts who are prioritized over community members (Smith, 2006, p.284), the focus in community-based heritage conservation is on local knowledge. Control over commemoration at a site of trauma, like an IRS site, can be vital to the reclamation of the

site, especially if it is returned to those who experienced the greatest harm (Cooper-Bolam, 2014, p.29). Care must be taken though, as the assumption that one party has the right to grant or cede control over a historical narrative to another group in itself may be an assertion of assumed power (Hovey, 2012, pp.69-70). One of the benefits of community-centered heritage strategies is the ability of the community to assert their own traditions and address their own needs (Brace, 2012, p.54). There is no pan-Indigenous experience that could be reflected in the treatment of IRS sites, and the experiences of survivors are as varied as Indigenous cultural treatment of memory. The process by which Indigenous communities come to choose a “strategy of destruction, reuse, redevelopment, or even abandonment” becomes more significant than the result (Brace, 2012, p.57). The effects of the IRS system, like those of the settler-colonial system more generally, are far-reaching. The treatment of the site, and the process by which this is decided, has the potential to challenge inequitable power dynamics enforced by the IRS system. These power dynamics are especially evident when considering the purpose of a memorial.

In the case of Holocaust memorialization, Young (2002) discusses how questions such as “What are the national reasons for remembrance?” or “Will [the memorial] be a place for Jews to mourn lost Jews, a place for Germans to mourn lost Jews, or a place for Jews to remember what Germans once did to them?” (p. 73) are important even if there are no answers. What is the purpose of IRS site memorialization? What are the pressures enacted on the site’s future by Indigenous people? By the federal government? By Canadians? All of these questions involve an understanding of power dynamics and the expression of sovereignty through control over heritage. The field of heritage operates

within wider social and political networks, which grants some heritage discourses more power than others (Smith, 2006, p. 276). In a settler-colonial context that means Indigenous peoples resist efforts at disempowerment from their own heritage, in similar ways to other political struggles for power and sovereignty (Smith, 2006, p. 281). The right to choose how history and memory is conserved and shared is vital. Indigenous peoples seek to control IRS memorialization in the same ways they assert their sovereignty in other areas.

As seen throughout this thesis, the strategy for identifying the appropriate outcome for a residential school site is of the utmost importance, but memory is complicated by power dynamics and politics. For example, interviews conducted by Hovey with employees of the Woodland Cultural Centre, located at the former Mohawk Institute, emphasized the WCC’s understanding that the testament of history at the site must be controlled and guided by survivors (2012, pp.64-65). Even at the WCC, however, there is some uncertainty over what the community wants to see as the future of the site (Hovey, 2012, p.96). The physical remains of the school, beyond their reuse as offices post-closure, pose a quandary for those at the WCC as they seek the appropriate representation of the building, and the experiences and memories of the school’s survivors. Societal responsibilities to remember IRS history must be balanced alongside the agency of survivors and their stories (Hovey, 2012, p.ii). Hovey acknowledges that the dominant theme throughout the Canadian national reconciliation process places the burden on all Canadians, but the onus seems to be on Indigenous communities to not only guide but conceptualize and implement reconciliation projects (2012, p.62).

3.3 Witnessing and Apologies

Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued an apology in 2008 for residential schooling in Canada, and this, along with the TRC, have been significant in shaping the ways in which Canadians have come to understand IRS history, as well as shaping expectations for the treatment of the remains of IRS. The apology acknowledged the IRS system’s intended purpose to isolate and assimilate Indigenous children, and the long-term damage this has done to survivors, their families, and Indigenous cultures (Government of Canada, 2008). Apologies like this one have become more frequent in recent years as part of some governments’ response to an increased interest in transparency as an act of contrition (Macdonald, 2015, p.16). Mackey suggests that the Canadian federal government’s apology in 2008 to IRS survivors reproduces colonial relational structures (2012, p.48).

Apologies play a role in the collective memory of nations and include individuals and groups with conflicting experiences. The formation of memory involves “ongoing processes of contestation and resistance” that seek mediation between contrasting or contradicting memories (Olick and Robbins, 1998, p.127). Apologies offered by the Government of Canada may not go far enough in offering an opportunity for dialogue (Mackey, 2012, p.56). Difficult histories require negotiated understandings between the perpetrator(s) and those who have been wronged, a process that requires dialogue. Dialogue is particularly significant when considering the conflicts that still exist between Indigenous peoples and the settler state, and what this may mean for the process of memorializing the history of IRS. The rise in historical consciousness surrounding collective justice has enabled apologies to different victims of past misdeeds (Olick,

1999, p.333), and these apologies often come for political reasons. Nation-state apologies seek to reinforce the idea of an end-point in human rights violations, which present the nation-state as a progressive and liberal on the global stage (Henderson and Wakeham, 2012, p.3).

In recent years a number of nation-states have sought to acknowledge their difficult histories as nations on the international stage now view transparency of past crimes to be a positive attribute (Macdonald, 2015, p.16). Recognition of past crimes does not necessarily result in the acknowledgment of current crimes. In the case of Canada, apologies from the federal government for the history of oppression in residential schools specifically fail to challenge the assumed sovereignty of the settler-state (Mackey, 2012). The trauma of settler-colonialism is ongoing, and cannot be solved solely through the treatment of IRS sites or through apologies, but rather must be an ongoing effort guided by Indigenous self-determination over memory; this can be accomplished by the bringing forward of IRS history and trauma into the present through an adaptation of IRS sites. The complications around IRS sites reflect larger issues of Indigenous control over Indigenous heritage, and the lack of strong relations between Indigenous nations and the federal government (Coulthard, 2014). Apologies offered for IRS history fail to challenge government authority, but Indigenous nations, through their actions including those at the IRS sites as described here, continue to resist and assert their sovereignty.

There is an increased willingness and expectation of government acknowledgement of historical damages done to different groups (Olick, 1999, p.333), even as, in Canada, most reconciliatory efforts avoid tangible issues such as the

prosecution of offenders, and the overarching question of the legitimacy of Canada’s sovereignty (Carr, 2011, p.246). There are differences in how some Indigenous and some non-Indigenous people view the history of the IRS system. Indigenous people may have first-hand knowledge of the consequences of the system and a desire to not only commemorate but to create active change; non-Indigenous people may view the IRS system as a historical event to be overcome (Milosz, 2015, p.205).

Apologies like the one offered by the Canadian federal government to Indigenous people attempt to prematurely close the chapter without committing to greater work and systemic change (Henderson and Wakeham, 2009, p.7). Henderson emphasizes that this trope of ‘closing a chapter’ constructs a particular national narrative that legitimates only a few particular historical wrongs (2012, p. 64), which Mackey asserts as placing the historical wrongdoing in the past, with no bearing on the present settler-state (2012, p.55). Mackey also suggests that the choice to apologize specifically for the IRS system was significant, as it limited reparations to the individual, unlike an apology and reparations for the theft of Indigenous land, which would require far greater structural work (2012, pp.49-50).

Henderson and Wakeham propose that the TRC’s shift toward witnessing and national healing erases the opportunity for specific justice-based reforms (2015, p.12). The other side of an apology is forgiveness, which, of course, requires acknowledgment of wrongdoing (Olick, 1999, p.344). The shift towards witnessing by non-Indigenous people of IRS as being key to improving relations does not acknowledge the needs and roles of Indigenous people beyond the witnessing process. Indeed, although witnessing can be an important step on an individual level to acknowledge the trauma inflicted on

survivors, the other side that is often left out of this process is the individual’s personal culpability to decolonization moving forward.

In Canada, IRS memorialization centers survivors, as it should, but in many ways it does not challenge non-Indigenous people as witnesses to consider the greater implications of these stories nor the ways they benefitted from settler colonialism. Carter describes the process of the testimonies given by survivors during the TRC as a spectacle rather than a healing or conciliatory process, where survivors’ “memories were assessed and ranked by onlookers who applauded, stood in silence, or spoke back” (2015, p.418). Carter proposes instead that Indigenous people can “keep the Indigenous eye squarely focused on the Indigenous actor,” which removes the necessity of recognition or witnessing from the settler-state, and asserts Indigenous sovereignty over Indigenous stories (2015, p.429). This focus provides Indigenous peoples the right to mourn and heal without falling into what Garneau criticizes as the dominant non-Indigenous idea that “public display[s] of private (Native) pain” (2012, p. 37) are necessary to national unity and healing. Instead, survivors can focus on their healing process, which may include revisiting sites of trauma like the IRS site to participate in or witness the demolition, or to visit reused IRS buildings which now serve a different purpose (Brace, 2012, pp.48-50). Survivors can exercise their own witnessing without the need for that process to be witnessed or validated by others.

The relation of a witness to a survivor should be one of support for the survivor’s healing process, where the main focus should be the survivor, and any benefit to the witness must be a secondary by-product. Centering the survivor and their community is key, but this process can create tension between Indigenous peoples’ right to mourn and

their right to give testimony to the harm done by settler-colonialization; this work needs to be done without the witness attributing victimhood as being inherent to Indigeneity (Carter, 2015, p.420). Even within the federal government’s apology, the regret expressed is that Indigenous individuals, families, and communities are now damaged, and therefore deviant (Mackey, 2012, pp.53-54). Witnesses may view the trauma as inherent to Indigeneity rather than as being a by-product of settler-colonialism, and may be resistant to the ways that this trauma is ongoing. If true conciliation was sought, greater conversations about the role of the settler-state on largely unceded territory would need to take place.

