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A question of justice: Critically researching suicide with Indigenous studies of affect, biosociality, and land-based relations

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Abstract

This paper considers how Indigenous studies can inform the evolution of critical research on suicide. Aligned with critiques of mainstream suicidology, these methodological approaches provide a roadmap for structural analysis of complex systems and logics in which the phenomenon of suicide emerges. Moving beyond mere naming of social determinants of suicide and consistent with calls for a theory of justice within suicide research, Indigenous studies helps to advance conceptual knowledge of suicide in descriptive means and enhance ethical responses to suicide beyond psychocentric domains. Through centering Indigenous theories of affect, biosociality, and land-based relations, this article examines what new knowledge of suicide can emerge, as well as what ethical responses are possible to suicide and to a world where suicide exists. This new knowledge can inform practices for critical suicide studies which are invested in resisting structural violence, nourish agency, dignity and freedom for those living and dying in often-unlivable presents, and enhancing livability for individuals, communities, and the environment living under shadows of empire. Implications for theory, ethics, and suicide research and prevention practice are considered.

Keywords

environment and health, death dying and bereavement, social inequalities in health, theory, race, ethnicity and health

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Suicide is widely regarded as a critical issue for our times, as rates around the world have at least at the population level steadily increased in recent years. It is estimated that 800,000 people die annually due to suicide around the world (World Health Organization, 2020). In Canada, where Indigenous peoples are the fastest growing population, Indigenous peoples, and particularly youth experience disproportionately high rates of suicide compared to the general public (Statistics Canada, 2019). Cautioning that demographic factors such as age, geography, and political identity hold variability; it has been estimated that in some communities, suicide rates for Indigenous youth under the age of 15 were 50 times higher than non-Indigenous rates (Statistics Canada, 2019). It is widely known that suicide and self-injury are the leading causes of death among Indigenous youth and adults up to the age of 44 in Canada (Government of Canada, 2016).

Suicide is frequently framed as a "problem" within Indigenous communities. Beginning with the release of *Choosing Life: Special report on suicide among Aboriginal People*, suicide was noted as being a rare choice made by elders within the context of specific family and community dynamics (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples [RCAP], 1995: 18). Proceeding to change with increasing numbers of Indigenous youth dying by suicide, RCAP hypothesized, and outright warned, the number of suicides for Indigenous youth would rise over the next 10–15 years (RCAP, 1995: 18). Over 25 years has come to pass with no alleviation of suicide rates within Indigenous populations in Canada. This fact continues to fuel the advancement of Canadian public health research and program development; however, this work has failed to account for ways that predominant approaches to suicide prevention are not working, and they maintain prevailing biases concerning suicide within Indigenous contexts (Ansloos, 2018).

Critical suicide studies have begun to critique the dominance of positivist, empiricist, and quantitative approaches to suicide theory and suicide prevention practice (Jaworski, 2020; White, 2017). Marsh (2010) has highlighted rampant bio-determinism in suicidology whereby, suicide has come to be known as a pathology of the individual mind that implicates an anatomical detriment. Further, given that this detriment is closely associated with the psychology of an individual, the prevailing assumption is that suicidality is a feature of a pathological, disordered, and/or irrational subject (Marsh, 2015). This framing of suicide permeates suicide theory and practice, and is used to justify interventionism that is primarily concerned with risk assessment, detection, management, and mental health treatment for Indigenous peoples (Ansloos, 2018).

Critical suicide studies are concerned about decontextualization and resist the universalization of theories of suicidality and suicides (Colucci and Lester, 2013). Structural factors like colonialism are the most frequently cited etiological factor in Indigenous health in Canada, yet it is rarely described or analyzed in a manner that deepens conceptual or tactical response knowledge (Nelson and Wilson, 2017). The practice of merely naming colonialism as a social determinant is problematic and more contextualization of such mechanisms, and their relationship to suicide theory and prevention practices is needed.

There is a dynamic corpus of work by Indigenous scholars, which we believe would shake up and enliven suicide studies (White, 2015). The following article considers how suicide theory and practice-based responses might evolve critically were we to center

Indigenous methodologies. As Indigenous health scholars, we are cognizant of the realities of colonialism within our context of work and are interested in how analyses of colonialism might inform theories of suicide. Aligned with the critiques suicidology, we suggest that Indigenous methodologies provide a roadmap for structural analyses of sociopolitical, economic, and environmental systems and logics in which the phenomenon of suicide emerges. Consistent with the critical concern for explicated theories of justice within suicide research and practice (Ansloos, 2018; Button and Marsh, 2020), we consider how Indigenous methodologies help enhance ethical responses to suicide.

Situating our project in conversation with critical suicide studies, we introduce Indigenous scholars as key partners. Centering Indigenous studies, as knowledge needed for suicide theory and prevention practice, we introduce three interweaving analytical paradigms, namely, felt theory, affective-biosociality, and land-based relations. By centering Indigenous theories, we reconsider what suicide might mean, and how to respond to suicide and a world where suicide exists.

Critical turns in suicide studies

The phenomenon of suicide has represented multifarious meanings across temporal, social, cultural, and disciplinary boundaries. Suicide has changed figurative and perceptive shape on behalf of the individual and on-looker as either an act of honor, morality and immorality, public performance of social status, and a crime, to name a few (Fitzpatrick, 2014; Marsh, 2010). In the context of suicides of Indigenous young people, while traces of these meanings persist, suicide has been fastened to discourses of a public health crisis (Chrisjohn et al., 2017). This resonates with the ways critical suicide studies scholars have reflected on the preponderance of individual psychopathology in the wake of suicides (Marsh, 2010). The fastening of suicide to psychopathology has been prescribed largely by the psy-disciplines, who act as the arbiters of its conceptualization, definition of preceding symptomology or etiology and methods of intervention (Mills, 2017).

