

***GATHERING STRENGTH:  
CANADA'S WILL TO RECONCILE, RECOVER AND REPAIR***

We are all familiar with the stereotype of the native person: lazy, stoic and detached, oftentimes drunk. Those courageous enough to look past prejudice will see that these characteristics are but masks, hiding feelings of rage founded upon immense pain and alienation. Aboriginals, like all other human beings, suffer and concoct ways to preoccupy themselves so as to minimize the brunt of unpleasant emotions. In that, they are no different from anyone else. Where they do differ, however, is the degree to which common pain is compounded by cultural alienation so deep as to obliterate feelings of dignity and worthiness. One thing that psychology teaches is that suffering that is simply discarded is suffering that reemerges in more demonstrable ways. Internalization is the name given for pain “forgotten” from conscious memory but that reemerges to become aggressively used as weaponry against oneself and others. So it is, then, that Aboriginals, on top of the every day pain of normal living, must also manage – or not manage as the case may usually be – with a societal hatred that is historically based. Just as the individual’s pain is internalized throughout the course of a lifetime, so too does a people’s pain become internalized throughout the course of history.

Social and family statistics show that Aboriginals in North America suffer more than any other population. Internalization is one explanation of this sad fact. Internalization stemming from historical genocidal efforts by the settler population is reflected in so many Aboriginals choosing to obliterate their own lives than to live in misery. It is borne out by high rates of alcohol and drug abuse, which, plainly speaking, is an aggressive attempt to wipe out all feeling. The stoic native is in many ways the person wishing not to feel anything at all. Additionally, community violence and ill health mark native living, each aspect an indication of the futility of living a life that is not felt to be worthwhile.

Futility is another word for powerlessness. Healing does not happen by itself, it requires self-generated energy. And yet, because Aboriginal self-hatred is embedded culturally and compounded historically through generations of repeated abuse, such energy is exceedingly

difficult to tap. The energy is certainly there, but the motivation to locate it is severely lacking. Reality aside for the moment, what would a self-generated healing look like? Depth psychologists like Alice Miller, who study the ugly ramifications of child abuse, talk about the need for a cathartic-like mourning to occur. Such grieving is different from day-to-day suffering in that it is consciously experienced as opposed to being pushed aside and denied. If conducted in the right circumstances (such circumstances to be discussed later), mourning, though initially painful, can nevertheless eventually spur feelings of relief and renewal. Consequently, a heretofore unrealized source of energy, guided by a hope to repair that which has been damaged, emerges.

Now, back to reality: self-generated renewal based on mourning is damn-near impossible because it goes against every self-generated fiber of the despondent. This fact is not lost on Miller, who calls for a community of support she terms “enlightened witnesses.” Such persons have recovered from abusive histories, and are thus able to assist those undergoing the mourning process. In other words, a support system, that might include a school teacher, spiritual advisor or psychologist, is absolutely needed for the individual to recover from abuse. Can the same hold true for groups within society? One country seems pointed in that direction. How appropriate it is that Canada’s name for its Aboriginal renewal and recovery program is called Gathering Strength, for its merits lie in empowering indigenous peoples individually and group-wide to better their lives. Primarily because it is sponsored by the largest support group of all – a government representative of the people at large – this program is the latest best-chance shot at providing positive impact on Aboriginal life. And yet, the merits of this program, presently only in its seventh year, are potentially-based. Gathering Strength needs guidance in order to bring about its stated goals of providing Aboriginals the wherewithal to better their lives. One needs to dig a little to see that this program possesses the wherewithal to succeed in its endeavors. This potential lies in its insistence on a community-wide effort to examine past historical abuse. It is certainly not as upfront as many would like it to be, but undeniably the desire to examine past abuse is present. That is enough of a start for healing to begin.

This program possesses the potential to take the lid off of history that an ashamed (Aboriginals) and guilt-ridden (Settlers) people has shut. The basis of its merit lies in a willingness to acknowledge past abusive acts perpetrated by Canada's European settlers – this, in order to begin to lay a foundation of trust between the two sides. Promoted as Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan, Gathering Strength was released in 1998 by the federal government based on recommendations presented by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). It was generally designed as a long-term approach to improve the quality of life and self-sufficiency of Aboriginal people. Gathering Strength's Statement of Reconciliation, for example, acknowledged past governmental mistakes and injustices while proclaiming positively the continuing diversity and strength of Aboriginal nations. The government further acknowledged its role in suppressing Aboriginal languages and culture, and in separating children from their families and communities during the years of forced schooling at the residential schools. The merits of this program are twofold: acknowledgement of historical abuse perpetrated against Aboriginals and, secondly, the responsibility, jointly with Aboriginals, for providing life opportunities for Aboriginals. The federal government insisted upon the participation of all Canadians concerning the recovery and healing of Aboriginals – all the while avoiding the pitfalls of government handouts and subsistence and precluding the notion that Aboriginals must become like Euro-Canadians. As a result, the government set out to educate the non-Aboriginal public so that they could better understand the severe predicament of Aboriginal life.

These worthy and far-reaching objectives could only start with acknowledgement of Canada's history of abuse. At the ceremony kicking off the initiative, then-Indian Affairs Minister Jane Stewart recounted the testimony of a young Aboriginal who said: "One of our great spiritual leaders advises us that we must look back seven generations and look forward seven generations and realize that we are the balance."<sup>1</sup> Indigenous philosophy teaches that not only are all life forms interconnected spatially, but that past, present, and future are interconnected as well. Each dimension of time influences the others. Past government and

governmentally-condoned violent acts, as well as the more insidious acts of cultural genocide, such as assimilation, have left present day Aboriginals spiritless and defeated. Hurtful acts by the government, though the worst of which have ceased, nevertheless have left emotional scars upon the individual and collective psyches of Aboriginals. Stewart and RCAP gleaned that the past must be honestly and thoroughly examined before lasting change can be brought about, for, in Stewart's words, "we cannot look forward without first looking back and coming to terms with the impact of our past actions and attitudes." Equally important are the ways we examine the past. "History," says Stewart, "must be understood in a way that reflects that people today are living out the legacy of decisions made in a different time."<sup>2</sup> This is easier said than done, for we must make ourselves remember history. We must realize that history remembered is not just an intellectual exercise, for history's ramifications are felt many generations after the initial event. Psychoanalytic theory informs us that repressed aggression ultimately manifests itself in destructive acts. Only until Canadians acknowledge and examine the destructive historical acts perpetrated against Aboriginals, with emphasis placed on the resulting emotional harm elicited, will Aboriginals become empowered to positively change their situation. In such a scenario, Gathering Strength's objectives could be clarified in this way: recognition breeds understanding; understanding then breeds the energy required to tackle the enormous problems that Aboriginals encounter presently.

The Gathering Strength initiative represents an opportunity to provide healing to all, provided that cathartic mourning principles inherent in the program are showcased. Keeping in mind the healing objectives inherent in the program, the following elements will be discussed in the forthcoming pages to support the contention that Gathering Strength is a unique opportunity that, if guided properly, will result in enormous benefits to Aboriginals and other Canadians as well. In addition, Gathering Strength has a chance to offer an effective example for minority conflicts occurring in other parts of the world. First, the primary source of Aboriginal suffering will be discussed, with emphasis placed on the enormous negative consequences caused by colonialism. As a case study, the plight of Aboriginal children caught up in the residential

schools fiasco will be examined. With analysis of the psychological effects of colonialism, it is hoped that Aboriginal emotional scars can be better viewed. Then, with such scars in focus, the discussion concerning the psychoanalytic advantages of confronting and then mourning emotional pain will provide insight into ways abused victims can empower themselves to transform their misery. This part of the paper necessarily delves into psychoanalytic issues of denial and repression in light of the individual's initial introduction to abuse experienced in the first years of life – all this in order to provide a theoretical foundation to explain the potential merits of Gathering Strength. This will be explained in the next part of the paper, entitled *Why Aboriginals? Why Canada?* Resisting the impulse to impose European-derived psychological constructs upon native culture, the first part of this section examines indigenous philosophy to demonstrate their affinity with psychological concepts. Various indigenous philosophical elements will be discussed, including dreams, myths, the notion that culture comprises the components of the soul, the fluidity and interconnectedness of all things, the impenetrable bond with the land, the community, and the cosmos, and the integration of mind, body and spirit, which teaches that a wound to the soul affects the body and mind as well. Such components of indigenous thought demonstrate an affinity with the psychoanalytic aspects of mourning emotional pain. It will be shown that psychological concepts are not a mask for colonial domination. If anything, it will be seen that the mourning of emotional pain shares much with indigenous philosophy. The second part of this section deals with the groundwork in the past 35 years laid by multicultural aspects of Canadian government. Without such a multicultural legacy, Canada would be ill-prepared to support the progressive aspects of Gathering Strength – indeed the idea of such an initiative probably would never occur to begin with. Finally, the last section of the paper discusses the motivation that Aboriginals and the rest of Canadians possess in uniting together to recover Aboriginal culture and improve Aboriginal lives. This section's objective is to demonstrate that the pain of the victim is also the pain of the perpetrator. Meeting this objective will show that, far from a government handout at the expense of white Canada,

Gathering Strength is an empowering initiative designed to obliterate the shame associated with being indigenous and the guilt attached to those associated with European ancestors.