Cooper-Bolam suggests that some museums like the Canadian Museum of History or the Canadian Museum for Human Rights rely too much on images and words in their representation of residential schools, and this results in “a surplus of prescriptive knowledge and a deficit of difficult knowledge” (2020, p. 16). Visitors to these museums are granted a very specific understanding of the IRS system, without recognizing their own responsibility to this history and its present-day effects outside of the museum space. Reconciliation exhibits that do not have a critical perspective built into their development process and end result will reproduce rather than challenge colonial narratives (Garneau, 2012, p.37). The reproduction of colonial narrative emerges when Indigenous suffering is portrayed as a historical event, with an end-date and accompanying apologies, without recognition of the effects of settler-colonialism today. As Cooper-Bolam suggests, curators have the opportunity to get viewers to “[remember] differently”, a process that “resist[s] the compulsion to project ourselves into the past as victim, perpetrator, or bystander, but rather to remain in the present as inheritor.” (2020, p. 73) The “Terrible

Gift” that Cooper-Bolam proposes requires witnesses to understand not only the significance of IRS history, but also their own role as an inheritor of this history and its continued legacy.

Former IRS play a unique role as sites of difficult history, since “there [is] no clear division between the offending governments and the current ones, and no clear and undefined end to oppressive policies” (Brace, 2012, p.46). The federal government apology was not dialogical, and therefore cannot be understood as a reconciliatory act (Mackey, 2012, p.56). This process of conciliation must be undertaken as part of the witnessing process, challenging traditional power dynamics and encouraging the centering of Indigenous voices. The Terrible Gift of the IRS legacy as proposed by Cooper-Bolam recognizes “reconciliation not as an end-state, but as an unending process of negotiation” (2020, p.1) and it is with this understanding that we should consider both state apologies for residential schools, and also the ways in which these sites are witnessed and memorialized.

IRS sites, while facing unique challenges as tangible evidence of some of the more overt forms of oppression enforced by the settler-state of Canada, suffer many of the same issues as other sites of trauma. These spaces sit alongside and interact with survivor testimony, and communities have spoken about their importance as spaces of assertion of sovereignty and control. The future of IRS sites has been and will be varied as a result of the varied Indigenous communities who control the sites, and the process that is undertaken is equally vital as the outcome. Indeed, the processes that determines IRS site outcomes also involve the negotiation and creation of collective memory. Cooper-Bolam recognizes a general disinterest in the transformation of the IRS legacy,

including its physical remnants; she attributes this disinterest to the failure of institutions of public memory to convey this history as an inheritance for all Canadians, not as a failure of collective memory (2020, p.xiv). Although IRS history may contradict Canadian national narratives of benevolence to Indigenous peoples, collective memory is always negotiated through individual memory, political motivations, and physical sites. Brace suggests that “through the modification of the tangible fabric of heritage sites, through the intangible ‘process of heritage’, there is both remembering and forgetting” (2012, p.9). The memorialization at IRS sites by Indigenous nations, guided by Indigenous tradition and memory, demonstrates self-determination over the development of memory involving these spaces.

Chapter 4: Transformations of IRS Spaces over Time

IRS sites are naturally no longer in the state that they were when children attended them. Over time, these sites have undergone changes in ownership and control that have resulted in different transformations and uses. The circumstances of the four IRS here demonstrate how Indigenous nations have transformed IRS spaces during and after their use as IRS. These former IRS sites are examples of how choices have been made to conserve or demolish buildings and infrastructure, taking into account both historical context and potential future use, guided by Indigenous priorities and decision-making principles. I use these cases to demonstrate how transformation has always been present at IRS sites, and the work of the Tseshah, Haudenosaunee, Ktunaxa, and Dene reaffirms their self-determination in their chosen transformation and also how they come to these choices.

The choice to demolish or conserve a site by an Indigenous nation represents the nation's understanding that something within that space is worthy of memorialization. The Tseshah, Haudenosaunee, Ktunaxa, and Dene all included some form of commemoration in the spaces they inherited and modified, regardless of whether the community explicitly preserved the IRS buildings or not. The memorialization that occurred within the IRS sites studied always involved the transformation of spaces – a testament to the importance of tangible heritage, survivor testimonies and archival evidence to the formation of collective memory. IRS sites are evolving and changing spaces where Indigenous communities and survivors can assert sovereignty, negotiate memory and transform the site physically and culturally to suit their needs.

Once control over a given school was transferred to local communities, transformation of the site continued to serve as a form of resistance as these communities enacted self-determination over the space and their territories more generally. For nations like the Tseshaht and the Dene, the demolition of the IRS buildings reflected the past transformation of the site through fire. The Tseshaht, for example, made the final decision to close Alberni IRS, citing its role in breaking up family structures (Titian, 2018). The Tseshaht demolished many of the Alberni IRS buildings and installed traditional art pieces in their place (Titian, 2018). Given the opportunity to assert its sovereignty, the nation terminated the functioning of an institution that was causing them harm and removed most of its remains. The commemorative art pieces came to replace IRS buildings – physical reminders of individual and collective trauma. For sites like Alberni IRS, the archive stands as an additional testament, containing documentation of the former incarnations of this, and other IRS sites, that may no longer exist physically.

Once the schools closed, the next step for communities like the Tseshaht, Haudenosaunee, Ktunaxa and the Dene was to continue the site transformation, guided directly by their sovereignty. For some communities, the IRS buildings came to represent the IRS system as a whole, and their demolition or conservation came to represent larger themes of Indigenous resistance. This chapter outlines the ways in which these schools and IRS sites were transformed over time to demonstrate resistance to assimilation and, eventually, sovereignty over space and place.

4.1 Fires at Beauval Indian Residential School and the Mohawk Institute

Transformation of IRS sites and buildings has not been limited to post-closure periods. During the years of their operation, the Mohawk Institute (1885-1970), Alberni IRS (1893-1973), and Beauval IRS (1860-1995) all burned down at different times. The fires that occurred at these sites were both unintentional – the result of poor conditions at the school – as well as a form of resistance against the site by students. The events of fire at the IRS acted, and continue to act, as transformative forces that deeply impact survivors and students. The impact of the fires on survivors, alongside the voices of elders in both communities and local traditions, guided each nation’s decision to conserve or demolish the respective IRS buildings.

Fire – an immensely dangerous transformative force – was one of the most frequent threats to IRS buildings, and in some cases students used fires as an act of resistance, in addition to other forms of micro-resistance to the settler-colonial system such as running away and through small rebellions against strict rules. The history of these fires and the conditions in which they occurred contributed to the memorialization of a given site, constructed by and among community members and school survivors. An important consideration is the ways in which the transformations of these IRS buildings were represented in media targeted to non-Indigenous audiences when compared with the ways they were understood and experienced by community members. The contrasting representations in the media of these moments of transformation reflect the colonial context in which these changes took place, and contemporary attitudes towards IRS and Indigenous people more broadly in Canada. In this section of the thesis I use two case studies of fires at IRS to demonstrate the ways these fires transformed the schools, as

well as the contrasting interpretations of the fires, their victims and survivors in the media.

Transformation of the IRS buildings through fire were frequent, and these events stand out in memories and testimonies from survivors (Shield, 2018). Of the 223 fires at residential schools identified by the TRC, 53 completely destroyed the schools, with 37 of those fires suspected or proven to be set intentionally (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 4, 2015, p.75). One of the earliest documented fires at an IRS took place at the Mohawk Institute in 1903 and was set intentionally as an act of resistance by students. Only a few days after a small blaze had been extinguished on the roof of the Mohawk Institute (caused by a defective chimney), the school burned down leaving “only the walls standing” (“Blaze at Brantford”, Apr. 20, 1903).

The articles which detailed the fire at the Mohawk Institute were written by and for a non-Indigenous audience. In reporting on the fire that razed the Mohawk Institute, *The Globe* reported that the cause of the fire was either the defective chimney or a defective electrical wire (“Blaze at Brantford”, Apr. 20, 1903). However, in July of 1903, after further investigation and a confession from one of the students, five male students were charged and convicted of arson (“Boys started fires”, June 23, 1903; “Firebugs sentenced”, Jul. 21, 1903). In this case it is important to recognize the bias against Indigenous people at the time both within the legal system and in media representations: the accused boys were quite young, with the youngest being only 12 years old (“Boys started fires”, June 23 1903). While the school’s construction resulted in a high likelihood of fire, in this case it was ostensibly students’ action against the site that resulted in its destruction. There is anecdotal evidence from other schools about students planning to set

fires, telling other children to be prepared to get out (Shield, 2018); significantly, the boys involved in setting fire to the Mohawk Institute assisted in carrying items out from the school (“Boys started fires”, June 23, 1903). As the fire at the Mohawk Institute resulted in no casualties, it is possible that other students may have been warned. While the boys who set the fire at the Mohawk Institute stated that they didn’t set it out of a grudge toward anyone, but simply wanted to see the buildings burn (“Boys started fire”, June 23 1903), their actions still fit into larger patterns of resistance against the buildings of the IRS.

A contrasting example of the impact of a fire on an IRS and the representation of the fire in the media is the 1927 fire at the Beauval Indian Residential School at the Beauval Catholic Mission; this was the third time this building had caught fire since 1920 (Niessen, 2017, p.46). This fire, the result of building inadequacies, was devastating due to the school’s isolation and inaccessibility; this isolation also resulted in fragmentary initial reports on the fire in the media (“Twenty lives lost”, Sept 22, 1927; “Little community on Northern Lake”, Sept 23, 1927). A short time later, *The Globe and Mail* described the circumstances of the fire in graphic detail:

The fire broke out at midnight in the boys dormitory....The leaping flames and their reflection from the waters of the lake lit up a scene of indescribable horror. The children who made their way to safety from the blazing building huddled in the circle of light and heard the screams of those trapped in the flames (“Twenty lives lost”, Sept 22, 1927).