This psychocentric (Rimke, 2016) view of suicide has been described as a "compulsory ontology of pathology" (Marsh, 2010: 18). Meaning that, the "experts" of the study of suicide participate in a "self-authenticating style of reasoning" (Marsh, 2015: 18) that favors positivism and regulates the borders of suicidology. This epistemic favoritism (White, 2020) and propensity to frame suicide as an irrational outcome (Jaworski, 2020; Marsh, 2020) deprives the field of more contextual, justice-oriented, and historically intertwined understandings of suicide (Ansloos, 2018; Button and Marsh, 2020; Chandler, 2020; Kral, 2019; Manning, 2020; White, 2017; White et al., 2015). The way suicide manifests within Indigenous communities warrants a multifaceted appraisal and moreover, the practice of prevention informed by this dominant approach has been ineffective in our context of practice.

We acknowledge that critical suicide studies scholars offer alterities in the form of social justice responses to suicide (Button and Marsh, 2020), social causes of suicide (Manning, 2020), and cultural (Colucci and Lester, 2013) and gendered (Fullagar and O'Brien, 2016; Jaworski, 2010) understandings of suicide. In this article, we intend to nuance a structural theory of suicide through the introduction of Indigenous studies into

suicide studies. Indigenous studies hold a "language of possibility" (Smith, 2012: 204) that has yet to be reckoned with in the study of suicide. It is our goal to produce knowledges of suicide through putting mainstream, and critical suicide studies, in conversation with Indigenous methodologies. Further, we anticipate that this interdisciplinarity will contribute to a necessary move from prevention-of-death frameworks to a focus on fostering livability within Indigenous communities and suicide studies.

Linking Indigenous studies with critical suicide studies

Indigenous studies are particularly concerned with critiquing the limitations of Western epistemologies in their abstracting, decontextualizing, and temporal focus, and analyzing the ways that such epistemological framing is an ideological basis for colonialism, imperialism, and racism (Deloria, 1973). Indigenous studies are interested in better understanding the spatiality of Indigenous epistemology, that is the material effects of place-based Indigenous knowledges. The freedom from colonial oppression that many Indigenous people seek is linked to this knowledge. Therefore, the resurgence of Indigenous knowledge systems becomes critical work.

These Indigenous studies critiques open up places of possibility in epistemologies of suicide in important ways: First, it is a reminder that theories are contextual and when made universal are prone to contribute to the emergence of structural violence. Indeed, universalizing theories of suicide can create logics conducive to colonial harm. In our perspective, there is no universal Indigenous theory of suicide. Second, the spatiality of Indigenous knowledge reminds us that theories of suicide must be contextually derived and should reflect the spatial relations of land, people and place. Spatial epistemology has material effects that hold possibility for the thriving of Indigenous peoples and lands. The stakes of understanding this knowledge could not be any higher for suicide researchers engaged with Indigenous communities around the world.

While Indigenous studies points us towards a contextual approach and resists universalization, this does not mean isolationism or epistemic incommensurability. Indigenous social theories produced in a context can be useful to other people in other contexts in the same way that knowledge produced outside of Indigenous communities can be useful for Indigenous peoples. What comes to matter is the relevance and ethics of that use. Engaging with Indigenous knowledge should not reiterate colonial power dynamics through capitalist appropriation or extraction. Alternatively, Indigenous thought should be engaged humbly, dialogically and relationally. This approach to intercontextual engagement of theory can be a form of mutual aid—where we thread together bundles of knowledge mutually invested in and reciprocally enacting liberation. In practice, this looks like a dynamic citational practice, with an acknowledgment of differences of context and histories, a commitment to learning and accountability, and foregrounding the relevance and solidarity of thought and action in knowledge exchange.

Institutionally, Indigenous studies is concerned with carving out space within academic institutions and systems for Indigenous people, and for our knowledges to be respected. This is also true of research in suicide, where Indigenous peoples are frequent subjects of research, yet rarely have been active contributors to knowledge production beyond being a data point. We are curious about how suicide research might change with

more Indigenous researchers at the table, and what Indigenous knowledges of suicide might emerge. Indigenous studies is also concerned with the work educating through and within Indigenous knowledge systems, vis-a-vis Indigenous methodologies, theories, and practices. We see this as resonant with the concerns of those critical suicide scholars considering how culture shapes suicide theory (Colucci and Lester, 2013) however, this pedagogy abandons an ethnographic gaze on culture, and turns toward more relational and spatial teaching and learning practices.

In a sense, Indigenous studies asks us to consider how suicide research might become a relational practice which affirms Indigenous people's self-determinism. This question points toward another goal of Indigenous studies, that is promoting the epistemological aims of Indigenous knowledge, such as liberation from oppression and the thriving of Indigenous peoples and lands (Hampton, 1995). This shifts the project of suicide studies away from mere prevention or a practice wedded to modernist sciences and neoliberal multiculturalist psychologies, toward something that reckons with structural conditions conducive to suicide and that addresses questions of livability in and beyond the colonial nation state.

A further goal is redressing the effects of western epistemological bias which have resulted in various forms of structural violence and systemic oppression. This raises the question of ethics in histories of suicide research, namely, what violence has the dominance of the mainstream epistemological frame of suicide research produced in Indigenous communities and how might critical suicide researchers be implicated in redressing such violence.

Indigenous studies offers an important ethical consideration which responds to colonial violence. In the context of its engagement within postcolonial literature of the early 20th century, Indigenous scholars and activists in the 1960s began writing about the political projects of decolonization as Indigenous self-determinism and liberation from colonial state-based interference and suppression of Indigenous nationhood. The key ethical commitments of this iteration of Indigenous studies concern the sovereignty and sufficiency of Indigenous worldviews, knowledges, and lifeways. This led to theories of decolonial change as being connected to recognition and acknowledgment of Indigenous peoples distinct ethnocultural identities within settler-states, as well as more radical calls for Indigenous nationhood and the abolition of colonization. Critiques of the neoliberal practice of recognition and acknowledgment are predicated on the idea that respect within the settler-state is not sufficient to ensure self-determinism (Coulthard, 2014). Further, the equating of decolonization with neoliberal projects of diversity fails to enact the abolition of structural conditions that diminish Indigenous life (Tuck and Yang, 2012). Radical theories of decolonization have thus emerged which emphasize Indigenous political freedom, which center the ethics of resurgence (Alfred, 1999), that is, foremost embodiment and action as self-determining Indigenous peoples.