## **I. Colonialism and Aggression Directed Inward**

The history of Aboriginal – Euro-Canadian relations in North America has witnessed many changes and new developments, but lest we view these changes as progress, it is important to realize that the core of the relations has been one of cruel mistreatment driven by racism and European ethnocentrism. Notwithstanding five centuries of exploitation, dislocation, and slaughter, North American indigenous people have survived perhaps the invaders' most deceptive and insidious weapon: acculturation. Yet, while many Aboriginals adhere to centuries-old traditions and customs, they wear the scars brought on by the traumatic physical and emotional battles their ancestors have endured. A survey of Aboriginal quality of life suggests that resistance to Canadian assimilation has come at an extremely high, and often deadly, price. Wretched health and economic statistics are symptomatic of the crises in which Aboriginals currently find themselves. Indigenous people rate at the worst end of measurements such as suicide rate, drug and alcohol addiction, infant mortality, family abuse, and crime.

Recent health and social indicators reveal the extent to which Aboriginals suffer:

- More than 85% of on-reserve households have incomes below the poverty line;<sup>3</sup>
- Infant mortality is twice the national rate. (Infant mortality rates fell from 28 to 11 per 1,000 live births between 1979 and 1993; the national rate fell from 11 to 6 in the same period.)<sup>4</sup>
- Life expectancy is seven years below the norm. (In 1990, First Nations men 66.9 years, women 74 years, compared to 74.6 and 80.9 years for all Canadians; life expectancy is the lowest for Registered Aboriginals living on reserves: 62 years for men and 69.6 years for women.)<sup>5</sup>
- Suicide rates of Registered Indian youth (ages 15 to 24) are eight times higher than the national rate for females and five times higher for males.<sup>6</sup>
- Unemployment rates are three times the national average.<sup>7</sup>
- While education is improving, only 25% of aboriginal students finished high school.<sup>8</sup>
- Incarceration rates of Aboriginal people are 5-6 times higher than the national average; nearly 70% of status Aboriginals have been incarcerated at some point before the age of 25.<sup>9</sup>

- 62% of First Nations people aged 15 and over perceive alcohol abuse as a problem in their community, while 48% state that drug abuse is an issue.<sup>10</sup>
- Other health indicators reveal First Nations people have a 6.6 times greater incidence of tuberculosis, are 3 times as likely to be diabetic, and 2 times as likely to report a long-term disability.<sup>11</sup>

The primary source of Aboriginal suffering lies in an alienating colonial structure, a totalizing system of power designed to enforce a way of living upon a captive population. Civilization, as discontented Freudians might say, is difficult enough. The everyday struggle to satisfy libidinous drives in a morally abiding society leaves the common person in a miserable – but still bearable – condition. Add to this, however, the further subjugation imposed by uninvited rulers and one perhaps can begin to understand the difficulties that minority groups, especially colonized ones, face. This section explores the psychological roots of colonialism, and in so doing details two aspects: (1) the unconscious need of the perpetrator to project its own painful aggression, and (2) the captives' internalization of the invader's culture. The traumatic plight of Aboriginal schoolchildren forced to attend residential schools will then serve as a case study to exemplify colonialism's harrowing effects.

The colonial relationship lends itself to psychological interpretation, especially in detailing the unconscious motivations of both the oppressor and the oppressed. This is not to discount political and economic factors prompting its existence. Exploitation for financial and political profit undeniably acts as colonialism's means for subsistence. However, in addition to political and economic factors, unconscious phenomena play a vital role in the existence and maintenance of colonialism. Projection on the part of the colonizer denotes the displacement of painful and unwanted aggression onto the colonized victims. Conversely, introjection signifies the victim taking in aggression, which then results in the internalization and identification of the dominating culture. In short, these processes are good for the colonizer as it extracts painful emotions, and bad for the colonized as painful aggression is taken into the individual and collective psyches. The forthcoming discussion emphasizes introjection, i.e., the Aboriginal internalization of Euro-Canadian culture. It would do well to keep in mind, however, that

colonialism describes a relationship and that the ruling class has a psychological incentive to continue the colonizing process. The section on *The Pain of the Perpetrator* accentuates the future benefits that Euro-Canadians will obtain should Gathering Strength realize its potential. For present purposes, though, the following describes the insidious processes whereby Euro-Canadian culture becomes internalized, resulting in the self- and group-hatred of Aboriginal people.

The Canadian government rightly proclaims that Gathering Strength involves the entire population – not just Aboriginals. Although not readily apparent at first glance, Euro-Canadians have a stake in seeing racism and ethnocentrism eradicated. The challenge lies in understanding the mechanics concerning displaced hatred, that is, the projection of painful aggression onto others. Psychoanalyst Melanie Klein provides background concerning the unconscious human need concerning projection. Centering on life's beginning stages, Klein ascertained that the newborn establishes patterns to process emotional pain. In becoming acquainted with new and expansive surroundings, the infant finds itself confronted with his/her own internalized pain. Unable not only to satisfy physical needs but to adequately communicate those needs, the infant forsakes uncontrollable motoric functioning for his or her more controllable psyche. Through an intricate fantasy life, which remains in the unconscious, s/he displaces pain and aggression onto external objects, such as the mother's breast. The self's own pain finds expression in surrounding objects. It is not a pretty site, for the heretofore neutral object once injected with the infant's pain and aggression becomes not only a hated object but a feared object as well. Klein's psychology is object-relational in the sense that it explains the need for enemies. As such, it lends itself to political theory as a means for describing group hatred and conflict. As a generalizing concept for the Euro-Canadian – Aboriginal conflict, Kleinian theory demonstrates the unconscious motivations for Euro-Canadians to continue colonial domination. Such motivations must first be brought out of the realm of the unconscious before reparation can begin. Gathering Strength provides the opportunity for this to happen.

The internalization of the ruler, what psychology calls introjection, has traditionally been the psychological basis for the study of colonialism. The most persuasive examination of colonialism was conducted by psychiatrist Frantz Fanon. His analysis of Algerian assimilation of, and ultimate resistance to, French colonization during the late 1950s and early 1960s has served as the most insightful analysis for recent colonial resistance. As such, it is applicable to the situation Aboriginals find themselves in. Fanon articulated the negative internal consequences that emerge when individual feelings of anger and fear remain boxed within the realm of the unconscious. One part psychiatrist, one part revolutionary, Fanon interpreted the postcolonial experience from the victim's perspective. In doing so he revealed the degree to which the colonized group was pressured to correspond to the dominant culture. As a psychiatrist, he analyzed and articulated the alienation caused by an exploitative foreign force. Having first studied in France and then joining the Algerian liberation movement in the 1950s, Fanon contributed two prominent works to anti-colonial revolutionary thought. *Black Skin, White Masks* is Fanon's personal account as a black intellectual in a whitened world as well as a psychological exegesis concerning the exploitative relationship surrounding the colonizer and colonized classes. Supported by an expertise in matters medical and psychiatric, Fanon contended that racism and colonialism produces harmful psychological constructs that binds the black individual to a universalized white norm. In consequence, the rich cultural ramifications of blackness become only an illusion, and the black individual becomes transformed into something s/he's not – which is white.

When the Negro makes contact with the white world, a certain sensitizing action takes place. If his psychic structure is weak, one observes a collapse of the ego. The black man stops behaving as an *actional* person. The goal of his behavior will be The Other (in the use of the white man), for The Other alone can give him worth.<sup>12</sup>

Fanon sensitizes the reader to what it is like for victims to live on the colonizer's terms. From the captive's perspective, language, the ultimate mechanism that transmits culture, instills an affirmation of Other and a refutation of self. Citing his own experience of speaking French, Fanon equates speaking the colonizer's language with accepting, even if on an unconscious

level, the collective consciousness of the dominating culture which identifies blackness with evil and sin. Psychologically speaking, in order to escape the evil that is associated with blackness, the black individual accepts the white mask. The heretofore foreign cultural values then become internalized or, as Fanon terms it, “epidermalized” into consciousness, thus creating a fundamental gap, and contradiction, between the black individual’s consciousness and his/her body. In *The Wretched of the Earth* Fanon strategizes over how the colonized can overcome exploitation and alienation. To overcome the binary myth in which black is bad and white is good, he argues that an entirely new world must come into being. Only by acknowledging the need to stand up and take action, will colonized people become empowered. “Decolonisation,” he writes, “is the veritable creation of new men. But this creation owes nothing of its legitimacy to any supernatural power; the thing which has been colonised becomes man during the same process by which it frees itself.”<sup>13</sup> Empowerment, the means of peeling away the white, Euro-Canadian mask, can occur only when victims become aware of their external surroundings and internal processes that thwart their freedom. Fanon believed violent revolution to be the method of accomplishing the task. Certainly, armed revolt indicates quite clearly that empowerment has reached at least a portion of the captive population. Revolution itself is empowering in forthrightly proclaiming that oppressed people are not waiting for ruling class concessions. However, French colonized Algeria is not multiculturalist Canada. If nothing else, Gathering Strength offers a hopeful sign that the Euro-Canadians will assist, not hinder, Aboriginal empowerment, and in so doing benefit themselves in the process.