The fire resulted in the deaths of 19 Indigenous boys between the ages of 7 and 12, as well as a nun employed at the school.¹¹ The newspaper article, presumably written by and for a non-Indigenous audience, went into explicit detail: “When the fire finally flickered out, the charred corpses were found piled along the main stairway and under wreckage in the dormitory hallway” (“Little community on Northern Lake”, Sept 23, 1927). This report on the fire has shock appeal for the readers due to images of carnage and loss; there is no acknowledgement of the human suffering of parents and communities at the loss of these young boys.

Despite this lack of media acknowledgment of community loss, an on-site memorial to the victims of the fire was installed and remains on the site, which includes deceased students’ names and ages.¹² The listing of students’ names and ages contrasts the memorialization of these children’s lives with the dehumanized language used in the newspaper. These children who are unidentified and lifeless in the newspaper article – whose bodies are framed as “charred corpses” – are remembered very differently in the memorial, where each student is named and identified by age, as the people who knew them would later remember them. These children had relationships with each other, with the surviving students, and with their families and communities. Instead of presenting these victims as people whose deaths would have deeply affected their families, the newspaper article addressing this fire instead aims for shock value.

¹¹ The nun who passed away in the fire was Sister Lea Bellerose, whose age is not known but who is identified as a “native of North Saskatchewan” (native here meaning that she was from North Saskatchewan, not that she was Indigenous). (“Twenty lives lost as lonely mission is swept by fire”, Sept 22, 1927)

¹² Attempts to contact English River First Nation regarding the installation of this monument were unsuccessful, possibly due to the circumstances of COVID-19 surrounding writing this thesis.



Figure 12 Beauval IRS Memorial, front. [Photo]. Shattering the silence: The hidden history of Indian residential schools in Saskatchewan. <http://www2.uregina.ca/education/saskindianresidentialschools/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Leroux-Beauval-Indian>



Figure 13 Beauval IRS Memorial, back. [Photo]. Shattering the silence: The hidden history of Indian residential schools in Saskatchewan. <http://www2.uregina.ca/education/saskindianresidentialschools/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/Leroux-Beauval-Indian>

Given the erasure of Indigenous names and languages from a wide array of historical, political, and commemorative discourses, it is important to reproduce the children’s names as inscribed in stone at the site here:¹³

Marcel Lemaigre (age 7)	Freddy Bishop (age 11)
Jimmy Iron (age 8)	Antoine Durocher (age 11)
Alex Opikokew (age 8)	Patrice Grosventre (age 11)
Simon Sayers (Sayese) (age 8)	Frank Kimbley (age 11)
Raphael Corrigan (age 9)	Alfred Laliberte (age 11)
Jules Coulionner (age 9)	Moise Lariviere (age 11)
Samuel Gardiner (age 9)	Zephrin Morin (age 11)
Roderique Iron (age 10)	Albert Sylvestre (age 11)
Joseph Sayers (Sayese) (age 10)	Ernest Bishop (age 12).
Thomas Alcrow (age 11)	

Highly specific and personal, the on-site memorial links the deaths of these children to the oppressive character of the broader IRS system, opening the dedication with the acknowledgement that “many Aboriginal children were forced from their homes and institutionalized at the Beauval Mission School” (Niessen, 2017). A curving black stone, the memorial depicts an eagle mid-flight, in front of a cross, with a sun behind it (Figure 11). The back of the memorial stone features a poem entitled “O Great Spirit” and has another image of an eagle, this time depicted in front of a tree (Figure 12). An

¹³ The exact numbers of attendees at the school was unclear, but it is assumed that this was about half of the school’s population and consisted of all of the boys who attended.

Indigenous-led interpretation of the tragedy, in the form of the memorial, humanizes the children and has more relevance to the community’s need to remember this event. The fire destroyed the school and the deaths of those children impacted their families, other students, the nuns who ran the school and also the Indigenous nations they came from, which the memorial text acknowledges, dedicating the monument to those “affected by this tragedy” (Niessen, 2017).

The IRS buildings were places of containment, assertions of settler-colonial control. Their poor conditions were a by-product of the neglectful circumstances of the IRS system, and resulted in numerous deaths like those at Beauval. The specter of the IRS continues to play a role in the memory of survivors, and the power of fire to transform the space is not forgotten. One Beauval IRS survivor, Mervin Mirasty, gave testimony to the TRC and said of the school that “to this day... I’ve always wanted to go back and burn the place, and I never did” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report Volume 5, 2015, p.185). Fire is recognized as a transformative force, used in this case for resistance, survival, and self-determination. Residential schools have always been sites of contestation, physical spaces that represent assertions of settler-colonial power over Indigenous peoples and Indigenous peoples’ resistance to this power.

After the fire at Beauval in 1927, which had the highest death toll of any recorded fire at an IRS, the Department of Indian Affairs implemented required monthly fire drills at all schools, although not all schools complied (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 4, 2015, p.81). At Beauval, there were several unsuccessful attempts by students to burn the school through the 1950s and 60s (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 1, 2015, p.304). Students felt the need to resist the IRS in whatever way they

could within the means available to them, and fire was an effective transformative force. The resistance of students through setting fires, challenging the power dynamics of the IRS space, can be likened to the eventual shift in power to Indigenous communities who also sought to transform the sites, sometimes through demolition. While the school operated, Dene students at Beauval sought to resist its presence, and the Dene community continued to resist the historical oppression associated with the site, both through attempted, and later, successful controlled destruction.

Sentiment toward IRS changed and the federal government took full control over residential schools in 1969 (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Volume 1, p.9). This change of ownership enabled the transfer of control over IRS sites from the churches that ran the schools to local communities. Now, Indigenous nations had the opportunity to assert their sovereignty over the physical remains of the IRS space, rather than through small-scale acts of resistance by students. In June 1970, the Mohawk Institute was closed as it was costly to maintain, and the land was transferred to the local Six Nations reserve (“Iroquois separatists keep lock”, Jun. 29, 1970; The Anglican Church of Canada, n.d.; Mohawk Institute IRS School Narrative, 2013). Later, in 1978, the land on which the Beauval IRS sat was transferred to the English River Band (Beauval IRS School Narrative, 2005, p.7). These two nations now had the opportunity to decide how to transform the former IRS sites, and to assert their authority over spaces that had previously been models of settler-colonial oppression.

The Dene and the Haudenosaunee expressed different needs for their IRS sites, took the opportunity to implement changes differently, and as a result, the IRS sites’ paths diverged. In 1983, the Dene Meadow Lake Tribal Council assumed administrative

control over Beauval IRS, which remained open with hopes to transform it into “an educational centre used by the whole district” (Guest, 1983, p.9). The Tribal Council asserted control over the former IRS as a centralized educational space, which was necessary for their diverse and geographically distanced communities. The Council took control over the site as a space of future education as opposed to colonial disempowerment disguised as education. The control of the community transformed the school from one that contained Indigenous children regardless of the wishes of their parents, to one that was guided by the needs of the Indigenous community. Rather than a place of containment, the school became a place of self-determination.

For over a decade, the school continued to serve the community until its needs changed, and in 1995, the former Beauval IRS was demolished with survivors present (Niessen, 2017, p.46). The demolition of the physical remains of the school acted as the Dene’s assertion of what they chose to remember at the site; its bricks were preserved as physical remnants of the site. The owners of the nearby Frazer’s Museum, now closed, witnessed the demolition and took a truckload of bricks to the museum (Legacy of Hope, 2014, p.26). The buildings were not important to the community members’ memory, but the detritus had potential as an object of memory. The desires of the community guided the memorialization, which, in this case, did not require the conservation of the buildings. Instead the community chose to create a memorial stone and to conserve the bricks in a separate location.

The Haudenosaunee at Six Nations took a different approach to memorialization that ultimately included plans for the conservation of the former IRS. In 1972, the non-profit Woodland Cultural Centre (WCC) was founded at the former Mohawk Institute

under the direction of the Association of Iroquois and Allied Indians, with an evolving collection that includes research materials, artefacts, and art (Woodland Cultural Centre, n.d.). The site became one where Indigenous culture was emphasized – a powerful statement given the fact that the site was originally meant to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the settler-colonial culture and social frameworks. The community asserted the stories of survivors and the history of the site, for their comprehensive memorial process, and at the same time used the space for their needs of cultural development and preservation. In 2013, the former Mohawk Institute was found to be suffering from extensive damage caused by a leak in the roof, and several community consultations conducted by the WCC discovered overwhelming community support for its preservation (Woodland Cultural Centre, n.d.). The center responded with the “Save the Evidence” campaign, striving to raise funds for the conservation of the school for the purpose of cultural use and education. Haudenosaunee community members chose to conserve the school, deciding that the site’s potential as a mnemonic space and as a museum were of more value to the community than engaging in a process of demolition. The poor condition of the school was previously used to disguise an attempt to burn it, but in the present, the community decided that the condition should be improved, and the building needed to be conserved.

I do not present these two cases to suggest that an accidental fire at an IRS that resulted in the deaths of Indigenous children should be likened to the efforts of Indigenous children to burn down their school. Rather, the buildings that made up the school have always played a role in the student experience, and so has the transformation of these spaces. Additionally, the media historically has had an agenda of normalizing

IRS. The depiction of the accidental Beauval IRS fire dehumanized the victims, and the depiction of the intentional Mohawk IRS fire depicted the students as criminal. Both serve to justify the suppression of Indigenous culture and sovereignty as necessary, since Indigenous people are presented as “less than” and in need of the guidance from both the settler-colonial state and the IRS system itself.