These ethics have substantial implications for suicide research, moreover, for us specifically as Indigenous suicide researchers. Indigenous Studies is concerned with a political project, and its interventions are both local and structural in the service of Indigenous self-determinism. Arguably, suicide studies are similarly a political project, which requires both local and structural change. That change is in the service of various political projects, but we suggest that as Indigenous scholars conversing with suicide

studies, the change processes we need in suicide research are connected, if not the same as those called for by Indigenous Studies. For research on Indigenous suicide to be nourished by Indigenous people's knowledge systems, Indigenous self-determinism, must be more than the practices of a neoliberal anthropology, but rather, a substantive commitment to justice for Indigenous peoples. In our context, death by suicide is a question of justice, and perhaps, more than the prevention of suicide, so is the practice of promoting life in unlivable worlds.

Thinking with Indigenous scholars, we intend to elaborate on theories of affect, biosociality and land-based relations, to provide new ways discussing suicide, particularly within our context of work in colonially called Canada. To do this, we turn to Dian Million's work on felt theory to better understand affective epistemologies of suicide. In this analysis, we explore the potential of felt theory as a new type of truth telling in the realm of suicide studies. We argue that exploring felt knowledge within Indigenous communities can provide a site of radical reflection about the nature of Indigenous suicide that lies outside of regulation, governmentality, and risk assessment, to instead describe colonial harms that go beyond psychocentric interventions and protecting institutions. We also draw on Billy Ray Belcourt's work on biosociality, colonialism and livability. In this section, we aim to describe the ways that Indigenous bodies are acted upon by structures, specifically settler colonial structures, which in turn, produce a certain bio-affective response, described by Belcourt as misery. We argue that misery, and ultimately suicidality, are intentional, depathologized, and rational responses to the precarious nature of living under a colonial empire. Finally, Tuck and Lee, and their collaborators, provide critically informative theories of geopolitics and land-based relations which can help us to move beyond the atomistic framing of suicide as merely ecologically situated, toward the relationality of suicide, and responses to a world where suicide exists. This section explores the inter-constitutive nature of land, colonialism, and Indigenous suicide. We describe the goal of colonialism as striving to disappear Indigenous peoples for the purpose of land acquisition, and delve into the implications of a contemporary Indigenous existence in a society that was structured to benefit from such elimination. Further, we outline that a besiege on land is consequentially a strike against Indigenous bodies evinced in the form of suicidality. These analyses of affect, biosociality, and land-based relations are useful for suicide studies which remain vague in describing the structural drivers of suicide. The next section will take a closer look at felt theory and the potentials for a type of accounting of structures that is unafraid to embrace the truths about colonially lived realities.

Felt theory and suicide

Meaningfully coinciding with the launch of a federal truth and reconciliation commission (TRC) regarding Indian Residential Schools in Canada, Tanana Athabascan scholar, Million (2008, 2009, 2013), reflects on the ways that Indigenous peoples lived experiences of colonial violence, and in particular Indigenous women's feelings about colonial violence, have intersected within private and public spheres. Voicing experiences of colonial violence—which is regulated through the TRC—is situated in a much longer history of Indigenous women's activism (Million, 2013).

Against the privatizing and stigmatizing norms of colonial women's subjectivity, Indigenous women for the last half century have been making public their lived experiences and feelings about the gendered, racialized and sexualized nature of colonial violence (Million, 2009, 2013). She suggests that these Indigenous women's stories resist the debilitating colonial forces of shame and their truth-telling laid the foundation for the public reflection presently occurring through transitional justice processes (Million, 2009, 2013). Nonetheless, Million (2009) argues that for the last half century, Indigenous women's contributions were often marginalized through misogyny, treated as radically polemic, or altogether disregarded.

Million (2013) problematizes the ways that Indigenous women's lived experiences are subject to inquisition, regulation and governmentality through the truth and reconciliation process where survivors of residential schools were required to give voice to historical experiences of violence as a means of proof or evidence of colonial wrongdoing. Million (2008) points out "[t]rauma requires all those positioned by its narratives to return to the site of the crime (the past as colonial history) to legitimate their claims" (p. 268). Her works implies a vital question, what might be possible if the felt knowledge of Indigenous women was taken seriously, on their own terms, beyond the scope of regulated processes.

For instance, in Million's (2009) writing on Indigenous women's resistance to gender discrimination in the Indian Act—an apartheid legislation that still governs Indigenous people's relationship to the government of Canada—it was noted that altering the problematic and gendered components of the Indian Act did not translate to addressing the gender abuses linked to community stress, changes in gender roles, and other unnamed gender violence's occurring within Indigenous communities (Million, 2009: 58). This enduring gender-based violence denotes the entrenched nature of colonization and it's reach beyond legislative practices. Million (2009) highlights the importance of attending closely to the truth in the emotional content of felt knowledge. For progress in the form of alterations to the Indian Act, was not a form of progress that was felt by Indigenous women in the context of their communities.