Aboriginal people have endured centuries of continuous pressure to conform to a white standard. The history of European colonialism on the American continent is full of attempts, overt and covert, to compel Aboriginals into forsaking their culture and accepting European ways instead. A notable example of this is the forced boarding school education of Aboriginal children. These children, after being removed from their families and communities, were made to learn a new language, discard their traditional garments, cut their hair short, and take on European customs. Many were abused sexually and physically; all were abused emotionally.

The forced education began in Canada and in the United States in the 1870s and lasted over a century. At its peak in 1927, roughly 50% of Aboriginal children attending school in Canada (6,441 out of approximately 14,000)<sup>14</sup> lived at these schools. These children were detained at the schools and away from their homes and communities year-round. Family members were not permitted to visit. Native young people were made to live at these “educational” institutions for no other reason than to purge them of their indigenoussness, to deculturate them and then to indoctrinate them in European ways. It was a harrowing experience.

In psychological terms, the regimen was deliberately and relentlessly brutal. From the moment the terrified and bewildered youngsters arrived at the schools, designed as they were to function as “total institutions,” a comprehensive and carefully-calibrated assault on their cultural identity would commence. For boys and girls alike, this began with a thorough scrubbing and “disinfection” – alcohol and kerosene were among the astringents used for the latter purpose – often accompanied by staff commentary about “dirty Indians.” For boys, the next step was to undergo the humiliating experience of having their heads shorn, military.<sup>15</sup>

It did not stop with hair: traditional native clothes were out, substituted by military-style uniforms. Native languages and spiritual practices were forbidden as well. It wasn’t enough that the children were snatched from their families, communities and ways of living, they were made to speak the white person’s language and practice the white person’s religion as well.

By far the most common experience was that boarding-school students were sternly forbidden to speak their language. They were usually punished, sometimes severely, if they broke the rule. School records and student recollections agree that vigorous disciplinary action was taken to discourage the use of Aboriginal languages . . . . It is also clear that the attack on Native languages was part of a broader assault on Aboriginal identity and the individual Native person’s sense of worth as an Indian or Inuit.<sup>16</sup>

Far beyond deculturation were the allegations of sexual molestation by school staff and clergy. The effects of such abuse linger up to the present, so much so that the wide assortment of emotional ailments caused by the abuse has been categorized under the name “Residential School Syndrome” (RSS). Such ailments include:

acutely conflicted self-concept and lowered self-esteem, emotional numbing (often described as “inability to trust or form lasting bonds”), somatic disorder, chronic depression and anxiety (often

phobic), insomnia and nightmares, dissociation, paranoia, sexual dysfunction, heightened irritability/tendency to fly into rages, strong tendencies toward alcoholism/drug addiction, and suicidality.<sup>17</sup>

While it is true that the residential schools were closed down twenty years ago, the effects of the abuse still fester today. The following section on denying and mourning emotional pain discusses how the pain resulting from the mistreatment of an abusive parent often becomes repressed and denied, only to reappear later when that child becomes a parent and begins abusing his/her child. Clearly, as the high suicide and drug and alcohol abuse statistics demonstrate, abused Aboriginal children, in unconscious fashion, have been redirecting pain and aggression toward themselves, loved ones (including their own children) as well as members of their communities. In this way, abuse received from a foreign source – school staff, priests, pastors, nuns – have then become recycled within future generations of Aboriginal families and communities. Ward Churchill writes eloquently:

For the children of residential school survivors, childhood is often an experience worse than it was for one or both their parents. Their suffering/witnessing of traumatic abuse begins much earlier – often at birth – and tends to be sustained longer and in a more intensive fashion. For the residential school children, those tormenting them were at least the aliens who had displaced their parents; for the children of survivors, it is all too frequently their parents themselves. The record of the residential schools is filled to overflowing with poignant accounts of little boys and girls who cried themselves to sleep each night in loneliness for the warmth and affection of the homes from which they'd been torn; the children of survivors *are* home, and must shed their tears in desperate hunger for something they've never known. Children in the schools escaped in droves, almost always trying to return to the places from whence they'd come; when the children of survivors run, as they often do, it is only "away." Increasingly, as native communities throughout North America continue to crumble under the weight of both the residential school legacy and such related factors as disempowerment and dispossession, there is nowhere for them to run *to* other than the pitiless streets of Winnipeg, Denver and Chicago.<sup>18</sup>

The colonizers projected hate onto their "savage" captives. Fooling themselves into believing they were doing right by Aboriginals, Euro-Canadians sought to "elevate" them to the correct European standard. Arrogance indeed is blind, blind to the unconscious projection of hateful and painful aggression. The Residential School system was nothing short of cultural

genocide. As the title of Ward Churchill's recent book makes clear, the intent was to kill the Indian in order to save the man. Nevertheless, as Fanon experienced and witnessed, the colonized individual has it within herself and himself to break the chains of despair, to become decolonized. It starts first within the heart and mind of the individual. The contention put forth here is that the alienated individual and group must stop the denial and repression process and begin a cathartic mourning which can lead to recovery and renewal.

## **II. A Social-Psychological Perspective: Pain, Repression, and Mourning**

Aggression against a defenseless individual can gravely damage the body and soul. The negative consequences stemming from abuse will intensify should the body/soul not be capable of consciously acknowledging and processing the pain. The same goes for groups. Persecuted groups need a methodology to process the pain constructively. Should one not manifest, individuals and the group itself will develop unhealthy defense mechanisms which unconsciously direct that aggression against itself. Defense in this instance is akin to a loss of empowerment and hope. Aggression turned inward manifests as shame and self-hatred and can become transformed into destructive behavior, such as alcoholism, suicide, poor health, and violence, to name a few of the pathologies common to the Aboriginal population. What is needed to combat these internal processes and manifested symptoms is a process whereby pain, instead of being denied, is encouraged to be faced head-on, felt, and mourned. The resulting cathartic effect should empower the individual/group and bring clarity of mind and a greater sense of reality. Healing and recovery, in turn, will then be based on a greater sense of responsibility, defined here as the ability to respond. This section analyzes the effects of dominant group aggression of the European colonizers and discusses methodologies that encourage group empowerment to combat the effects of the historical, and continued, aggression.

Analysis will be psychological in scope and social-psychological in particular, since it deals with group interaction which affects, and is affected by, social and cultural institutions. Individual and group psychology work much the same way when encountering aggression. When discussing group psychological behavior it is important to remain aware of the connection between group and group member. As indigenous philosophy would rightly point, when the individual suffers the community suffers and vice versa. Analysis will be maintained at the level of cause and effect: what happens when Group A inhumanely dominates Group B? What causes can both Group A and Group B make to empower themselves to make decisions based on a clearer perception of reality as opposed to suppressed fears, anxiety, and aggression?

This section features two approaches to the problem and solution of social group domination. Eduardo and Bonnie Duran combine their clinical experience treating Native Americans with a Jungian psychological approach and a postmodern-like insight concerning the dominating effects of western epistemology. Their focus is placed on the wounded indigenous soul which is evidenced by an unconscious internalization of the aggressor. Such internalization of aggression that is not confronted and adequately processed is passed on intergenerationally. That is why, the Durans claim, aggression begun hundreds of years ago still exists today. The soul wound has still not healed. Alice Miller, a classically trained psychoanalyst who has since turned critical of a Freudian drive theory that masks child abuse, does not write specifically of indigenous culture. Her theories are helpful nonetheless in pinpointing the family as the locus of intergenerational pain, repression, and destructive behavior. She claims that the only way out of the continuation of pain, repression, and destructive behavior is a mourning process which elicits a cathartic reaction and then a clearer perception concerning the cycle of denial and abuse.

***The Problem: Repression and Internalization***

The emotional cause and effect chain of events goes something like this. A dominant group appears in the so-called New World, a group grounded in an arrogant culture that negates difference. In fact, this notion of difference stirs up fear and anxiety so intense within colonizers that they suppress it in the realm of the unconscious where it festers until it is released over generations in the form of racist aggression toward the “savages.” The Aboriginals, on the face of it a trusting people in the beginning, eventually see this trust taken advantage of. Clearly, to the colonizers, the Aboriginals are not part of the community. They are different. They must be classified, categorized, and castigated according to this difference. Over generations, unable to physically overtake the enemy which has devised a “clean” plan for genocide – destruction of indigenous culture through assimilation – this dominated population has come to internalize aggression, anger, and fear.

The dynamics of such abuse on an individual are well known to clinical practitioners: the victim has the tendency of internalizing the abuse and becoming like the abuser him/herself. The decades of abuse of Native Americans in turn formulated what can best be

described as hybrid family systems in which the traditional family system no longer existed. This trauma broke the systems apart, and a new negative and dysfunctional ideology was incorporated into the Native American family system. This dysfunction and oppression have been internalized to such a degree that the oppressed members of the family seemingly want to continue to be oppressed or abused.<sup>19</sup>

This unconscious internalization, in turn, has resulted in pathological symptoms – alcoholism, suicide, low birth rate – as well as a general sense of hopelessness and despair. Internalization, much like stress, is associated with the loss of power to influence the environment. Duran and Duran note that “with the victim’s complete loss of power comes despair, and the psyche reacts by internalizing what appears to be genuine power – the power of the oppressor.” The power to influence their environment, then, is but “a caricature of the power actually taken from Native American people.”<sup>20</sup>

Alice Miller primarily maintains focus on the emotional ramifications that child abuse has on children and the culture that sanctions such abuse. Nevertheless, her theories lend themselves to other abusive environments, including those involving groups. The roots of violence and other forms of destructive behavior, she maintains, are found in abusive relationships in which the child is unable, or not allowed, to react against the abuser/parent. Emotionally, the child faces a Catch-22: voicing vehement opposition triggers the abusive parent’s pain and anger; however, stifling expression, a defensive response against pain, causes pain to fester within the child as anger becomes directed inward instead of toward the persecutor/parent.