For better or for worse, at both Beauval and the Mohawk Institute, fire was a transformative force, affecting the buildings and the students. These buildings and spaces, post-closure, continue to play a role in the memory of survivors and communities. The transformations described above moved beyond fire and its effects, as former students and communities found ways to transform spaces through assertions of self-determination. At Beauval, the stone to commemorate the students who passed away there and the bricks that were saved from the demolition are both examples of Indigenous people commemorating the IRS outside the practices of tangible conservation. At the Mohawk Institute, the community decided that they would conserve the school for the purpose of further use as a site of commemoration, gathering, and cultural sharing. Both sites are examples of self-determination through transformation and memorialization of IRS by Indigenous communities. The accurate expression of Indigenous cultural meaning in heritage projects emerges when communities like the Haudenosaunee and Dene maintain control over those heritage projects (Smith, 2006, p. 297), something that was also of key importance to community groups at St. Eugene and Alberni described in the section below.

4.2 Elders’ Voices Shaping IRS Outcomes

Expressions of sovereignty in IRS transformation often are supported by the reclamation of Indigenous traditions, in which knowledge keepers and elders play a key role. Knowledge keepers not only protect and develop Indigenous historical, cultural, and scientific knowledge, but they also guide its day-to-day implementation. Here I show how the words of community elders influenced contrasting decisions about how the local IRS buildings would be transformed in the communities that housed St. Eugene IRS and Alberni IRS.

Early planning for the future of the former St. Eugene Mission was guided by the words of Elder Mary Paul, who in 1984 stated that “since it was within the St. Eugene Mission School that the culture of the Kootenay Indian was taken away, it should be within that building that it is returned” (“The Wisdom of Mary Paul”, n.d.). The Ktunaxa Kinbasket Tribal Council used these words to guide the revitalization and adaptive reuse of the former St. Eugene’s Mission School into the golf resort and casino it is today. Listening to the words of knowledge keepers, and asserting their will over the physical site provided an opportunity for analogous assertions of cultural and territorial sovereignty. For the Ktunaxa, memorialization of St. Eugene included the site as a key element of the transformational and commemorative processes.

In order to transform the St. Eugene IRS into a golf resort and casino, the Ktunaxa Kinbasket Tribal Council had to raise forty million dollars for the restoration and transformation of the site while contending with the opinions of other band members who wanted the site demolished (St. Eugene Golf Resort and Casino, n.d.), 2020). St. Eugene Golf Resort and Casino, in the *About Us, Culture and Heritage* portion of their website,

acknowledges the originally-divided opinions of community members, and explains that prior to the referendum that allowed the Ktunaxa to move forward with the restoration of the school, consensus was required which “began with family visits to the school, ‘kitchen table’ talks and two years of internal marketing to over 1,500 members of the five bands who share the 130 hectares of reserve land” (St. Eugene Golf Resort and Casion, n.d.). The Ktunaxa had specific visions for St. Eugene, and foremost among them was a process that would ensure community members felt heard in determining the future of a space that once rendered survivors powerless.

The idea that the IRS site is key to the memorialization process is by no means universal to Indigenous communities. The guiding words from Mary Paul stand in sharp contrast to the words of other community leaders regarding other residential school sites in British Columbia. For example, at a healing ceremony held in 2018, where the Tseshaht nation welcomed survivors to the site of the former Alberni IRS, Les Sam, former elected chief said, “Our nation didn’t have any say in having a residential school in our backyard and what they left us with is a large gaping wound in our territory” (Hamelin, 2018). The installation of Alberni IRS caused pain to the Tseshaht nation, to survivors, and to the land itself. Demolition acts as an opportunity to heal that wound, to remove the space of pain and the reminder of its violence, and this guided the Tseshaht nation’s decision to destroy elements of the former residential school.

Upon Alberni IRS’ closure in 1973, which was widely advocated for by the Tseshaht community, Larry Wight, then-regional director for Indian Affairs, expressed that there would be no problem in transferring the property wholesale over to the thirteen nations in that district as reserve property in common (Giesbrecht, 1973). The remaining

five buildings were leased in 1975 as administrative offices to the Tseshaht Band (Alberni School IRS Narrative, 2004). The destruction of part of the school and two student residences (Caldwell Hall and Ross Hall) was first proposed in 1974 when the federal government announced it would no longer maintain the buildings (The United Church of Canada, n.d.; Broadland, 1974). The choice was made at that time to demolish three of the five buildings, and the District Council would move their office into Peake Hall, one of the other residences (Broadland, 1974).¹⁴ The demolition could be considered a way of healing the ‘wound’ left by the IRS history, and a triumph over a history that sought to disempower the Tseshaht as well other nations whose children attended the school. It wouldn’t be until 1980 that the federal government acknowledged long-held Tseshaht claims to the land that the school sat on, and that it was added to the Tsahaheh reserve (The United Church, n.d., Alberni School IRS Narrative, 2005). The site then came under the control of the community, and the process began for the community to determine the site’s future.

In 2009, the Tseshaht nation welcomed survivors from all nations to the school site for the purpose of a ceremonial destruction of Peake Hall (The United Church of Canada, n.d.). Although some advocated for the dorm buildings to be conserved, Les Sam suggested that the demolition would be an opportunity for healing (Atkinson, 2009). The Tseshaht ultimately decided on the site’s future and were able to use the demolition process to enact their traditions and their survivors’ needs.

¹⁴ At this time, it is likely they only demolished two of the five buildings; as of 2019 the boys’ dormitory and the gymnasium are still standing. (Titian and Plummer, 2019)

The communities whose lands hosted these IRS have chosen different strategies, but both were community-guided approaches, foregrounding the voices of respected elders and knowledge keepers. Although the revitalization outcomes were different, the Tseshaht and the Ktunaxa both asserted sovereignty over their respective former IRS sites, and challenged the power dynamics that existed during each school’s tenure. Their commemoration of IRS experiences also differed, but both processes are still ultimately about commemoration. While each community transformed their respective IRS buildings and surrounding landscape in a different way – Alberni IRS through ceremonial destruction and St. Eugene Mission through restoration – the outcomes for commemoration and sovereignty were paradoxically similar. The Tseshaht and the Ktunaxa both memorialized their IRS experiences at the site, prioritizing their cultures and people. In contrast to settler-colonial heritage conservation discourses, the physical remains of the IRS played a role only as far as their conservation or demolition suited the communities’ needs.

4.3 Commemoration at Mohawk Institute and St. Eugene Mission School

The previous section contrasted the guidance of elders at the sites of Alberni IRS and St. Eugene that resulted in different memorialization strategies. Here I consider instead the similarities in memorialization strategies used at St. Eugene and at the Mohawk Institute. In both these cases, building remains were conserved, although the ultimate use of those remains are quite contrasting based on the needs of each community. The Haudenosaunee and the Ktunaxa have used these sites to memorialize IRS within the former IRS buildings, with their own communities deeply guiding the

conservation and ultimate strategies for building reuse: St. Eugene now operates as a major job creator and economic engine for the Ktunaxa people in the form of a golf resort and casino, and the Mohawk Institute showcases Haudenosaunee culture and history.

The Mohawk Institute embodies memorialization of the greater IRS experience through the presence of the Woodland Cultural Centre, as well as through efforts to restore the IRS building. Thus, the residential school site has benefitted from considerable conservation and restoration work. Money collected through the “Save the Evidence” campaign helped repair the roof, upgrade the mechanical infrastructure, and its organizers are in the process of identifying how the community wants to restore the building, expecting to complete this process in 2020 (Koblun, 2017; “City councillors back \$100,000”, 2019). The WCC and the museum it houses provide the local community, both Indigenous and non-Indigenous, with the opportunity to come and learn more about the Haudenosaunee people, their relationship with the federal government of Canada, and the history of settler-colonialism. The WCC frequently hosts events showcasing Indigenous arts and culture, making use of the large property the school sits on.

Like the Mohawk Institute, St. Eugene sits on a large property that has been used to accommodate a golf course, casino, and hotel. The Ktunaxa Kinbasket Tribal Council chose to maintain control of the St. Eugene site rather than lease it to a developer, and the council received grants and loans from the federal government leading up to the opening of the resort in 2002 (Stueck, 2002). In 2004, when faced with bankruptcy, Samson Cree Nation and Rama First Nation entered into an economic partnership with the Ktunaxa (“Ktunaxa nation regains ownership”, 2017; Milner, 2017), supporting and expressing

solidarity with other Indigenous peoples. As of 2017, the Ktunaxa Nation successfully negotiated a buy-out, and they are once again the sole owner of the St. Eugene Golf Resort and Casino (Milner, 2017). Early on, the site’s history was credited as a draw for tourism, and the Ktunaxa culture was intended to be a major presence on the site (Stueck, 2002). St. Eugene’s Golf Resort and Casino employs a large number of people, many of whom are Ktunaxa community members, and is a key economic player in the area (“Ktunaxa nation regains ownership”, 2017; Milner, 2017). In 2017, the St. Eugene IRS installed a memorial called “The Children” in honour of survivors of the IRS system (Rodgers, 2017). A less frequently visited part of St. Eugene is the interpretive centre in the basement of the site, a place for guests to learn about Ktunaxa culture and the impacts of residential schooling (Carr, 2011, p.216). St. Eugene IRS has blended their reuse of the site for tourism with an assertion of their traditions and the need for historical interpretation and memorialization.