Million (2009) invites us to attend to "colonialism as it is *felt* by those whose experience it is" (p. 58). As she suggests, "to decolonize, means to understand as fully as possible the forms colonialism takes in our own times" (Million, 2009: 55). Such felt knowledge is risky. Million (2009) suggests "our voices rock the boat and perhaps the world. They are dangerous" (p. 55). This felt knowledge is a methodology which helps Indigenous people, "to speak to ourselves, to inform ourselves and our generations, to counter and intervene in a constantly morphing colonial system" (p. 55). As Million (2008) suggests:

> We need models for what can be achieved by felt action, actions informed by experience and analysis, by a felt theory. I believe that these knowledges and practices represent significant political interventions or counterhegemonic moves. . . (p. 268)

Conversations about suicide within suicide studies, and perhaps more tellingly within suicide prevention research, are similarly confined to borders of public and private disclosure and regulated through colonial governmentality. Fitzpatrick (2020) notes that

contemporary suicide prevention practices are contingent on risk assessment and surveillance. This marked dependence presents harmful communicative obstacles that effect how individuals express their experiences with suicidality. The hyper attendance to risk assessment and surveillance continually leads to shallow and misguided understandings of suicide because discussions about suicide are often cultivated within the dialogical parameters of risk and surveillance. Like the felt knowledge of suicide, Indigenous women's felt knowledge of violence was regularly silenced by the misogynist foundations of colonial subjectivity. Therefore, we must consider how the spaces we create to discuss suicide, similarly, regulate felt knowledges about suicide.

Acknowledgments of suicide have been historically confined to the private domains of morality and religion (Jaworski, 2020; Marsh, 2010; Yampolsky and Kushner, 2020). While philosophical reflections of morality, and the resulting public debates around the ethics of suicide still persevere within suicide studies (Fitzpatrick, 2014; Jaworski, 2020), there are critical calls to "reframe suicide as ethical in so far as suicide is about what people do to end their lives to make sense of their suffering, and paradoxically, their lives" (Jaworski, 2020: 5). Felt knowledge invites us to consider how Indigenous people are making sense of their life, amidst colonial suffering. This is a call to allow truths about suicide and suicidality to exist outside of predetermined bio-determinist and psychocentric frames.

Million (2009, 2013) implies that colonial governmentality employs shame as a tactic to privatize and obscure colonial violence. Shame, of course, does not diminish the widespread occurrence of violence, nor Indigenous women's public responses to it. We see a parallel here with suicidal deaths of Indigenous peoples. Against the shaming pathologization of psychocentric surveillance, Indigenous peoples have both died of suicide and spoke of suicide, leading to an increasingly public engagement, and debate about the coloniality of suicide. While still regarded as risky, it has become a more palatable discourse in so far as it is situated within a discursive framework of prevention (Fitzpatrick, 2014, 2016), and mediated through an especially individualistic, scientific and biomedical process (Marsh, 2020). Suicidality and suicide are highly regulated and governed by a set of norms with specific actors who question the legitimacy of felt knowledges of suicide and forensically establish their own theories through positivist science. There is a reliance upon expertism to legitimize suicidality, resulting in a propensity for suicide to only make sense when it is confined to the discursive limitations of preventing such deaths. It is as if Indigenous deaths by suicide are devoid of a particular felt knowledge, one that may speak more to the conditions of living within a colonial state, rather than a genetic predisposition to depression, or an undiagnosed mental health disorder.

In our context of work, we find ourselves reflecting on how Indigenous peoples' felt knowledges of suicide have been ignored or regarded throughout history. The goals of cultural assimilation of intergenerational colonial policies have certainly shaped the landscape of private and public responses to Indigenous youth suicidality and suicides. While there may be knowledges of suicidality and suicide that predate colonization or exist beyond it, Indigenous youth suicides have continued to occur and increase throughout Canadian history. This felt knowledge is forcing public recognition, albeit largely perceived through the frames of crisis and mental health. In such framing, the substantive statements of Indigenous youths felt knowledge are ignored, and instead, suffering youth

are surveilled as risky and shameful subjects. We suggest that their felt knowledge implicates the colonial violence of the Canadian state.

If we resist the colonizing forces of positivism, individualism, and psycho-pathologization, and instead attend to the felt knowledge of Indigenous young people, we may begin to understand the radical political claims they make concerning suicide, and moreover our society. By attending to this truth telling, we might understand the radical possibilities of refusing the fly-in, drive-thru versions of psychological and psychiatric interventions that dish out diagnoses and line the pockets of pharmaceuticals and that do little to advance change on the material realities sourcing distress. We might come to know the power of refusing the services of supposed psychological experts. Such refusals are learned through felt knowledge and experiences over time with colonizers and mental health experts alike, standing in as the solution in times of widespread crisis, ironically produced by colonial interventionism in the first place. Felt knowledges often speak more about colonial harms, intergenerational and contemporary injustice, and structural violence than about a missed psychological diagnosis. Such knowledges beg questions like, how much is risk surveillance of suicide meant to protect institutions rather than help surveilled individuals feel better? Felt knowledge implores us to intentionally act against safeguarding our institutions because it is those institutions that have inflicted harm in the first place.

Suicide researchers must be able to ask relevant questions that are not necessarily committed to safeguarding institutions, or psychocentric hegemonies, but that emphasize lived experience and that expose and nuance structural risk. Under the threat of governmentality in suicidology, will suicide researchers listen to young people's felt knowledge of suicide, especially if it questions the structures of injustice in a world where suicide exists? Felt knowledge troubles.

Felt knowledge, risky as it is, is an important way of advancing more relevant theories of suicide because it helps us to see the ways that colonial subjectivity is linked to suicide. We must reflect on whether progress in the prevention of Indigenous suicide, including the increasing presence of mental health workers in Indigenous communities—notably regulated and governed by conventional mental health interventions—*feels* like progress to Indigenous young people. Ultimately, a felt theory of Indigenous suicide means we must as researchers, practitioners, and as a society attend to a "more complex telling" of Indigenous youth suicide that "recognizes emotion as an embodied knowledge" (Million, 2009: 71). Felt theory provides an opportunity to counter psychocentrism, and resist the "pathologization of difference" (Rimke, 2016: 4) in the stories, reflections, and lived realities of suicidality occurring within a colonial state. Meaning that, felt theory asks whether Indigenous suicidality is merely a manifestation of depressive symptoms, or if feelings of suicide is a type a *felt knowledge* about the construction and conditions of the world. Attending to felt theory is a commitment to complexifying traditional notions of suicidal reasoning, and it is a dialogical tactic that can describe the nature of living within a world structured to inflict pain.