What becomes of this forbidden and therefore unexpressed anger? Unfortunately, it does not disappear, but is transformed with time into a more or less conscious hatred directed against either the self or substitute persons, a hatred that will seek to discharge itself in various ways permissible and suitable for an adult.<sup>21</sup>

An abused people who have no effective and realistic means to fight back and who have never before experienced anything along the lines of cultural genocide have no known outlet to release their pain, frustration, and anger. Without an outlet, these feelings stay within the body and soul of the individual and group, and, as mentioned previously, they become directed inward and

outward. Suicide and alcoholism are symptomatic of inner despair and hopelessness.

Outwardly, the symptoms of suppressed anger and fear manifest as community violence. At first glance it is perhaps remarkable that most Aboriginal violence is acted out on other Aboriginals, but upon reflection, perhaps not. The loss of empowerment through generations of repressed anger redirects aggressive emotions not at the perpetrator but instead at fellow members in the group. Duran and Duran write that violence within the Aboriginal community can be

interpreted as a venting of anger toward someone that is helpless and as a reminding of the perpetrator of himself. The root of anger is toward the oppressor, but any attempts at catharting anger toward its root result in swift retaliation by the oppressor . . . . Therefore, it is safer for the perpetrator to cathart his/her anger on a helpless family member who represents the hated part of him/herself.<sup>22</sup>

The authors further suggest that violent acts upon loved ones achieve dual purposes. The instigator of violence experiences a temporary catharsis, a release of aggression, while at the same time it destroys that hated part of him/herself through the act of projecting that part onto another person. What is pathological in this instance is the unrecognized certainty that the perpetrator is punishing persons not responsible for the aggression in the first place. Picture daily occurrences of domestic and group violence due to repressed anger and one can see the extent to which cultural genocide has completely twisted a culture that once so inherently valued community.

At this point it becomes important to address the continued generational disintegration of the Aboriginal community. One might wonder: is it fair to assess the blame of current Aboriginal problems to events that happened 30 years ago, 75 years ago, or hundreds of years ago? After all, though admittedly racism is still prevalent, the aggressive acts of generations past were much more severe compared to present day transgressions. To what degree, if any, are Aboriginals responsible or even to blame for their plight? In short, the answers to these questions are yes, acts of blatant cultural genocide in generations past, mainly due to denied and suppressed emotions, still resonate within today's transformed indigenous culture. Within this answer, though, is the implication too that Aboriginals are responsible for their problems because

emotions have been suppressed. The fact that emotions have not been adequately processed has caused a defect in the Aboriginal ability to respond to crises of not only colonized domination but to their own problems of suicide, alcoholism and community violence. This should not be taken to mean that Aboriginals are *at fault* for their problems; rather it is to say that they possess a heretofore unrealized power to overcome and transform their problems.

Horrifying events that occurred years ago become passed down intergenerationally like some unwanted heirloom. The effects of cultural genocide become localized within Aboriginal families, and due to the inability to process pain, it has been passed from one generation to the next. Members of the Aboriginal population become targets of abuse from within and without the community. It becomes difficult, then, for individuals to know where to displace energy to solve their problems, for the problems that reside within the family and community context exist against the backdrop of an abusive dominant culture. An understanding concerning the dynamics of repressed emotional pain would assist the oppressed group in empowering themselves. First, it is important to realize that suppressed anger and aggression becomes localized, surfaces, and gets repeated within the family structure. It is here that Alice Miller's theories on child abuse make strong contributions. Intergenerational occurrence of child abuse emerges in what Miller describes as an unconscious compulsion to repeat abuse. Abuse is repeated because the child, overwhelmed that the cherished parent(s) would harm him/her, is not mature enough to process the pain caused by the injury. As a result, the pain festers inside the body and psyche and becomes released in harmful ways to the self and others. One way it gets released, Miller claims, is when the child becomes a parent and, in unconscious retribution to his/her abusive parent(s), takes it out on his/her own child. That child, in turn, if unable to process the pain in a healthy manner continues the cycle of abuse with his/her own child. Miller writes:

The individual psychological stages in the lives of most people are:

1. To be hurt as a small child without anyone recognizing the situation as such;
2. To fail to react to the resulting suffering with anger;

3. To show gratitude for what are supposed to be good intentions;
4. To forget everything;
5. To discharge the stored-up anger onto others in adulthood or to direct it against oneself.<sup>23</sup>

It is the inability to react against the aggressor that causes the child to internalize the abusive parent, believe that s/he is indeed guilty and deserving of the abuse, and to actually praise the adult for what s/he mistakenly believes are good intentions.

When children are trained, they learn how to train others in turn. Children who are lectured to, learn how to lecture; if they are admonished, they learn how to admonish; if scolded, they learn how to scold; if ridiculed, they learn how to ridicule; if humiliated, they learn how to humiliate; if their psyche is killed, they will learn how to kill – the only question is who will be killed: oneself, others, or both.<sup>24</sup>

In most societies, child abuse is so widespread that a culture of acceptance of abuse exists to preserve the continued cycle of abuse. Miller cites “poisonous pedagogy” as the dominant culture’s way of excusing the parent’s need to defend against his/her pain and thus perpetuate the cycle of abuse. Referring specifically to child-rearing manuals that advise parents never to spare the rod, Miller reveals that the intentions of the pedagogy, in reality, are to meet the dysfunctional needs of the adult. The true motives of emotionally repressed adults, according to Miller, are:

1. The unconscious need to pass on to others the humiliation one has undergone oneself;
2. The need to find an outlet for repressed affect;
3. The need to possess and have at one’s disposal a vital object to manipulate;
4. Self-defense: i.e., the need to idealize one’s childhood and one’s parents by dogmatically applying the parents’ pedagogical principles to one’s own children;
5. Fear of freedom;
6. Fear of the reappearance of what one has repressed, which one reencounters in one’s child and must try to stamp out, having killed it in oneself earlier.
7. Revenge for the pain one has suffered.<sup>25</sup>

Miller’s analysis and description of poisonous pedagogy, to be sure, is western culture-specific. But it is discussed here to demonstrate the interconnection between individual and community in efforts to deny painful experiences originating from childhood. Indigenous

communities provide their own means of perpetuating abuse, but the locus of internalized pain and its unhealthy discharge of anger reside with the Aboriginal family unit. And so it is that the Aboriginals experience individualized psychic pain called child abuse within the context of a culturally-specific psychic pain referred to as cultural genocide. The complexity of this scenario may make solutions seem problematic. Should emphasis be placed on clinical services rendered to individuals or in the area of community-wide empowerment in efforts to stand up against the dominant western culture? The answer, as indigenous philosophical thought would suggest, is that the two problems are intertwined and should be treated as such.

### ***The Mourning Process***

Such double-edged treatment is the mourning process whereby the individual/group cathartically confronts and experiences repressed pain. Duran and Duran highlight a study developed by Peterson, Prout, and Schwartz<sup>26</sup> concerning group-symptomatic post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Five stages of evolution are listed:

- *Impact or Shock*, the first phase in which the individual, unable to absorb and consciously experience pain, sets in motion the process of denial;
- *Withdrawal and Repression (Warrior Regression)*, in which the individual attempts to survive, emotionally-speaking, by disassociating him/herself from intense pain;
- *Acceptance and Repression (Magical Thinking)*, in which denial concerning the severity of the problem has set in, thus prompting the individual to believe that the problem will resolve things by itself;
- *Compliance and Anger (Decompensation)*, in which the person, realizing the severity of the problem, nevertheless is unable to direct anger toward the perpetrators, thus prompting pathologies such as family violence and alcoholism; and
- *Trauma Mastery (Healing)*, which is akin to a mourning process. Duran and Duran write of this state of development:

This is the ideal final stage at which the person hopefully arrives. Through understanding of the dynamics of the trauma, the person finally validates their reality and focuses the anger and frustration at the appropriate target. At this point the person realizes that s/he, the family, and the tribe are the victims of a scenario that was initiated over one hundred years ago.<sup>27</sup>