4.4 IRS in the Archive

The archive is an important source for memorialization work and it often complements the IRS memorialization efforts. Archival footage that documents sites’ transformations over time show multiple IRS incarnations of the sites as well as shifts in attitudes towards them. For example, the Mohawk Institute, which was once burned down by students, is now conserved by the Haudenosaunee as part of the memorialization of IRS history. Contrasting archival images that show a given site’s transformation over time – such as incarnations of Beauval IRS that burnt down and were replaced prior to its demolition and the different incarnations of the Mohawk Institute – become key to

memorialization of the IRS past at that site. Witnessing these sites, as those who seek to engage in this history must do, means recognizing the myriad changes that each site has undergone, specifically those changes that Indigenous communities have enacted over time.

Images of IRS during their operation present a mundane government-sanctioned violence, often enacted by non-Indigenous workers whose names are lost to time. Carol Payne, in her work on the archive of the National Film Board Still Photography Division, describes the Board’s work as “the country’s image bank, producing a governmentally endorsed portrait of Canadian society” throughout the period of 1941 to 1984 (2013, p.3). When we consider the archival images of residential school sites, particularly those taken while the schools were still open, we can see how the project of assimilation was presented to Canadians and the world. Library and Archives Canada holds many images of IRS sites, sometimes mislabeled, and often disembodied from the greater context of these sites today.

As Susan Sontag (2002) writes, “photographs alter and enlarge our notions of what is worth looking at and what we have a right to observe” (p.1). Images of the IRS were framed through the federal government’s vested interest in the IRS project being viewed as a positive force, justifying its role as part of the assimilation project that sought to erase Indigenous sovereignty. As a paternalistic project, the residential school system asserted the Crown’s authority over Indigenous people, and particularly over their children. While the schools were spaces of near total institutionalized surveillance (Carr, 2009, pp.122-123), the archival images documenting their functioning and habitation can be considered an inversion of this narrative and a new form of surveillance of that

system. The power dynamic has shifted, and the present-day viewer may be able to distance themselves from the damages done as historical events. Library and Archives Canada, where the images of IRS in this thesis were found, does not encourage a critical eye toward the context of these sites in its holding of memory, nor does it position these images in relation to the current status of the lands on which these images were taken.

There is also an element of witnessing when viewing archival images of the sites. In these images the schools were presented as vehicles of civilization, yet subsequent images of a school’s demolition or transformation present an opportunity to acknowledge the history of IRS sites and the sovereignty of Indigenous nations. The images in the archive itself are often not closely associated with one another. The path of these schools from places of state-sanctioned violence to spaces where Indigenous peoples assert themselves despite ongoing pressures must be stitched together by a researcher. This disjointed narrative about IRS as presented in the images held by Library and Archives Canada limits the efficacy of the archive as a space of holding memory as it is not fully accessible nor is a full story presented.¹⁵

The archive, even national ones like Library and Archives Canada which are often viewed as impartial and reputable, should be viewed as holding information that is often decontextualized and dependent on the agendas of the people who took the photos and constructed the archive. Consider the different portrayals of the schools in this thesis. The

¹⁵ I wrote this thesis during the early COVID-19 quarantine in 2020. My research was restricted to only online accessible information, not the physical materials that Library and Archives Canada holds. This was a restriction that I had not anticipated but I was still privileged enough to be able to access this archive and others, such as the Globe and Mail, which were only available through the university library. A layperson, particularly one who lives outside of Ottawa may struggle even more to access this information, further restricting the efficacy of the archive as a place of memory.

Mohawk Institute, being a centrally-located and long-running school with close ties to the nearby Six Nations reserve, is presented frequently in the archive and includes multiple images and documents about the school’s tenure. Smaller schools that were more isolated, such as Beauval IRS, have a far more limited presence in the archive. Neither of these schools should be viewed as more important than the other but their differing presence in the archive may grant one more attention than the other.

What becomes clear is the necessity for critical use of the archive and the many possible different interpretations of archival images, as “photographic meaning is informed but never entirely constrained by the original intent of the maker or guiding institution” (Payne, 2013, p.167). Images are interpreted beyond the original meaning intended by the photographer. Payne and Thomas acknowledge the archive as a self-enacted and often unchallenged authority over marginalized voices, grounded in its supposed neutrality (2002, p.114). The images of IRS used to supplement this thesis are not neutral and should be understood in relation to the people who lived within the IRS spaces and experienced the trauma of this state-sanctioned system of assimilation.

Archival images of schools may be understood by some as visual reminders of the difficult relations between Indigenous peoples and the Crown. Haudenosaunee photographer Jeff Thomas uses the archive as a space for dialogue with his own work (2002, p.120). The space of the residential school site continues to change, with or without the buildings, and should be considered alongside archival images. This does not mean that the site must be preserved and visited in order to be understood, but rather that the archival image serves a different purpose alongside the physical site. Archival images

of IRS when viewed alongside the sites today allow the viewer to blur the lines between past, present, and future.

The history of IRS sites remains even if the buildings are demolished, as Milosz (2015) explains:

When an architectural demarcation is erased, its impression nonetheless persists as a variegated echo. Its forms may be oriented towards the past, such as representations in documents filed away in an archive, or the memories of those who once inhabited it (p.131).

The IRS continues in the collective memory of communities and survivors through the physical remains of the school, through the archival images, testimonials from participants in the TRC and through the spirits of children who passed away there. As the sites are transformed, they may not look the same as they did when they operated, but they continue to serve an important role in the memorialization of IRS. Indigenous peoples may completely transform former IRS as part of their needs, but this does not mean a given site's role as a place of memory is erased.

Communities that chose to demolish their IRS buildings, as in the case of Beauval IRS and Alberni IRS, have different opportunities to assert their ideas of the site's future. New meaning and memory are overlaid, as the physical building is removed, leaving its impression in the memories of survivors and images in the archives. In cases where the building is maintained, like the Mohawk Institute and St. Eugene Mission, the sites serve new purposes for the community. All of these sites have some element of commemoration in a range of forms, demonstrating the diversity of Indigenous cultures and traditions, as well as the diversity of memory in these spaces. Archival images and

remnants of each site provide historical documentation that shapes our understanding of the history of the sites and thus play different and often interacting roles in the ways in which people come to understand and relate to these sites. Transformation of IRS sites occurred consistently throughout their history, and the archive contains the memory of former incarnations. Importantly, what is often missing in the detached documentation of archives and building remnants themselves are the stories of agency and sovereignty that were enacted by students’ and community members throughout the history and transformation of each IRS site.

Chapter 5: Taming the “Monster”: Indigenous Self-Determination

Over Memorialization

What does it mean for an IRS site to be demolished? To be conserved? The IRS building as a specter, and as a space, shapes the imagery and memory of the IRS system for survivors, their families and Canadians more broadly. To ensure that residential schools are memorialized on a national scale, the TRC called for the creation of publicly accessible monuments to residential school survivors and victims in provincial capital cities and in the national capital of Ottawa (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Summary, 2015). These calls, when viewed in tandem with efforts to conserve residential schools, demonstrate that there is a desire for a tangible memorialization of this history. Although the case studies discussed have varied widely in their locations and individual circumstances, the physical site of the IRS, and the buildings that each school comprised, have significance in the minds of survivors and communities. The space for memorialization created by the Haudenosaunee, Dene, Tseshaht, and Ktunaxa within their respective IRS sites, as this chapter will discuss, demonstrates the self-determination of these nations. This chapter highlights the contradiction of IRS sites as spaces of violence and also as spaces of self-determination, and how memorialization work can seek to balance this. The treatment of IRS sites by Indigenous communities, whether being conserved physically or demolished, and the memorialization that occurs at these sites, will influence the ways in which future and current generations understand IRS history and the space of the IRS.

Indigenous communities exercise their authority over IRS sites, asserting their sovereignty and building memory at the IRS. The Dene of English River First Nation chose to demolish Beauval IRS and to retain a memorial stone at the site. This choice reflects the needs of the community and the testimony of survivors, who expressed a desire to see the building destroyed (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Final Report Volume 5, 2015, p.185). At the Mohawk Institute, on the other hand, the WCC seeks to conserve the buildings of the school for their power alongside the testimony of survivors (Hovey, 2012). The outcome of demolition or conservation matters less than the ability of the nation to assert their sovereignty in the development of memory at the site.

Sovereignty is hard won by Indigenous nations, and effective memorialization for IRS history involves acknowledging the power dynamics inherent to the settler-colonial system. IRS history is a difficult history and memorialization efforts have involved conflict as IRS memory is negotiated. Challenging settler-colonial power dynamics and centering Indigenous voices contributes to the IRS space as one of conciliation, where Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can come together to build relationships. This chapter will demonstrate the adaptation of IRS spaces into ones of memorialization that challenge the historic power dynamics of that space and assert Indigenous culture and political needs. This allows for a more robust memory of IRS that acknowledges ongoing inequities and incorporates the physical space.

5.1 The IRS Space as a Venue of Indigenous Art and Culture

Each of the sites examined in this thesis have been guided very clearly by the Indigenous nations whose territories the IRS operated on, and communities have

transformed former IRS from spaces that sought to erase Indigenous cultures, to ones that champion them. These processes have faced complications and pressures leading up to the current state of the sites, which should be understood as not static but as spaces of change. The Ktunaxa were very explicit that determining the future of St. Eugene required work to ensure that all community members had come to a consensus (St. Eugene Golf Resort and Casino, n.d.) and the Woodland Cultural Centre asserted the same about the Mohawk Institute, in the case of a referendum where 98% of respondents wanted the site conserved (Bein and Iqbal, 2019). These nations explicitly desired consensus in the future of the IRS site, taking the opportunity to assert not only their self-determination as nations, but the power of survivors and relatives who had been made powerless in that space.