Affect, biosociality and suicide

Starting from the position that Indigenous health, in colonial contexts is a complex web of biosocial relations, Belcourt (2020), a Cree scholar, turns our attention to the

illuminating role of biologically situated affects to inform our understanding of what he calls misery.

Belcourt (2018) considers the ways that the high rates of diabetes in Indigenous communities are indicative of a "sort of exhausted existence" entrenched within racial structures, whereby, "indigeneity is a zone of biological struggle" that is "calibrated by affects" which he groups "under the sign of misery" (p. 3). Expanding on the biosociality of necropolitics in the Canadian context, Belcourt (2018) suggests that "the biosocial is where biology's politics are thinkable, where bodily production and statecraft meet, where sickness coheres as a racialized symptom of a world that is not good for most of us" (p. 2). He explains, that "indigeneity and sickness are co-constitutive categories in a day and age where health is the biopolitical measure of a subject's ability to adjust to structural pressures endemic to the affective life of setter colonialism." (Belcourt, 2018: 2). Bodies are acted upon by structures—in this case, settler colonial structures—and that action produces certain biological and affective responses, such as misery, which can quicken death. That quickening can take the form of suicidality, and leads to death by suicide.

The relevance of this argument in the context of suicide studies is that it acknowledges what many critical suicide scholars have long suggested, that suicide, among other things, is a response to structural violence, and has been considered generally to be correlated with structural drivers of inequality and social determinants of health. This has produced a critical refrain that is seeking to rationalize and depathologize suicide (Marsh, 2020; Rimke, 2016) in suicidology.

When the structural orders are violent, neither the desire to die nor the act of suicide is necessarily an irrational or pathological response. Alternatively, suicide may be quite rational and socially encoded within the fabric of a settler colonial state. As Kral (1994) suggests, suicide occurs in a context where the idea of suicide already exists and is a social logic made available in a repertoire of responses to the state of perturbation. Belcourt (2018) in his emphasis on biosociality, similarly shifts away from over pathologizing and individualizing states of distress, disease, and dying within Indigenous communities by attending to the structural. Belcourt (2020) states "there's a way to talk about and represent suicide that's not pathologizing" (p. 131). He writes "this is an occasion not to romanticize suicide but to reflect on how to practice radical empathy for those who experience aliveness as a kind of ever-present death knell" (p. 132). Belcourt shifts the biosocial argument away from the cognitive orientation of social logics toward a renewed description of perturbation by socially situating the embodied experience of misery, something akin to what suicidologists call suicidality.

Pushing beyond a psychocentric rendering of misery, Belcourt invites us to think about the relationship between Indigenous people and colonial structures and how this relation produces specific structural biosocial affects, and deadly ones at that. Belcourt writes:

> Suicide emerges as a political response to structurally manufactured sorrow where joy has been shut out of everyday life for a long time. (Belcourt, 2020: 133, 134)

The affective frames of unlivability are relevant to the question of suicide because it helps describe the condition of attempting to live within a structurally violent context.

Speaking to the death rates of Indigenous youth and the normalization of these structural arrangements, Belcourt (2018) writes, "ours [our lives] is an elongated state of near-deathness that rarely collects the public outrage constitutive of the out-of the-ordinary" (Belcourt, 2018: 12).

While suicide prevention studies are preoccupied with the question of preserving life, Belcourt makes clear that conditions of Indigenous life under the colonial regime are at best miserable, at worst, entirely incommensurable, unlivable, and therefore, to remain alive in such a world is always a courageous and precarious affair. He also highlights that a racialized violent social order is normative within settler-colonial imaginaries, to the point that, it is almost regarded as an inevitability that the Indigenous person or community should be alive only in a state of constant deadening misery. As an example, Belcourt points to the Canadian apartheid structure of the reserve system—a colonial administration which has produced and maintained economic and social inequality—he writes:

> The reserve, then, is where settler states like Canada dump biological risk, polishing the structurally produced vulnerability of Indigenous bodies, compressing them into containers for sickness. On the reserve, doing nothing in the face of biosocial violence is often how empire besieges Indigenous worlds. (Belcourt, 2018: 10)

This focus on describing the moral imagination of settler colonialism, is an important intervention into suicide studies, because it demands elucidation of the intents of structural arrangements which produce misery. Belcourt's work drives home a particular sociopolitical aspect which should produce unease. We call this sociopolitical component of Indigenous suicide: colonial intentionality. We assert, perhaps radically, that colonial intentionality is the defining feature that solidifies Indigenous suicide as the intentioned outcome of colonial nation-state. This is aligned with Belcourt's (2020) analysis of unlivability, of which he describes there is, "dizzying evidence of the unlivability of Canada wherever one looks. That NDN kids, NDN women and men, queer and trans NDNs, are all enticed by the freedom of non-existence is an ethical problem at the core of Canadian modernity" (p. 139).

This charge is frequently met with denial, or as Tuck and Yang (2012) suggest, a settler "move to innocence", but perhaps more insidious, Indigenous misery is met with a settler-colonial performance of individualistic and psychocentric interventionism in the name of Indigenous people's welfare, which dubiously reinforces colonial dominance. This is a necropolic: Indigenous peoples suffering and made suicidal under the weight of empire, while being surveilled, intervened upon to stay alive, denied the sovereignty to choose death, and asked to choose life in a social order that refuses to change. This is the colonial intentionally felt by Indigenous peoples, and described poignantly by Belcourt (2020):

> How any of us survive in a world always against us, against what we signify and make imaginable, is a sociologically significant act. What I know is that it's unfair that NDNs are called on to make do in a world we neither wanted nor built ourselves. I have called this bind precarity. It's also the ground zero for suicidal ideation. (p. 134).