Alice Miller equates mourning with reality testing whereby the individual simultaneously uncovers and confronts psychic pain stemming from mistreatment in childhood. As mentioned earlier, her analysis centers on the claim that individual destructive behavior reflects an unconscious compulsion to repeat abuse experienced as a child. Unless this abuse is consciously realized – that is, mourned – the child later will likely inflict abuse upon self and/or others. Mourning, then, becomes the quest to face and learn from the reality of painful experiences. The process is problematic, for successful mourning depends upon the individual's emotional strength and ability to withstand pain. The endeavor, according to Miller, becomes obstructed by an individual and cultural investment in child-rearing practices which, despite contrary claims, are harmful to the young self. Mourning, which counters repetitive abuse, occurs when: the individual begins to understand the system of repeated abuse; releases expressions of pain and rage; and transforms rage into sorrow and pain over unfortunate past experiences. If successfully completed, the individual begins a healing process marked by renewal and creativity. Miller's notion of mourning grants the individual greater awareness of the emotional network, specifically the cause-effect relationship concerning emotional processing and behavior. The individual who mourns, tests reality, gains awareness, and is thereby willing and able to reconstruct his/her emotional world. While the mourning state is a worthwhile goal, the process is extremely difficult. Recalling and re-experiencing a painful past remains just as terrifying the second time around, thus requiring a strong-enough self to withstand momentary suffering. Despite the fear it instills, mourning must highlight past abuse. Only then can the mourner see clearly the cycle of abuse, including the emotional processing which results first in suppressing emotions, and secondly, in destructive behavior. Miller writes:

For parents to be aware of what they are doing to their children, they would also have to be aware of what was done to them in their own childhood. But this is exactly what was forbidden them as

children. If access to this knowledge is cut off, parents can strike and humiliate their children or torment and mistreat them in other ways, without realizing how they are hurting them; they simply are compelled to behave this way.<sup>28</sup>

In recent years Miller has stressed the importance of the “enlightened witness,” that is, someone who has undergone successful mourning who is then able to assist others in the process. The enlightened witness need not be a psychotherapist but certainly therapy is a frequent avenue for individual mourning. Regardless of method, successful mourning results in greater self esteem as the individual finds it easier to express anger without fear of retribution. Mourning reintegrates the individual with early painful emotions. To the extent the individual is strong enough to confront and challenge that pain, s/he will learn the cathartic benefits of expressing anger.

A person who can understand and integrate his anger as part of himself will not become violence ... [for] he has the need to strike out at others only if he is thoroughly unable to understand his rage, if he was not permitted to become familiar with this feeling as a small child, was never able to experience it as a part of himself because such a thing was totally unthinkable in his surroundings.<sup>29</sup>

The constructive expression of rage and hatred that results from the mourning process decreases the likelihood of destructive behavior. Such emotional release results from truthfully identifying the culprit and source of emotional pain – the abusive parent. Only when dreaded childhood memories are confronted and re-experienced will destructive symptoms disappear. Furthermore, the successful mourning, empowered by increased self-awareness, will recognize the cyclical nature of abuse, thereby preventing further reoccurrence. This, in turn, will foster positive relationships with the mourner’s children and others. The child who then grows up in an environment where free expression is encouraged will be prone to constructive – rather than destructive – actions later in life.

Those who were permitted to react appropriately throughout their childhood – i.e., with anger – to the pain, wrongs, and denial inflicted upon them whether consciously or unconsciously will retain this ability to react appropriately in later life too. When someone wounds them as adults, they will be able to recognize and express this verbally. But they will not feel the need to lash out in response.<sup>30</sup>

Neither Miller nor Eduardo and Bonnie Duran were consulted concerning the creation of Gathering Strength. Yet, with the call for all Canadians to view the harmful and traumatic past, along with its aftereffects, it seems as though this Aboriginal action plan was informed to some degree by psychological concepts. One aspect of the encouraging development of Gathering Strength is the federal government's public relations efforts to inform all Canadians about the tragic situation Aboriginals find themselves in and the link with past historical abuse, such as the residential school injustice. Gathering Strength needs to be guided in a way that incorporates concepts articulated by Miller and the Durans. Think of it not as some comical, giant group therapy session. Rather, think of it as a public information campaign, a continuation of the government's public relations campaign, but more focused, with a more exact psychological component to it.

The benefit that Miller's theories can bring to such a campaign lies in acknowledging the immense ideological force that drives society's denial of past wrongful action and the havoc such action has caused society's victims. It is as though a social contract has been reached *not* to bring up the issue of the past so as to avoid any discomfort. The only thing is, this contract is etched in the unconscious, with denial and repression acting as the main motivating forces. Another name for this social contract is taboo. The taboo against criticizing a parent's mistreatment of his/her child has been in full force for a long time. Fortunately, due to the work of Miller and others, chinks in the armor have begun appearing. More and more people are seeing that the Emperor really does not have any clothes, that it really is in everyone's interest to react against a parent's mistreatment of his/her child and, by extension, a government's abuse against a minority group.

### **III. Why Aboriginals? Why Canada?**

With more attention being given to the plight of abuse victims, perhaps Gathering Strength is a sign of the times. Indeed, it is no accident that this particular action plan pertains to Aboriginal people and that the setting is in a land whose institutions utilize a multiculturalist approach to governing. This section examines indigenous philosophy and Canadian multiculturalism and puts forth the claim that the psychological elements inherent in the initiative fit well with the victim group and the political environment. Indigenous philosophy will be discussed with two purposes in mind: (1) to defend against the claim that the psychological aspects brought up in this paper are European-derived and thus constitute colonial exploitation; and (2) that in actuality, indigenous philosophy and the psychological concepts so far discussed share an affinity with one another.

#### ***Indigenous Worldview: The Interconnection and Inclusion of All Things***

There exists in this paper a somewhat dangerous element concerning imposing western ideological concepts, in this case social-psychology, onto an indigenous culture foreign to such ideas and, in many ways, antithetical to them. Anyone who attempts such an endeavor must be aware of what Eduardo and Bonnie Duran call “philosophical and psychological imperialism.”<sup>31</sup> Duran and Duran speak of “cross-cultural” studies and the subtle ways in which authors, hoping to fit within the rule of the academy, reflect western subjectivity and positivism – aspects antithetical to indigenous culture. “In this sense,” they write, “knowledge from a cross-cultural perspective must become a caricature of the culture in order for it to be validated as science or knowledge.”<sup>32</sup> In such instances, despite all good intentions, research and writing is but a microcosm of colonization. As a mechanism of power, such scholarship can be very damaging. When viewed under the scope of colonialism, it becomes revealed as an aggressive intellectual endeavor designed to perpetuate the dominant culture’s destruction of indigenous culture. Utilizing western concepts that validate such foreign and, at times, discriminating concepts as subjectivity and positivism, then, become the intellectual component of assimilation and arrogant paternalism.

But what would a western-derived intellectual work that recognized and incorporated indigenous concepts – not for the sake of appeasing the other culture but based on its own merits – look like? Dennis McPherson wrote a paper concerning RCAP’s dialogue with First Nations representatives on the challenges of the two groups agreeing to what the idea of “culture” means. Reaching a consensus on a definition was easier said than done, for culture encapsulates many different things ranging from tradition to history to current, everyday ways of behavior.

McPherson noted that Aboriginal representatives

talked about culture as “what makes us who we are as Aboriginal people,” “the core of our identity,” “the heart of our people,” “the hope of our future,” “the strength of our past,” “the pain of our loss,” “the locus of our power.” They talked about culture as “spirituality,” as “health,” as “politics.”<sup>33</sup>

These individuals were speaking to aspects specific to their postcolonial environment. Non-Aboriginals could never relate in-depth to what it felt like to be indigenous, to possess an indigenous spirituality or be part of the heritage, nor could they come close to experiencing the pain associated with being colonized, the pathologies associated with being a dominated society. Still, there are aspects of culture that can be considered universal if viewed cross-culturally. Non-Aboriginals relate to heredity, tradition, customs, and spirituality. Most importantly, for purposes of this paper, whites, indeed everyone, can relate to emotional pain, perhaps not pain caused by centuries of cultural genocide, but pain nevertheless that is associated with being mistreated in one form or another. In fact, as will be discussed later in this paper, there is emotional pain associated with being part of a dominant/colonizer culture. Utilizing western concepts in addressing indigenous – Euro-Canadian problems does not have to be a fruitless endeavor. A social-psychological perspective can bring value if it 1) recognizes indigenous thought as worthy in and of itself; 2) incorporates those elements within its structure; and 3) connects with universal aspects common to all humans, most notably psychic pain. In this instance, the concept of mourning as a universal phenomenon is critical.

We turn now to aspects of indigenous thought that contrast with western culture to gain better understanding of a worldview that has been the object of annihilation. It is vital to observe

a culture that is unique in its specific elements, compared to dominant culture, but yet, strangely enough, may not be so different after all. Six general aspects of indigenous thought will be highlighted: an integrative approach to viewing the world that inherently sees a distinctiveness and unity among all things and concepts; a centered, fluid awareness that intrinsically values acceptance and harmony; a process-oriented outlook that emphasizes events as opposed to concepts; a spatially-oriented perspective that places emphasis on the environment, land, and home; a concept of soul comprised of psyche, myths, and dreams; and a worldview that pays special heed to matters of the heart, the emotions.