To leave IRS sites out of memorialization processes would be a loss as these sites were integral to the student experience. As historically-meaningful spaces, these sites have been transformed differently to respond to needs and wishes expressed by local Indigenous communities. Consider Beauval IRS, which operated as the Beauval Indian Education Centre for several years following its transfer to the control of the Meadow Lake Tribal Council (Niessen, 2017). The building went through several incarnations in its tenure as an IRS; as detailed in chapter 4, the building deteriorated to such a state that it caught fire, killing nineteen children, burning to the ground. It exists now only in the archive, in the stories of survivors, and memorialized at the site. The community chose to reclaim the space and take away the power it held in the minds of survivors by demolishing the buildings.

Many of the efforts described in the case studies here have blended Indigenous traditions with the physical space of the IRS, by either operating out of the building as in the Mohawk Institute, or in the ceremonial destruction of the site like Peake Hall at Alberni IRS. The Mohawk Institute is an example of an IRS site that has been transformed into a museum, supported by the Woodland Cultural Centre to showcase Haudenosaunee culture and history in the Grand River area. As an organization that occupies the space adjacent to the Mohawk Institute building, the WCC acts as a memorial to the IRS system as it showcases Indigenous art and history, educates visitors, and acts as a place of return and healing for survivors (Hovey, 2012, pp.88-89). Milosz discusses how the adaptive reuse of the Mohawk Institute by the WCC has given “the space of the former institution... meanings that diverge from its original intentions,” (2015, p.66) and so here the opportunity is provided for the creation of new meaning and memory for the site grounded in Haudenosaunee tradition. In this same vein, the Legacy of Hope Foundation in Saskatchewan uses bricks from the Beauval School alongside archival images as part of their activities to challenge participants to think about the history of residential schools (Legacy of Hope Foundation, 2014, p.26).

At Alberni, in 2010, following the demolition of the Peake Hall residence, a totem pole commemorating the political and artistic work of Alberni survivor and artist Art Thompson was erected (Winks, 2009). At that time, Tseshah Chief Councillor Les Sam said “the Nuu-chah-nulth people are calling on the government to build a health and wellness centre on the site of the old residential school” (Winks, 2009), and a longhouse

was in fact constructed (Titian, 2018).¹⁶ In 2014, an art installation called “Strength from Within” was installed to honour survivors and those children who did not make it out of the school (Steel, 2014). Another totem pole, carved by Gordon Dick and Erich Glendale, including a portion honoring Art Thompson, was erected in 2015 (Ahtsik Gallery, 2015). Gordon Dick also attended and participated in the demolition of the school (Ahtsik Gallery, 2015). The Tseshah community ultimately determined what they wanted from the site, and that was to use art and traditional ceremony in that space. The community supported traditional practices in recognition of the site’s history, and these efforts were assertions of the community’s self-determination over the space’s future transformations.

Survivors and communities can return to the IRS site as part of their own healing processes. Although much of the Alberni IRS has been demolished by the Tseshah nation, the community continues to hold ceremony in that space (Ha-Shilth-Sa, 2009a). The community asserts traditional practices at the site and invites survivors from outside the community to return for their own healing journeys, and the healing of the spirits and space there (Titian and Plummer, 2012). The notion of healing extends to the non-human and spiritual world. The Tseshah decided to demolish many of the buildings that comprised the school, but there still remained a need to commemorate survivors’ experiences which they have chosen to do within the space.

IRS were frequently built in areas without traditional associations for the local Indigenous peoples (Carr, 2009b, p.117). The idea of the IRS site or building as a

¹⁶ The article also suggests that the totem pole may be moved from this location, but I cannot find a record for where it may have gone, or if it is still at this site.

physical wound or mark on the landscape, which requires healing, guided the work of Alberni IRS as well as St. Eugene despite these two sites having different commemorative methods. IRS can be understood as one expression of colonial violence, which has done far-reaching damage to the land and spirits, in addition to the damage done to Indigenous peoples, and both the Tseshsaht and the Ktnuaxa, respectively, have taken opportunities to heal this damage through traditional methods.¹⁷

Commemoration and “return” to sites of colonial violence take place across Turtle Island. Indeed, Nelson explains how members of the Southern Paiute Nation in the United States were able to return to the site of the Sherman Indian Boarding School, where they performed ceremony to free the spirits of the children who had died there (2008, p.295). The Southern Paiute Nation made it clear that this was an opportunity for healing and decolonization, as well as an opportunity to revitalize their cultural traditions (Nelson, 2008, p.296).¹⁸ In this way, the residential school site can be understood as “not a single space but a series of evolving spaces,” as past use and current use interact (Milosz, 2015, p.219). The space of the IRS is not restricted by its history as a tool of oppression and has the opportunity to be transformed through adaptive reuse and practice by Indigenous peoples.

Many IRS were isolated and removed from Indigenous communities as a way to discourage children from running away and to divorce them from their traditional

¹⁷ This is why for IRS both the physical buildings and the intangible stories must be addressed, as the damage is far reaching.

¹⁸ The experiences of Indigenous people in Canada and the United States are not directly comparable, as the relationships of the settler-colonial states to Indigenous nations have different elements, but the concept of the boarding school/residential school as a site of return has similarities.

territories. Survivors who return to IRS spaces have the opportunity to reframe their relation to those spaces. Some, like those who returned to Alberni IRS, describe experiencing a sense of catharsis through assertions of agency over the space, where the space no longer holds the same power as when it contained and constricted them as a student (Ha-Shilth-Sa, 2009a). The experience of changing this power dynamic has been particularly evident at Beauval IRS and Alberni IRS where survivors witnessed the demolition of the former school building and experienced a sense of catharsis. In 2018, Darrell Ross, Research and Planning Associate for Tseshah First Nation expressed the nation’s desire to have an annual event welcoming survivors and celebrating the closure of Alberni IRS (Titian, 2018). In 2019, the Tseshah invited 203 other First Nations in British Columbia to come for ceremony to honour the demolition of the school (Titian and Plummer, 2019), recognizing the displacement that affects many survivors, and creating a safe space for survivors’ return. The absence of the buildings at this IRS site may also make returning less intimidating, as the site is now a Tseshah gathering place.

The removal of the buildings at Alberni also presented an interesting opportunity in the form of the detritus of demolition. In 1983, the Tseshah offered any community member to come and remove the bricks and sell them, with the hope to lower the cost of demolishing the building (Alberni Valley Museum, 1986). The community was able to use the material that made up the school for new purposes, benefitting their nation and its members. This treatment of the bricks is in contrast to Beauval IRS, which was also demolished. Some of the bricks from Beauval were conserved for the Frazer’s Museum, and they are now used by the Legacy of Hope Foundation in learning exercises to teach others about the history of IRS (Legacy of Hope, 2014, p.26). The Dene no longer needed

their IRS buildings, but members of the nation also saw value in conserving some of the remains of the school for future education. This also allows for a certain hands-on, but spatially changed and distanced, approach that is different than if the buildings were still standing. The bricks held value to the Dene as pedagogical materials, whereas the Tseshahht saw economic benefit, which through the reinterpretation of the physical remains creates new meaning. Both nations exercised their sovereignty, which led to the sites’ demolition, and the material remains then serving different purposes.

For sites that remain standing, the mnemonic potential of the IRS space can create both positive and negative effects in visitors. For those who are seeking to learn about the history of the schools or are seeking to memorialize them, an intact building can have power as it enables visitors to travel through the school in the way that the children did; this adds a layer of memory over the space. The Woodland Cultural Centre seeks to communicate the mnemonic potential of the Mohawk Institute while allowing for the active participation and guidance of survivors who visit the site (Hovey, 2012). At St. Eugene, the physical remains of the building were also conserved but the site underwent a “mnemonic reconfiguration” where it was transformed from an institution of containment to one of a luxury resort (Carr, 2009b, p.129). For both of these sites, a guide or educator would need to make clear to a visitor the memory in the space (Cooper-Bolam, 2020, p.15)

The IRS space has power as one that was used for containment of Indigenous children over very long periods of time. The power of a space is that in some ways it can

speak for itself, while also offering opportunities for greater clarity through a guide.¹⁹

Human psychology works in such a way that seemingly unimportant features of a space may trigger memories that will provide a better understanding for the viewer and will better represent the broader memory of the IRS experiences and sites.

In the same way, the space can have a negative effect on survivors who may be re-traumatized by re-entry. This is a challenge that the Mohawk Institute has considered when determining whether or not they should move forward with plans to restore the school to look as it did when students attended. A balance needed to be drawn between the survivors who visit the site on their own healing journeys and the visitors who come to the site to learn about residential school history or Haudenosaunee culture and history. The opportunity to restore the school space along with the active survivor presence and story sharing provides unique learning opportunities for visitors. The Mohawk Institute buildings are no longer focused on the assimilation of Indigenous children but rather have shifted to spaces of education and memorialization informed by Haudenosaunee principles, a reflection of Indigenous self-determination.

IRS spaces were once sites of contestation between students and staff, a microcosm of conflict between settler-colonial systems and Indigenous peoples. In the present, visiting these spaces can represent an openness to developing better relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Settler-colonial power dynamics are

¹⁹ This is what Cooper-Bolam (2020) talks about in regards to Shingwauk. A similar experience occurs at the Mohawk Institute, where survivors give tours at the site.

challenged as the sites are transformed by Indigenous peoples post-closure, disrupting and inverting the greater settler-colonial political landscape.

5.2 Settler-colonial systems and Indigenous sovereignty

Settler-colonialism is the environment that lead to the assumption of authority by the Crown over Indigenous peoples, and the suppression of Indigenous sovereignty by the Crown (Waite, 2019). Any work that is done within these territories must consider the broader framework and assumptions that its structures rely on. The memorialization of IRS history is particularly complicated when one sees the IRS system as one genocidal system in the larger practice of settler-colonialism. How do we memorialize the history of IRS while also acknowledging how the circumstances that brought it about continue to exist? Indigenous people continue to be dispossessed of their land and continue to be oppressed through imposed colonial systems such as healthcare, policing, and education. Indigenous people, both survivors and their families, continue to suffer the effects of IRS through intergenerational trauma, in tandem with the effects of greater cultural loss and settler-colonial pressures.