Living in a world that is against you as an Indigenous person is not an accident, a fluke, or even a surprise. We push further to state that this "ethical problem" is a product of a colonial intention that has manufactured the parameters where not dying is as critically important for the colonial enterprise, as denying the vitality of living to Indigenous peoples. There is evidence of this necropolitical enterprise at every turn, from lack of access to clean drinking water, to food insecurity, to lack of economic opportunities within communities for youth, to under-funding of education, social services, and healthcare, and on the other end, massive investments in surveillance, profiling, policing, and over incarceration.

Conversing with Belcourt's theories of affect and biosociality produce important new knowledge in suicide studies, particularly in helping to articulate a more descriptive theory of the role of structural violence in suicide. Moving beyond the insufficiency of the mere naming of social determinants and structural drivers of inequality, Belcourt helps us see how the settler state produces, with intention no less, conditions of unlivability, which in turn makes life miserable for Indigenous people, and marks bodies as uninhabitable. He helps us to explicate the necropolitics of settler colonialism, which by virtue of the structural arrangements of the state, denies both the sovereignty to live a flourishing life and seeks to deny the right to end the condition of misery of living in uninhabitable worlds—or what we frequently call suicide. Recognizing structural drivers of suicide is a step in the direction of materiality, and the ways that suicide and suicidality are actualized in response to palpable circumstances and destruction that lie outside of the body. It is those material contexts of life in the settler state built upon Indigenous lands that we now turn.

Land and suicide

The connection between land and Indigenous suicide may appear enigmatic upon first encounter, and this is perhaps achieved through the widespread framing of suicide as fastened to mental health. We aim to highlight important relationships unfolding at the intersection of land, colonialism, and Indigenous suicide. We want to do this by drawing attention to the work of Unangaŝ scholar Eve Tuck and her collaborators writings on land and decolonization (Tuck, 2009; Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013; Tuck and McKenzie, 2015; Tuck and Yang, 2012) and Cree scholar Lee (2016) in her work on wasteland theory.

In suicide studies, research related to land and suicide has been largely reductive, instrumental and non-relational. For example, there is research which suggests that regional, seasonal, and latitudinal differences in suicide prevalence exist (Bagley, 1991; Björkstén et al., 2005; Eastwood and Peter, 1988; Fossey and Shapiro, 1992). This simplistic approach suggests that higher rates of suicide are occurring in geographical zones with higher prevalence of Indigenous peoples, while altogether obscuring the variation within those regions and failing to consider the environmental, geographical, and socioeconomic factors (Henderson, 2003), let alone structural dynamics such as colonial history.

We see a unique opportunity within the field of critical suicide studies, and feel an inherent responsibility as Indigenous scholars, to address the absence of a meaningful

interrogation of the nuanced connection between land and suicide. This omission can be understood as one of the consequences of a pervasive epistemic flaw that has continued to position, and operationally define colonialism as an abstract social determinant of Indigenous health (Ansloos, 2018; Nelson and Wilson, 2017), as opposed to one that is enacted on, with, and vis-a-vis land-based relations. Our goal in this section is to locate the phenomenon of suicide within a theory of structural violence that is materially situated, and as a result, there lays a renewed place-based tangibility implicating Indigenous suicide as occurring on, or with Indigenous land.

A relational theory of land must interrogate the centrality of settler futurity in land-based conversations, and recognize the structural, colonially violent, and unlivable implications for "anyone who dares to speak against ongoing colonization" (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013: 73). This provides a useful way of reconceiving land beyond reductive ecological terms and demonstrates how Indigenous people's relationships to land have been meaningfully linked to experiences of, and resistance against settler colonialism. In daring to speak about colonization, Indigenous scholars highlight that it is a historically, and contemporarily "settled" structure that has vested interest in various forms of transforming Indigenous peoples' humanity, assimilating Indigenous peoples' identity, and eliminating Indigenous peoples' physicality. These processes were conducted in relation to land, whereby not only were Indigenous lands converted to property, but for settlers to make a place their home, it was a prerequisite to disappear or destroy the Indigenous peoples that live there (Tuck and McKenzie, 2015: 68). The violence resulting from settler colonial invasion is not temporally constrained to the moment of first contact, or the "unfortunate birthpangs" of a new nation, rather the violence is reasserted everyday of occupation (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández, 2013: 73). Thus, the relationship between colonial domination and Indigenous sovereignty expressed in living or continuing to exist in a settler-colonial world as an Indigenous person is material and land-based.

This is important as it provides an opportunity to reflect on how a land-based analysis of suicide prevalence might nuance our understanding of the geopolitical dynamics of suicide. Consideration of the place-based nature and spatiality of suicide in relationship to histories and indeed, present experiences of land-based structural violence, may shed an interesting light on why prevalence of suicide seems to be also meaningfully occurring in sites of failed environmental policy, environmental degradation, water and food insecurity, and where the effects of human caused climate change are most felt.

Indigenous studies scholars suggest that land-based relations are present whether we acknowledge them or not, and, that land is living. This is a critical departure from instrumentalist and reductive relationality to land characterized by settler-colonial imaginings. Such an orientation renders land as kin (Simpson, 2017). In contrast, Cree scholar, Lee (2016) considers how settler colonialism relates to the places of Indigenous life as wastelands. She writes:

> Spaces that are considered not simply unworthy of defense, but deserving of devastation, are named "wastelands." Wastelands are places where no medicines grow, only plants called "weeds." A wasteland is a place where, we are taught, there is nothing and no one salvageable.

> A wasteland is a person denied safe haven because she is full of the chemicals that make survival less painful. Wastelands are spaces deemed unworthy of healing because of the scale and amount of devastation that has occurred there. Wastelands are named wastelands by the ones responsible for their devastation. Once they have devastated the earth . . . once they have consumed all that they believe to be valuable, the rest is discarded (Lee, 2016, para. 27–29).