Perhaps the most relevant aspect of indigenous thought, at least in comparison to western thought, is the innate perception that all things are interconnected. Here, the individual is considered as part to a whole, meaning that s/he is not separated, distinguished, or categorized from his/her environment. "Aboriginal people," writes McPherson, "hold a strong belief and understanding that the 'I' as being in both physical and spiritual realms means having a presence in everything and everything having a presence in me."<sup>34</sup> Mind (including emotions), body, and spirit are integrated. They are not classifications and are not to be studied separately from the others. A reflection of this integrative perspective is shown in the Aboriginal values of community and sharing. The benefits of the individual self have little meaning without benefit to the community. There is, then, not the heightened incentive to hoard that there is in western culture. As Aboriginals see themselves more as selves *in* society rather than selves *and* society, relationships take on more meaning than in western individualistic society. This perspective extends even to a morality that is often expressed in views concerning the ecosystem. The balance of life as exhibited in the interconnection between self and other life-forms take on significant meaning. Franke Wilmer writes:

The world imagined by indigenous philosophies is not only interdependent, but at once diverse, integrated, interconnected, cyclical, and moral. Morality, like the democratic truths declared by America's founding philosophers/settlers, is self-evident: It follows from an awareness of the consequences of the actions of one life-form on other forms in a system in which the continuation of life is the ultimate imperative. In such a world, all life-forms are simultaneously subjects and objects.<sup>35</sup>

Individual actions require significant consideration due to the potential effect on community and environment. Objectification, singling others out as “good” or “bad,” is irrelative to Aboriginal culture. There are not even words existing within many indigenous languages capable of describing such a thing.

An indigenous worldview encompasses a centered awareness. Fluid and nonstatic in nature, this view on life underscores harmony. Again, such a perspective is evidenced by emphasis in living amongst community and nature. Fluidity is exemplified by accepting the environment and the mystery of the universe. Aboriginals do not feel a need to “master” others or the environment; instead, as part of the circumambience, they strive to live in balance with it. In this instance, Aboriginals are seen to be more spatially-oriented than temporally-oriented. Culture, spirituality, and identity fuses with the land, and, as Jace Weaver notes, it is not land as a generalized concept but their specific portion of land where they live. “The act of creation,” he writes, “is not so much what happened *then* as it is what happened *here*; it is the story of the formation of a specific land and a particular people.”<sup>36</sup> Bonding with the land was so intense that when it was taken away from them, it became a traumatic experience. More than a piece of territory was taken from them, for their identity and souls were so intertwined with the mountains, rivers, trees, and other animals. While there was an intense attachment to the land, it was, as discussed, an attachment that positioned the individual within its confines. Land was not objectified, and to conceive of land as a form of possession that could be bought and sold was, and is, preposterous to the indigenous mindset. In opposition to western ideology, which seeks to control nature, as evidenced by an obsession with ownership, Aboriginals see the world as a dynamic, continuous, and ever-changing process. Living in this world is an honor, and to struggle in it means not to control it but rather to utilize and be part of it and to create value. Aboriginal philosophy is a systematic approach to existing in the world that can be best described as being process-oriented. Duran and Duran refer to an “action and eventing approach to life.”<sup>37</sup> Phenomena are not analyzed and classified but rather become expressed as a series of

events. Indigenous languages describe the world as a sequence of activity, as verbs, while western languages describe the world by way of nouns and relationships between objects.

Indigenous images of the soul are reflected in myth, dreams, and tradition rituals. As such, religion is tantamount to living in the world. Life is all around the individual, simultaneously existing within and without. Religion, as such, is not objectified; God/The Creator exists not in Heaven where She/He/It is unseen, but rather exists in everything. Western assault on the beliefs of Aboriginals was perhaps most gruesomely evidenced by forced schooling of Aboriginal children into the Residential School System. As mentioned, the federal government operated the schools in partnership with both Protestant and Catholic churches. The government chose to seemingly overlook the significant negative consequences of forcing these children, separated from their families, to comply with a religious belief system radically different from their own. With good intentions perhaps, but still under the extremely arrogant assumption that the western/Christian way is the one, true way, these children were torn apart from a culture that honors mutual origination, myth, and dreams and forced to adhere to beliefs that taught to fear myth, dreams, and even God. Emotions in the western world are to be feared as well. The indigenous worldview embraced the emotional qualities of the human condition, especially in conjunction with the physical and the spiritual. In contrast, classical Freudian psychoanalysis, reflecting the western model, often dismissed the emotional content of patients' experiences (such as women who reported to Freud that they were sexually molested), instead opting, incorrectly, to assign such claims to the realm of fantasy.

Indigenous thought has been the topic of this section. In a way, however, it is a contradiction of terms – not in the sense that Aboriginals do not think, but in the way that “thought” would never be separated and analyzed apart from the rest of the human condition and indeed the cosmos. Indigenous thought begins to take shape, however, when compared with western thought. Every element of the indigenous worldview analyzed thus far has a countervailing western component, as seen in Table 1. As the table suggests, Aboriginal and western civilization hold many polar opposite worldviews. One area of difference is significant

when contemplating the historical relationship between Euro-Canadians and Aboriginals: indigenous harmony and acceptance versus European objectification, mastering, and controlling. The history of this relationship sees an indigenous culture, especially in the beginning, as more accepting of the Europeans and more willing to create a harmonious relationship. Conversely, it sees European settlers manipulating Aboriginals for its own military and economic purposes. Aboriginal trustworthiness, of course, has vanished in time, and now we are left in Canada with a government willing to make amends.

**TABLE 1**

<b>INDIGENOUS COMPONENT</b>	<b>WESTERN COMPONENT</b>
Interdependence of things and concepts	Things and concepts are separated, classified, segregated
Mind-Body-Spirit considered as one	Mind-Body-Spirit considered separate
Thinking: process and event-oriented	Thinking: content-oriented
Spatially-oriented	Temporally-oriented
Individual part of environment	Individual to master environment/land for own needs
Subject-object integrated	Objectifying
Accepting, non-judgmental	Judgmental
Individual exists as part of the whole	Individual exists part to part
Centered awareness that is balanced, fluid, non-static, harmonious	Egocentric awareness that is controlling; exemplified by ownership

Far from being an example of cultural colonial exploitation, the psychological components used in this paper share an affinity with indigenous philosophy. For example, the integration and inseparability of mind, body and spirit, a cornerstone of indigenous philosophy, corresponds with the notion found in psychology that that emotional ailments often lead to physical dysfunction. Indigenous philosophy and psychology both try to achieve balance with regard to body, mind and spirit. Another area of commonality is the integration of subject and

object. Relationships, especially the active processes between two or more entities are primary. While repression and denial can be considered individualistic measures, it is important to realize that such actions are most often caused by traumatic, abusive encounters with another person. While Aboriginal philosophy is more spatially-oriented than temporally-oriented, it is important to note that within time, past, present and future are integrated. This is also the case in depth psychology, where events occurring in childhood, though faded from conscious memory, nevertheless hold sway years later and often determine how we react to many varying circumstances. The thread of commonality between indigenous philosophy and psychology is the integration between two or more objects or concepts. This integrative approach finds affinity with the notion that life is process- and event-oriented, that what matters most is interaction rather than results or facts.

Another area of commonality resides in the importance placed in dreams and myths. Eduardo Duran, an American Indian practicing psychiatry on a reservation in New Mexico, dances between two worlds, to borrow from the title of Fred Gustafson's book. His challenge is to integrate skills learned from a western-oriented approach to medicine with a clientele living life from a decidedly non-western perspective. He found the most obvious bridge between the two worlds to be dream analysis. Here, he comments on the use of dream analysis with native people who visit him at his "dream community," otherwise known as the local reservation health clinic.

Since not much of my western training was showing any effectiveness with the patients I was seeing, and since the people I worked with valued dreams, I started utilizing a crude form of dream-analysis therapy. I felt this would be a good therapeutic intervention in the community, and therefore my time wouldn't be totally wasted with my attempts to implement cognitive behavioral strategies that were unwelcome and made no sense to the people I was working with. It seemed the only time I was able to engage people from this community in any type of treatment was when we worked on dream material. It was in this manner that other interventions were then welcomed and made possible. Without the dream as a vehicle, there was no intervention with individuals, or with the community for that matter.<sup>38</sup>

***Canadian Multiculturalism: A Political Environment Conducive to Overturning Deep-Seated Ill Effects of Postcolonialism.***

Historically speaking, Canada and the United States have shared a similar approach to genocide with respect to native people. These similarities amounted to: (a) a European perspective, shared by all invading European colonizing countries, that viewed Aboriginals as savages and sub-human; (b) European economic exploitation of Aboriginals, resulting in the disruption of indigenous culture, economic systems, and personal health; (c) the on again, off again U.S./Canadian attempts to acculturate and integrate Indians – based on the arrogant assumption that Indian lives would prosper under European ways of living; (d) the forced relocation of Indians onto reserves; (e) the development of ineffective bureaucracies in both countries to deal with the so-called Indian question; (f) periods of reform in the early 20th century followed by so-called termination intentions (ultimately not carried through) in the 1960s designed to abruptly cut off federal aid. This threat, combined with the U.S. civil rights movement inspired Indians to organize nationally in the late 1960s. History also shows that Indians on both sides of the border responded similarly to the European invaders. This is revealed in: (a) an increase in inter-tribal conflict as tribes sought the assistance of colonized nations in battling enemy tribes; (b) the dissolution of some tribes and the forced formation of multi-tribal confederacies; (c) vehement refutation of European acculturation and integration, (d) the drive to return to spiritual and traditional roots, (e) failed attempts to organize politically until the 1960s when Indians tribes began expressing their desire to become nations within nations.