Carr takes care to emphasize that St. Eugene became recognized for its potential role in local economics rather than as an institution of eradicating Indigenous cultures and power (2009a, pp.128-129). Many visitors to St. Eugene remain ignorant of the history of IRS, even as they visit the former IRS for leisure purposes. The adaptive reuse of the St. Eugene building was supported by the federal government and the site is now touted as a success of Indigenous economic effort (“St. Eugene Mission Resort: Pride of the Kootenays”, 2010). The site’s memorialization is physically relegated to the

basement, and the site’s adaptation may be viewed as palatable as it has been reused for economic purposes that benefit the local communities. The site has multiple overlapping meanings, as a source of pride for the Ktunaxa nation, an example of Ktunaxa reclamation of space, culture, and sovereignty, and a source of support for their nation and members, which should be celebrated.

Sophie Pierre, former chief of one of the Ktunaxa bands, described retaining full control over the site as necessary since “the residential school was a place where children were sent and they really had no control, and their parents felt they had no control. It wasn’t right for us to turn it over [and] have someone else do the development” (Stueck, 2002). The Ktunaxa asserted and maintained their control over the site and guided its reuse, important in a system that continues to disempower Indigenous peoples. The interpretive centre was important for the Ktunaxa despite its relegation to the basement of the site, which Carr suggests allows guests to remain vastly ignorant of the site’s history (2009a, p.130). The pressures of the settler-colonial state have shaped not only the over-a-century-long operation of the IRS system, but also shapes how Indigenous communities can commemorate this history, and the potential for non-Indigenous peoples to avoid grappling with this difficult history.

Memorialization of the IRS can provide an opportunity for non-Indigenous people to reckon with their own role in the settler-colonial framework of Canada. Education on IRS history has only recently been mandated on school curriculums and in many school districts it is still very much on a case-by-case basis (Kabatay and Johnson, 2019). The Mohawk Institute and St. Eugene are spaces for education for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, guided by Haudenosaunee and Ktunaxa traditions. Non-

Indigenous people should have an understanding of their own role in the memorialization process in such a way that does not drown out Indigenous voices. Non-Indigenous people have a responsibility not only to the memorialization of IRS history but to the reckoning of how they may benefit today from the results of the settler-colonial system, for example in regards to land theft and the displacement of Indigenous people. The aftereffects of policies that disempowered Indigenous nations continue to impact the lives of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.

IRS history is just one egregious example of settler-colonial violence that can be used to make more visible the greater issues that Indigenous peoples face, as Canadians and Indigenous peoples make shifts towards a new era of decolonization efforts and conciliation. The circumstances that brought about the IRS system, and the context through which it operated in the IRS space, are why Indigenous peoples seek to assert their sovereignty over the commemoration of this history. The ultimate authority over an IRS site, sitting on Tseshaht, Ktunaxa, Six Nations, or Dene territory, lies with those communities. Indeed, it is the communities who hold sovereignty with their territories and their relations to the land, non-human world, and who shape their relationship to the site. The memorialization process for IRS is complicated by the fact that other acts of settler-colonial violence and oppression continue today, but the process of memorialization also provides opportunities for greater decolonization efforts and land restitution.

As memory of IRS develops with current and past interactions with the IRS site, the continuous development of collective memory becomes evident and creates uncertain boundaries between the past and present (Halbwachs, 1950). The world is made up of

different communities all of whom are “coexisting, cohabitating, and occupying the same space,” (Gunn Allen, 2008, p.140) and their understandings occur simultaneously and without rank. As these understandings come into interaction with one another, negotiation occurs between these understandings. In the case of IRS sites, like the Mohawk Institute or Alberni IRS, the renewed sharing of stories by survivors provides an opportunity for those who were not directly affected to understand and learn about the deep and complicated impacts of IRS. The identity of Canada as a benevolent state is challenged by these conversations, and memory about IRS adapts and evolves with survivor stories and the physical remains of the IRS. Memory is created and recreated by different groups at the same time, as well as by those in the same group at different times, and this contestation lends itself to the development of collective memory.

5.3 Contestation and Memorialization

Collective memory is in part developed through contestation (Olick and Robbins, 1998, p.127). Contestation exists within the IRS site as one that represents settler-colonial violence and also Indigenous self-determination. As IRS sites continue to be repurposed, demolished and conserved, the collective memory of IRS continues to grow and expand to include the process and also the conflict inherent to the site. As Indigenous nations like those discussed here assert themselves over the site, new memory of the space as an assertion of sovereignty overcomes its past usage as a site of pain. The past and present memories of a site – as one of both cultural suppression and pain as well as Indigenous self-determination – are brought into conversation so that all of the communities in the

case studies discussed here have an opportunity for healing; both as nations, and for individuals.

When dealing with difficult history, Olick emphasizes that as trauma becomes a part of the collective memory it is no longer just personal, and it impacts the collective and the group’s understanding of itself (1999, p.345). IRS history is an example of such trauma, and as it has grown in the public eye, there have been conflicts as it enters the settler-colonial collective memory and people seek to memorialize it. The process of commemoration itself can be worthy of study (Olick, 2016) but when collective memory is challenged by an exhibition of difficult heritage, it must take care not to be self-congratulatory to the point of failing to take further social action, considering the moment of awakening to the difficult history as the ultimate goal (Cooper-Bolam, 2020, p.76). As collective memory often plays a significant role in politics (Olick, 1999, p.333), difference becomes evident in how people and governments incorporate IRS history into collective memory, where the focus shifts to memorialization as the end goal rather than continued conciliation and relationship building.

IRS history challenges the assumed benevolence of the Canadian state toward Indigenous peoples (Mackey, 2012, p. 49), and the IRS site is a physical reminder that is difficult to ignore. At the same time, the history of IRS is sometimes taken to stand in as a substitute for conversations about Indigenous oppression, as it has a time frame that encloses it as a historical wrong (Coulthard, 2014, p.108) rather than acknowledging ongoing inequities. The IRS system also has sympathetic victims in the form of Indigenous children who are enshrined in innocence and distanced from the adult survivors that those children grew up to become (Henderson, 2012, p.73). Survivors and

their families suffer from continued trauma of both the IRS system and the continued impacts of the settler-colonial system and may express this trauma in disruptive ways. If commemorative efforts directed toward IRS sites are to be considered with conciliation in mind, then the efforts must also address the continued existence of unequal power dynamics enforced by the settler state over Indigenous nations, and the often uncomfortable realities of adult survivors and the impacts on their families.

Commemoration that does not embody the needs of survivors and communities, does not challenge the essence of the history which divorced Indigenous children from their cultures and Indigenous peoples from their sovereignty. Conciliation, and the development of better relations between Canadians and Indigenous peoples cannot emerge when unequal power dynamics are replicated. The memorialization efforts of Indigenous nations at physical IRS sites works alongside the intangible remnants of this history. The buildings do not need to be the sole focus, but they also should not be an afterthought, especially considering the sense of urgency present as the conditions of some remaining sites continue to deteriorate. The tangible and intangible remnants of the IRS system interact in the formation of a collective memory of the IRS system.

The field of collective memory also recognizes the blurring of lines between the past/present/future (Halbwachs, 1950) which is important for IRS sites as they have undergone many changes over time. The relationship of Indigenous nations to these sites has also evolved over time, and the sites are simultaneously representative of colonial violence and representative of Indigenous sovereignty over memory. Collective memory of IRS makes room for the multiple incarnations of IRS sites through the sites' relation to survivors past and present, and the sites' relation to the land they occupy. Additionally,

this blurring makes clear the ways in which the violence we see in IRS history continues today in the present both as intergenerational trauma, continuation of settler-colonial systems, and also in the transformation of the IRS through Indigenous efforts.

The structure of memory and the greater settler-colonial system puts pressures on memorialization efforts for IRS sites. Memorialization requires analysis and careful consideration of the restrictions that IRS sites face in the ongoing settler-colonial system and the different visions that survivors and community members may have for the sites. For this reason, the process of memorialization must be ongoing, as is the process of conciliation itself. IRS sites are not solely sites of sovereignty, or sites of trauma, or sites of historical significance, but rather they are all of those things at once, created through the layering of memories of children who attended there, those who taught and worked there, and by of generations of people who did not attend but still had their lives shaped by the schools’ existence.

Chapter 6: Moving Forward: IRS Sites and Conciliation

Whether an IRS site has been demolished or repurposed, Indigenous nations have taken the opportunity to assert their goals and satisfy their community’s needs. As spaces of self-determination, schools like St. Eugene, Alberni IRS, Beauval IRS, and the Mohawk Institute show how the meaning of spaces can shift from ones of cultural suppression and containment, to ones of Indigenous sovereignty and memory.

Throughout this thesis my understanding grew as I came to realize that IRS sites had not been forgotten in the memorialization process, but rather Indigenous nations like the Tseshah, Dene, Ktunaxa, and Haudenosaunee had asserted their self-determination over these spaces, making decisions to demolish or conserve IRS sites to suit the needs of the nation at different times. The Tseshah used the physical materials of Alberni to support their members through the sale of bricks, knocked down the majority of the buildings, and use the space now as one of culture and gathering. The Ktunaxa conserved the buildings of St. Eugene, transforming them into an economic driver that employs many of their community members. The memorialization process is an act of sovereignty for these communities, an example of how to move forward into a future of conciliation where larger systems of settler-colonialism are dismantled.