Lee makes clear that the treatment of Indigenous lands by settler colonialism, always intermingles with the assault of Indigenous peoples, and that the directionality of violence always entangles land and bodies. Indigenous people refuse to disentangle Indigenous bodies from Indigenous lands, theoretically nor physically. Disentanglement is what produces individualistic and anthropocentric interventions which: fail to grapple with impending environmental collapse, are limited by the goals of settler futurity, and corrupted by the ethics of disposability which imagine white wealthy human life above all else. This is especially true in a settler colonial society that continues to demand more, and refuses to redress coercive historical obtainment of, space and land (Tuck and McKenzie, 2015: 60).

It is in this spatial arrangement where Indigenous people are tasked with living, and where the land-based relations of suicide occur. We think suicide scholars ought to attend to the ways we frame land and peoples, as wastelands, and instead adopt Indigenous geopolitics. It may help us to consider how the theft and degradation of Indigenous land by settler-colonial power intersects affectively and bio-socially. Further, through such an analysis, we might consider that suicidal death in this context could be understood as a range of radically unsettling expressions of agentic counter-conduct to settler-colonial expansion, including protest, solidarity, witness to, and/or symbiosis of suffering with land.

We think that this land-based relational reconfiguring could invite new and creative responses to suicide which are concerned not only with suicide, but with redressing a world where suicide exists. Simply put, freedom from settler-colonialism does not reside in the mind, or body alone, but must be enacted in land-based relations. As Tuck and Yang (2012) illuminate, decolonization is not metaphorical, but is linked to embodied and land-based freedom. Decolonizing suicide studies, if such a project exists, is to be about a theory of change which is both material and social, and grounded in people and place. It is also about justice, and that justice is seen in both the large-scale transformations of society, and the everyday ways in which our work makes living possible, and desired. Throughout these last three sections, we have moved from felt theory, a radical form of truth telling about suicide that lies outside of psychocentric parameters, toward a structural analysis of suicide that situates suicidality, as a biosocial manifestation of colonial misery. In the following section, we conclude with a discussion about materiality, and the potential of a land-based relational analyses of suicide concerned with the livability of lands, waters, and peoples.

Toward Indigenous ethics in suicide studies

Indigenous theories of affect, bio-sociality, and land-based relations hold possibility for responding to suicide and responding to a world where suicide exists. Applying Dian

Million's felt theory invites suicide studies to consider a different kind of listening to the knowledge of Indigenous people. This requires us to persevere even if that knowledge is risky to the enterprise of colonial society and is troubling in the practice of prevention. For instance, through attending to the felt knowledges of Indigenous youth, might we reinterpret the "desire for death as a possible answer to a problem. . . [to instead see suicidality as] the desire to change the way one lives" (Yampolsky and Kushner, 2020: 539). Attending to the felt knowledges of Indigenous young people dying in the colonial nation state may bring into existence alternative prescriptions for a life that feels livable. As opposed to seeing dying as the answer to mental illness (i.e., the "problem"), felt knowledge allows us to understand suicide as a desire to change the condition of being in a colonized world, and points us toward the site of needed social action. Inviting a felt knowledge of suicide translates into practices which create space for young people to tell stories of how colonialism produces uninhabitable types of pain, grief, and trauma. The discomfort this truth telling produces is needed, and it is vital to the pursuit of justice in a world where suicide exists.

Belcourt's work helps us think about a theory of justice in suicide studies by asking how we respond to suicide, and moreover the settler state where suicide exists. Belcourt (2020) suggests, "suicide is routinely coated in negative affects" and is studied through the lens of tragedy, as if the structural circumstances which render life unlivable are inevitable. Suicide is not inevitable, but it is both "devastating" and "a kind of politically charged reaction to the world" as it is structured (p. 139). The ethical imagination of suicide studies cannot remain tethered to a depoliticized tragedy nor can it remain unreflective on the political truths which suicide reveals. Belcourt (2020) states, "[t]hat we haven't sufficed in the project of making being in the world an arousing and joyous thing for all is a cause for alarm" (p. 131). To keep people alive while simultaneously, failing to build livable worlds is pathological. Instead, we must be anchored by a concept of dignity and urgently alter the conditions which produce such misery. Our work must be about "illuminat[ing] a future in which the clouds aren't more hospitable to NDNs than Canada is" (Belcourt, 2020: 137). To make bodies inhabitable, one must make the world livable, or as Belcourt (2020) suggests, to prevent suicide, "requires a radical remaking of the world" (p. 139).

Responding to suicide and responding to a world where suicide exists might be described as a practice of decolonization. While decolonization is not a metaphor and concerns actual Indigenous sovereignty, decolonization doesn't only occur through state-based relations. It occurs through intimate and everyday actions which help to nourish futurity. Like Belcourt, decolonization for Tuck and Yang (2012), is an intimate worlding project that takes material form on Indigenous land as a uniquely unsettling "elsewhere" (p. 36). This is relevant for suicide studies in relationship to the personal and professional responsibility of researchers and prevention practitioners. Here, we are invited to consider the ways our work is implicated in struggles for the abolition of colonialism, and in the assertion of Indigenous peoples' self-determinism. How we individually chose to use our craft, and the referent power it affords in the service of the political freedom for Indigenous peoples is a measure of our value. If our work does little to world a possibility of freedom for people suffering from the misery of colonialism, life promotion has become the metaphor, and the prevention of death in an unchanged world remains the

rule. What these theories call for is not code for merely culturally safe or trauma-informed approaches to research and practice but is a call to social action.