Despite the similarities, Canada and the United States are headed in opposing directions, with Canada, by comparison, taking a decidedly more proactive and engaging approach to assisting Aboriginals. The point of diversion between the neighboring countries occurred in the early 1970s when Canada began embracing a more multiculturalist approach to governing. Declaring a policy of official multiculturalism after signing into law the Multiculturalist Act of 1971, Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau pronounced four aims:

1. To encourage and support various ethnic and cultural groups in their cultural development.
2. To stimulate fuller political participation in Canadian society;

3. To promote exchange among all groups; and
4. To assist the newer members of Canadian society to acquire one of Canada's official languages.

Absent from these politically-minded targets was multiculturalism's innate potential to resolve conflict through encouraging recognition of each group's uniqueness. Recognition has a positive effect on group esteem. Members of a minority group need not feel ashamed of its difference. Better yet would be a social environment that accepts and encourages difference so that group members can actually feel good about their uncommon attributes. A psychological underpinning exists in multiculturalism that links positive identity with recognition in a social setting. Charles Taylor, speaking on behalf of multiculturalism, writes that

... our identity is partly shaped by recognition or its absence, often by the misrecognition of others, and so a person or group of people can suffer real damage, real distortion, if the people or society around them mirror back to them a confining or demeaning or contemptible picture of themselves. Nonrecognition or misrecognition can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being.<sup>39</sup>

Minority groups, it is true, must rely upon themselves to promote positive identity, but how much better for all concerned if the community offered not only the freedom to do so but assisted in the process. Just as Freud contended that all psychology is group psychology groups do not exist in a vacuum. Identity – individual as well as group – is an interactive process. As Taylor asserts, it is dialogical.

My discovering my own identity doesn't mean that I work it out in isolation, but that I negotiate it through dialogue, partly overt, partly internal, with others. That is why the development of an ideal of inwardly generated identity gives a new importance to recognition. My own identity crucially depends on my dialogical relations with others.<sup>40</sup>

Recognizing one's inherent worth and uniqueness and providing a positive mirror is an important, but only but an initial first, step. Multiculturalism, to be truly effective and indeed revolutionary, must dig deeper into a repressed and painful history in order to heal wounds. Adopting multiculturalism to what we've learned so far about the ramifications of repressed

painful memory, a governmental multiculturalism policy needs to unearth painful, oppressive events in history, examine the negative effects repression has delivered, and through dialogue – in public education and other government-sponsored activities – begin the healing process. How much good will talking about painful (historic) memories do? Plenty, if Freud is to be believed. Freud stated that the goal of psychoanalysis was to make the unconscious conscious. He also highlighted the benefits of expressing repressed thoughts and emotions, often extolling the virtues of the “talking cure” that was psychoanalysis. A multiculturalist policy that emphasizes uncovering repressed emotions – because it encourages understanding of the Other – can be a strong foundation on which to construct the bridge of conflict resolution.

Canada’s multiculturalist approach to governing, even if it has to be nudged here and there, is conducive to a program like Gathering Strength. The strength of multiculturalism resides in acknowledging, recognizing and appreciating difference and the Other. As a result, Gathering Strength exists in a political and social environment that allows it to establish a foundation. As the federal government has stated, Gathering Strength is a long-term action plan. It is due to Canada’s acceptance and recognition of differing cultural attributes that the program has an opportunity to ultimately achieve its significant goals. Along with the affinity between psychology and indigenous philosophy, this makes Gathering Strength the right initiative for Aboriginals living in Canada.

#### **IV. The Pain of the Perpetrator**

Fred Gustafson, a Jungian-trained psychoanalyst, perceives unfulfilled connections between indigenous and western culture. His theoretical bridge between the two worlds presupposes an indigenous soul existing in everyone that frequently becomes obscured. Gustafson describes the pain inflicted upon Aboriginal people by colonizers who have projected their own western-derived, pathologically repressed aggression onto their culture. It is not only the Aboriginals who suffer, however, for what the colonizers have done to Aboriginals, namely the destruction of the native essence or soul of the individual, they have also done to themselves. What is needed, proclaims Gustafson, is a collective mourning that awakens everyone to the past and current pain brought about through assimilation and exploitation.

The psychological ramification of abuse generated within the family structure and against the backdrop of an oppressive dominant culture is further suppression of pain that then becomes metamorphosed into pathologies, such as alcoholism, suicide, and community violence. But what happens to the members of the dominant culture? What psychological processes do they undergo, if any? While on some peripheral level it may seem unfair to clump all whites together into a single dominant group category, these group members need to realize that they are a part of the whole, part of the community called Canada. Moreover, their participation in a Canadian healing process with Aboriginals is not merely just a public service but will produce benefits to damaged individual and collective psyches which continue to deny the history of oppressive behavior. To understand the emotional process of being a part of the dominating class is to further understand Eastern culture in relation to indigenous culture. Recall that for every aspect of indigenous philosophy discussed in the previous section there was a countervailing philosophical element pertaining to western culture. Recall also, though, a cross-cultural analysis aims at discovering aspects common to the two groups. There must be some universalizing aspects that connect peoples from the two cultures as human beings. Gustafson sees western culture steadfastly adhering to classification and categorization. He cites western obsession with maintaining separation from indigenous culture as originating within a context of

both fear and longing for an indigenesness, a state of being at the core essence of the self. Fear of the indigenous relates to the western fear of the earth as a symbolic representation of one's own body and psyche. This fear, because it has not been acknowledged, has caused an alienation and existential loneliness, the ramification of which is a dysfunctional need to emphasize difference and separation. In essence, indigenous life is a reminder to western culture that it has lost connection to its own essential root. Alongside this alienation, however deeply buried within the collective psyche of Westerners, is a sadness and longing for its return.

The indigenous is representative of the essence of the human condition and the interconnection with nature and the cosmos. The fact that western culture has long ago lost contact with that human and cosmic essence has meant a severe alienation and fear which, unfortunately, has significant negative consequences.

This is an alienation from our deeper self, from the earth as home and from the gained wisdom of our evolutionary past. It has set us adrift to project these losses on identified indigenous peoples of the world with the result of either idealizing or romanticizing them according to our undifferentiated needs or conquering and attempting to destroy them to ride the truth they carry from our terrified and, as I stated, alienated ego. If this were only on a personal level, it would be bad enough. However, it has been raised to collective proportions, institutionalized, politicized and made a way of life in the world affected by the western perspective of life.<sup>41</sup>

The fear associated with indigenesness needs to be released from the realm of the unconscious. Gathering Strength, spurred by Canada's support of different cultures, possesses the potential to benefit Euro-Canadians as well as Aboriginals.

The problem with members of the dominant culture is the mistaken belief that what has occurred long ago has little consequence today. This kind of thinking is mistaken in two ways: first, actions long ago do resonate today as evidenced by the intergenerational transference of pain mentioned earlier; and secondly, such claims, in reality, are defense mechanisms masking emotional pain. Racial hatred is evidential of suppressed pain and anger, but there is another pathological symptom adhered to by many belonging to the dominant western culture that are sympathetic with the problems of the Aboriginal population. That symptom is guilt, and it is as

unhealthy as repressed aggression. In fact, guilt represents the other side of the coin of repressed emotions. Now, there is an upside to feelings of guilt; many acts of reparation arise from such feelings. Guilt, though, resonates in the realm of self-hatred. Additionally, in western culture, blaming becomes a polarized emotion. Someone needs to be at fault for the plight of the  
Aboriginals: either *I/We* are to blame or *They* are to blame.

There exists an alternative to Canadian guilt and the denial of complicity: the power of mourning. Gustafson refers to it as grief and sadness:

But even more fundamental and restorative than guilt is sadness – the condition of seeing, admitting and weeping! Sadness certainly can acknowledge the guilt but moves on to the loss behind it. Blame includes one part of the population, guilt the other. Grief includes everyone. It is the common element we all share in together and that can join us in the mutual task of finding our way home to the earth.<sup>42</sup>

Mourning has the potential to bring clarity of mind to those who participate in it. It is a form of reality testing which can reveal to members of the dominant culture that what they have done to Aboriginals they have done to themselves, namely destroy that essential, indigenous part of the self to appease the need to mask hurtful emotions. To recover from painful emotions means to experience that pain again. Therein lies the problematic aspect of mourning, however: people are not prone to experience pain; we are, rather, prone to avoid it. One of the most relevant discoveries Freud made is one of the simplest. The goal of psychoanalysis, he mentions, is to replace the unconscious with the conscious: “where id goes, there ego shall be.” That is what is at stake here. Members of both populations need to acknowledge, confront, and grieve over painful experiences unique to the individual. By doing so, individuals can transfer unconscious, repressed emotions into the realm of consciousness.