Collective memory formation is an ongoing process that incorporates interaction and negotiation between individuals, groups, and spaces. The collective memory of IRS includes the spaces of the schools, where survivors’ memories were formed, and where continued interaction with the site shapes peoples’ understandings and allows for reinterpretations. It also is framed by the context of continued pressures by the settler-colonial state, where it is powerful that Indigenous nations like those mentioned here

carve out opportunities for assertions of their sovereignty. The collective memory that develops in relation to IRS has and will impact the treatment of IRS sites, even as memorialization at IRS sites contributes to the formation of collective memory. The physical heritage of a society is embedded in its collective memory. How a society deals with this history speaks to how that society has changed, or not. Canada as a nation has made some steps toward a more positive nation-to-nation relationship with many Indigenous peoples, and part of this has been addressing their IRS history. The apologies made by the federal government must be turned into action, providing space for Indigenous nations to assert themselves, grounded in their traditions outside of the purview of the non-Indigenous eye.

The IRS system disrupted Indigenous sovereignty, and Indigenous peoples have always sought to resist this disruption of their political systems, and to protect their peoples and cultures. The Ktunaxa at St. Eugene deliberately sought to maintain control over the site, entering partnerships with other First Nations to ensure their self-determination, protecting themselves from concerns over bankruptcy (“Ktunaxa Nation regains ownership”, 2017). St. Eugene, as a golf and country club, also provides the opportunity for non-Indigenous people to come to an IRS space and learn about the role of the IRS in disrupting Indigenous sovereignty and the long-term effects it has had on survivors. The relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people moving forward will at least in part rely on the ways in which these groups come to understand their shared difficult history. The space provides an opportunity to develop on an individual level improved Canadian/Indigenous relations. The choice to conserve St. Eugene for adaptive reuse as a golf and country club has given the Ktunaxa the

opportunity for economic development and to improve the well-being of members of its nation. The healing of the Ktunaxa is influenced directly by their healing of the nation’s relationship to that site.

Regardless of treatment type and whether the site is demolished or conserved, the buildings examined in this thesis have played a role in IRS site memorialization.

Consider the Dene of English River First Nation successfully demolishing their former IRS and retaining a memorial stone on the site: commemoration of IRS is not predicated on the physical buildings being conserved, and commemorative strategies will vary based on the needs of communities, pressures the sites may face, and the voices of elders and knowledge-keepers. Self-determination of Indigenous communities guides the form that memorialization takes in these spaces.

Conversations about IRS sites must be accompanied by discussions about the larger history and effects of settler-colonization. This will mean difficult conversations about the federal government’s relationship with Indigenous nations, Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships, and questions of land rights. Apologies can be a good start, but without dialogue or a commitment to avoid future harm, they serve little constructive purpose. The apology by the federal government will not lead to ‘closure’ when it is not accompanied by greater work on the undoing of damage caused by settler-colonialism, including the dispossession of land. A good apology requires a certain element of dialogue that serves the purpose of bringing one or more parties together; this was missing in the federal government’s apology to Indigenous peoples about IRS (Mackey, 2012, p.55). The formation of collective memory emerges from dialogue between individuals and their communities, and between individuals and the site. Apologies and

conciliation require dialogue and shared responsibilities for positive relations and correcting injustices. IRS commemoration requires an open dialogue in order to create a conciliatory environment for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and for Indigenous nations and the Government of Canada.

By doing this critical work, there is better space for non-Indigenous people to act as witnesses, and for Indigenous people to hold healing within their own communities. Indigenous peoples then can move away from the necessity of recognition, and towards decolonization that is grounded in Indigenous traditions (Coulthard, 2012, p. 149).

All of the IRS sites in the case studies examined here are on reserve lands. The reserve system, which historically was used to limit the movement of Indigenous peoples, and which today, through the Indian Act, continues to dictate the eligibility of Indigenous peoples for certain treaty rights, is a settler-colonial institution (Indian Act, 2009). Indigenous peoples have fought for and asserted their control over these spaces as they have done the same for control over their larger territories through conversations of land claims and treaty. It is understandable then that the memorial processes that occur in these spaces must include the memory of the territories upon which the IRS sit and the struggles Indigenous nations have undergone to protect them.

Simply acknowledging settler-colonialism does not create change, and simply acknowledging a historic violence like the IRS system cannot be the end goal. Especially in the case of IRS sites, physical buildings that were imposed on Indigenous land to contain Indigenous children are a pointed example of the enforced suppression of Indigenous peoples by the settler state. Indigenous peoples have always maintained their sovereignty and have had, as demonstrated here, the opportunity to express that through

the modification of IRS sites and memorialization efforts therein. Indigenous peoples have the right to memorialize IRS and mourn for the experiences of those who attended these institutions. The healing of Indigenous peoples needs to be centered by Indigenous peoples.

The future of the remaining IRS sites will depend on the communities' goals. At some sites, like the Mohawk Institute and St Eugene, community members are seeking to use the former school space as one of education, and memory. Using a former IRS site as the setting for education, led by Indigenous peoples and centering Indigenous traditions, could be viewed as a positive shifting of power dynamics to favour Indigenous peoples. Key attributes that must be addressed moving forward are the role of the sites in the formation of collective memory, the role of the sites as places of witnessing, and the delicate balance between the responsibilities of non-Indigenous people to take part in these efforts while acknowledging the rights of survivors as paramount. As inheritors of this past, the ways in which the IRS memory is consistently being reworked, as one small part of settler-colonial history, has the potential to be part of conciliation.

Garneau envisioned a space on reserve where anyone could come in a respectful manner to learn about Indigenous peoples and cultures, while also undergoing self-transformation (2012, p.37). Garneau's proposed space of conciliation would be continuous, both through a process of individual transformation and in response to the ongoing legacy of colonialism (Garneau, 2012, p.38). Colonialism continues through all facets of life in a settler-colonial society, both structurally and on the individual level. On an individual level, one must enact decolonial processes both in the self and in the ways one interacts with other people. These spaces of conciliation would include not only the

ultimate outcome for a site but also the process to reach that outcome. The choice to use an IRS site like St. Eugene or the Mohawk Institute as one for education and as a part of a greater scheme of decolonization fits well in the dialogue of collective memory, encompassing the sites’ contradictory past and present. Through critical self-reflection, relationships can be built between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples and heritage traditions in a way that challenges traditional colonial power structures and makes way for new and innovative respectful relationships.

Key here, is the idea that memorialization of IRS cannot occur outside of larger questions of decolonization. Beauval IRS, Alberni IRS, St. Eugene Mission, and the Mohawk Institute demonstrate how memorialization at IRS sites can actively challenge historical power dynamics, particularly in spaces where Indigenous peoples were stripped of their sovereignty and cultures. Indigenous peoples have actioned commemorative strategies at IRS sites across their territories and these sites play a role in the memorialization of IRS history. These sites, which stand as “monsters” in survivors’ memories, can be treated in such a way that empowers IRS survivors and Indigenous nations.

As time passes, there is a certain sense of urgency that emerges for sites that continue to deteriorate. If the choice is made to conserve these sites, then the next steps need to be taken soon. Further work must be done on the future of debris when the choice is made to demolish a site, when the physical building no longer remains. Additionally, further research could address the differences in how Indigenous nations memorialize IRS history outside of the IRS space. Memorialization of IRS sites, as discussed here, is an ongoing dialogical process.

In the manner of conciliation, the work is never done.

I stood up, I told the monster I must go

Ahead of me is my life. My people are waiting for me.

...

I looked over to the monster, I was surprised

I wasn't looking at a monster anymore

I was looking at an old school. (Saddleman, 2013).

Glossary

The terms used throughout this thesis have many different meanings, and this glossary should not be viewed as comprehensive. The definitions included in this glossary may have contested meanings but these definitions are how I invoked them throughout this thesis.

Collective memory: How groups of people come to understand their shared histories through the negotiation of individual memories (See Olick, 1998; Olick, 1999).

Commemoration: Something done to remember an event or series of events, such as a holiday, construction of a monument, art piece, etc.

Conciliation: A way of developing Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations that respects cultural difference, acknowledges past and ongoing harm, and seeks to build a new relationship (See Garneau, 2012).

Memorialization: The process of memory construction, preserving memories about an event or series of events, in an ongoing manner.

Monument: a plaque, art piece, or other object constructed to commemorate an event or time period, such as those constructed at former residential schools.

Power: The agency to influence events, people, and spaces.

Reserve: Also known as an Indian reserve, a designated tract of land set aside by the Crown for exclusive use by First Nations people.

Self-determination: The right for Indigenous people “to freely determine their political status and freely pursue their economic, social and cultural development.” (UN General Assembly, 2007).

Settler-colonialism: The forced displacement of the original people of a territory through the settlement of immigrants from a different territory, often done in order to assert a claim for a settler-state to exploit that area for resources.

Settler-state: the imposed governmental body that maintains authority over a settled territory and seeks to suppress the political systems of the original people.

Sovereignty: The right of a nation to determine its future, through control over its members, culture, politics, and territories.

Spaces of self-determination: The creation of spaces where Indigenous nations assert and protect their right to self-determination over their histories, territories, and people.

Territory: A land mass that is inhabited and cared for by a group of people. For Indigenous peoples, this relationship is not one of ownership but one of stewardship. Indigenous stewardship of traditional territories is often disrupted by the settler-state.

Trauma: The impact of hurtful or challenging events on an individual. The trauma that many Indigenous peoples face is not limited specifically to IRS survivors, as it has intergenerational impacts and includes ongoing colonial violence.

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