Similarly, Lee (2016) suggests that resistance to colonial disposability is a project anchored by the ethics of enduring possibility and care. She writes: "we understand that there is nothing and no one beyond healing. So we return again and again to the discards, gathering scraps for our bundles, and we tend to the devastation with destabilizing gentleness, carefulness, softness." While suicide and the story it tells of bodies and land sits in the register of misery and violence, it is not a story without the possibility of desire and hope. As Lee (2016) suggests:

> Joining the defense of body and the defense of land is to dream of something beyond constant defense . . . When we make a home in lands and bodies considered wastelands, we attest that these places are worthy of healing and that we are worthy of life beyond survival.

We invite suicide scholars to situate themselves not as anthropological observers of Indigenous peoples' misery, but as active witnesses to Indigenous peoples enduring love for one another, and of our land, and commit themselves to mutual aid. In a sense, this means methodologically, our research needs to see different and attend to things, attend to places of vitality and love at work in our communities. To bear witness to this love should move us, but moreover, should challenge us to articulate the "why" of living in our work, which is at its core, a reflection on justice. If the why for living is limited by the colonial, capitalist, and anthropocentric imagination of our day, Indigenous death by suicide will continue. But if our "why" for living is reoriented by decolonial desire, love, care, and an unwavering commitment to the dignity of persons and place, we may yet find healing beyond survival.

Reflecting on Tuck and Lee's contributions invites us to consider how our suicide studies are entangled in life promotion for both people and the planet. This is important because it moves us beyond a romanticized view of Indigenous people's relationships to land, toward an ethic of land that implicates all of us. Inevitably, the unlivability of the colonial world as it is structured for Indigenous peoples, dooms us all in the end. The promotion of life for Indigenous land and people, is not merely about addressing the ethical challenge of suicide but it is about making a livable world that exists beyond the supposed anthropocene.

Conclusion

As Indigenous people working within suicide studies and prevention spaces, where the misery we respond to is so intimately close, Belcourt (2018) reminds us that "to be abandoned is not yet to be dispossessed of the ground beneath your feet where you were left" (p. 12). Our position is that the facts of suicide do not negate the possibility of good living or a better world. But what matters for suicide studies scholars, is that our work needs to be justice doing and must urgently respond to the story that suicide tells.

We have sought to contrast the dominant discursive framing of Indigenous suicide as a depoliticized crisis, toward something entrenched within the aims of the colonial project. Moving beyond the mere naming of a social determinant, we have argued that

colonialism needs to be described and knowledge of it, nuanced and felt. We cannot listen nor understand the complex entanglements of colonialism with suicide, until we better perceive the felt knowledge produced by Indigenous peoples. To invite such knowledge is a critical task and fraught with risk, because it necessarily takes us outside of the domain of prevention of death. It takes seriously the ethical problem of pain and prioritizes the ethical imperative of listening to seek understanding. Ironically, we would suggest this type of listening, will inevitably lead toward futures full of living, in part because the structural threats to living become perceivable.

We have also attempted to make visceral the biosocial and affective realities of colonial structures and argued that suicide can be better understood by seriously attending to misery and unlivability. As a theory of suicide, this moves us beyond the disintegrating framing of suicidality as a mere cognitive state or psychological vulnerability, toward an integrated concept of debility and necro-politics. In this rendering, suicidality is what happens to a mind and body enacted upon by a particular set of colonial logics. In a world which diminishes the dignity and embodied sovereignty of Indigenous peoples, suicide is an exit from structural misery. This assertion is often met with discomfort and repudiation by suicidologists and is telling of how disconnected mainstream conceptualizations of suicidality are with the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples. Our claim that suicide is a logical exit from structural misery is not a comment on what is ethical or healthy, however, foreclosure on such questions is driven by fear, limits our ability to address root causes, and upholds the power structures of a pathologizing field of research and practice. We should not foreclose on such inquiries. What we are suggesting is that suicide scholars should ask what sorts of structural shifts are needed to disincentivize, and moreover, make unnecessary suicide. Responding to suicide implies the need for social reforms, and perhaps, abolition of those structures which produce such distress. Practically speaking, this means we need to reform and or end structures that administer violence against Indigenous peoples. For example. if systems of policing or child welfare were designed to oppress Indigenous peoples and produce misery, critical suicide studies researchers and practitioners ought to be concerned with inquiries toward the end of these structures; and in the immediate, reducing harm.

The realities of colonial structures are not apolitical but are intended to produce a particular type of suffering, therefore, those interested in addressing suicide, are implicated in political work which strikes at the core of colonial empire–racism, ethnocentrism, anthropocentrism, extraction, disposability, and genocide. Our praxis must position these as central ethical problems of suicide studies and as sites in need of action in world where suicide exists. To invite Indigenous people to endure living, we must make the world better. Failing to do so while necessitating prevention of death is a necropolitic. Suicide prevention must be linked to life promotion, and materially so. Much of the work of suicide studies is about theorizing suicidal death, lethality, perturbation, and suicidality. We need theories of living, not merely surviving, but good living, thriving, and freedom. Suicide studies must consider the "why" behind our impulse to keep people alive. We suggest there are ethical reasons to stay alive, but those reasons are linked to a sense that the world can be made better and should be made better. This is the work that a world where suicide exists begets. Worlding a good life beyond the grips of colonialism is decolonizing, and manifests the futurity of all relations—people and place.

Indigenous suicide exists and occurs on and within the context of colonial notions of lands as property, and places as resources made for extraction. We have argued above that Indigenous bodies cannot be disentangled from land-based relations, and as such, we see colonial occupation of land as implicated in Indigenous suicide, and structures a world where suicide exists. But what else is possible? We ask suicide studies scholars to not settle for the world as it is, but to join Indigenous peoples in our work for justice, and in so doing, center the ethics of desire, care, and love in our resistance to violence. As Belcourt (2020) suggests, "there isn't only now and here. There is elsewhere and somewhere too. Speak against the coloniality of the world, against the rote of despair it causes in an always-loudening chant. Please keep loving" (p. 140).

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