Westerners can learn much from Aboriginals (and vice versa), for it is an indigenous worldview that would make the claim that

A great healing is needed today, and a great healing is possible. The earth is as always ready to receive us as is the Indian literally and as a reflection within ourselves if given a chance. It is now time to begin moving away from a blame and guilt relationship into a recognition of our common grief and common brokenness and common task to clean up the mess.<sup>43</sup>

Only when a grieving process is completed can true reparation begin. Mourning will bring clarity of perception and the energy and drive to repair the damage. It will be at that point that members of both populations experience an interconnection with each other.

Winding down a path unknown  
with souls entwined together  
Staying in the dark recesses of the  
underworld, waiting patiently  
Until that which has been forgotten  
can be remembered  
And once remembered, can be healed.<sup>44</sup>

## **V. Conclusion: Realistic Hopes**

The core of Aboriginal identity is the location where the soul wound occurred. Once this core essence of the soul becomes wounded, then all emerging aspects of the soul – mythology, dreams, and culture – reflect that wound. Prior to colonization, indigenous culture inherited to a central and balanced awareness that placed the individual as part of the whole of the environment and the cosmos. Everybody was connected to everything. Mind, body, and spirit were separate but interchanging features of a unified whole, and the emotional state of life was equally important as the physical. The land was treasured and the indigenous self felt connected to mother earth. A moral code arose out of the interconnection of all things: the consequences of individual action affected not only that individual but the treasured community as well. And then the soul was wounded by colonizers representing what was arrogantly presumed to be a superior culture. At first, the native population was exploited for the colonizer's survival, economic, and military needs. Then, when the Aboriginals were no longer of use to the Europeans acts of assimilation, tantamount to cultural genocide, occurred. The Aboriginal response to assimilation was the suppression of anger, fear, and aggression and the internalization of the Canadian perpetrator. Repressed aggression does not just disappear, however. It resurfaces in dysfunctional ways. Aboriginal pathologies, instigated by suppressed emotions, revealed themselves as high suicide rates, severe alcohol abuse, family and community violence, and a general sense of hopelessness. Anger could not viably be directed at the Canadian aggressor and was instead directed inward or toward other Aboriginals in the community. The locus of symptomatic rage became the family unit where an unconscious compulsion to repeat abuse insured an intergenerational flow of child abuse. As for the dominant Canadian population, while not suffering the kinds of effects associated with racism, economic discrimination, and cultural genocide, they nevertheless experienced an existential alienation and loneliness due to a simultaneous repulsion and longing for what has been described as a lost or repressed indigenous self. This indigenous self is a spiritual and earthbound feeling whereby the individual feels connected to the community, mother earth, and

the cosmos. The solution to the repressed anger and fear of both populations is quite simply to remove the repression which then uncovers space for sadness to emerge. The mourning process opens the way for a clearer perception in which the individual and group can better test reality. A greater perception of reality coincides with individual group empowerment. From there, positive changes can be made with emotionally-based pathology kept to a minimum.

Canada's Aboriginal action plan, entitled *Gathering Strength*, was presented to the public on January 7, 1998. Much of the press commented upon it being Canada's "official apology" to Aboriginal people. Many felt an apology to be a great understatement. However, upon reflection, not many countries have offered apologetic gestures to indigenous populations for past transgressions. The nation south of Canada's border, for example, has yet to apologize to the Indians, nor to African-Americans for that matter. Some months after the presentation of Canada's initiative, Bill Clinton traveled throughout various parts of Africa. The notion of an apology to African-Americans arose at a press conference, but Clinton hemmed and hawed and ultimately dismissed the idea. At any rate, as it turns out, *Gathering Strength* has much greater substance than a mere overdue apology. The plan's objectives include:

1. *Renewing the Partnerships* between Aboriginals and whites;
2. *Strengthening Aboriginals Governance*, that is, encouraging self-empowerment in creating effective governments, affirming treaty relationships, and negotiating fair solutions to Aboriginal land claims;
3. *Developing a New Fiscal Relationship*, so that financial arrangements with Aboriginal governments and organizations become stable, predictable, and accountable, thus fostering self-reliance; and
4. *Supporting Strong Communities, People, and Economies*, which refers to improving health and public safety and strengthening Aboriginal economic development.<sup>45</sup>

Point number 4, "improving health and public safety" comes closest to the heart of this paper. Greater awareness of the psychological ramifications of cultural genocide – pertaining both to

Aboriginals and whites alike – is needed. There are signs that Canada is open to the suggestions of social-psychology. The language of *Gathering Strength* attests to that, with words like, well, “gathering strength,” but also words like “reconciliation,” “mutual respect, mutual recognition, mutual responsibility,” “learn from our past,” and “profound regret for past actions.”<sup>46</sup>

In addition, one aspect of *Gathering Strength* is especially promising and comes closest to a national mourning. In January of 1998, the government of Canada announced a commitment of \$350 million to support the development of a ‘Healing Strategy’ to address the legacy of physical and sexual abuse in the Residential School System. More than just a compensation package, the Healing Strategy is comprised of a series of mechanisms designed to support community initiatives that address the intergenerational effects of child abuse. It emphasizes supporting Aboriginal organizations in the operation of programs which address the needs of the survivors of abuse in the Residential School System. One such organization is the Aboriginal Healing Foundation. An Aboriginal-run, non-profit organization that is independent of both the government and other Aboriginal organizations, they see their mission as not only aiding the healing process of Aboriginals but to include whites as well.

We see our role as facilitators in the healing process by helping Aboriginal people help themselves, by providing resources for healing initiatives, by promoting awareness of healing issues and needs, and by nurturing a supportive public environment. We also work to engage Canadians in this healing process, encouraging them to walk with us on the path of reconciliation.<sup>47</sup>

A combined effort on the part of both populations is needed to focus on the emotional aspects of the healing process, to dig deep to reveal, acknowledge, and then heal the deep hurt that has been hidden from conscious view for centuries.

Any proposed Canadian-Aboriginal mourning will be a long-term endeavor lasting many generations. There are no quick-fix solutions, and the task will be challenging. Analytically, the concept of mourning is very clear cut: past pain is uncovered, experienced fully on an emotional level, and then catharsis begins. Realistically, however, the individual/group must be willing to participate in it. That is why a national program, a public education campaign, is needed. The Healing Strategy represents a promising first step forward as does, generally, the *Gathering*

Strength initiative. In comparison to other governments with similar problems with colonized indigenous populations, *Gathering Strength* stands out. Much of the world will be looking forward to its progress. As of now, it is a promising first step toward reconciliation.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> Jane Stewart, "Notes for an Address by The Honorable Jane Stewart, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development on the Occasion of the Unveiling of Gathering Strength – Canada's Aboriginal Action Plan," Ottawa, Ontario, January 7, 1998.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP)

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Medical Services Branch, Health Canada.

<sup>7</sup> RCAP.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Aboriginal Peoples Survey, Statistics Canada, 1991.

<sup>11</sup> RCAP.

<sup>12</sup> Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 1967), 154.

<sup>13</sup> Frantz Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 1963), 30.

<sup>14</sup> J. R. Miller, *Shingwauk's Vision* (Toronto, Buffalo, London: University of Toronto Press, 1996), 142.

<sup>15</sup> Ward Churchill, *Kill the Indian, Save The Man* (San Francisco: City Lights Books, 2004), 19.

<sup>16</sup> Miller, 39.

<sup>17</sup> Churchill, 68.

<sup>18</sup> Churchill, 71-73.

<sup>19</sup> Eduardo Duran and Bonnie Duran, *Native American Postcolonial Psychology* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1995), 34-35.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>21</sup> Alice Miller, *For Your Own Good: Hidden Cruelty In Child-rearing and the Roots of Violence*, trans. Hildegarde and Hunter Hannum (New York: The Noonday Press, 1983), 61.

<sup>22</sup> Duran and Duran, 29-30.

<sup>23</sup> Miller, 106.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 97-98.

<sup>26</sup> K. C. Peterson, M.F. Prout, and R. A. Schwarz, *Post-traumatic Stress Disorder: A Clinician's Guide* (New York and London: Plenum Press, 1991).

<sup>27</sup> Duran and Duran, 42.

<sup>28</sup> Miller, 262-63.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 65.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Duran and Duran, p. 25.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>33</sup> Dennis McPherson, "A Definition of Culture: Canada and First Nations," in *Native American Religious Identity*, Jace Weaver ed. (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1998), 78.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 95.

<sup>35</sup> Franke Wilmer, "Taking Indigenous Critiques Seriously," in *The Greening of Sovereignty in World Politics*, Karen T. Litfin ed. (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 1998), 65.

<sup>36</sup> Jace Weaver, "From I-Hermeneutics to We-Hermeneutics," in *Native American Religious Identity*, 20.

<sup>37</sup> Duran and Duran, p. 15.

<sup>38</sup> Eduardo Duran, *Buddha In Redface* (New York, Lincoln, Shanghai: Writers Club Press, 2000), 5.

<sup>39</sup> Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism* (Princeton University Press: 1994), 25.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>41</sup> Fred Gustafson, *Dancing Between Two Worlds* (New York, Mahwah, New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1997), 7.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 98.

<sup>44</sup> Margaret Smerlinski, quoted in Gustafson, 19.

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<sup>45</sup> Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples, *Gathering Strength – Canada’s Aboriginal Action Plan*, January 7, 1998.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> Aboriginal Healing Foundation, *Mission, Vision, and Values*, 1998.