

Naming the Fatigue, Rekindling the Fire

Gitxsan Matriarchs' Fight Against Colonial Disorder

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces two conceptual frameworks—Post-Settler Disorder (PSD) and Colonial Contact Fatigue (CCF)—to describe the ongoing impacts of settler colonialism on Indigenous peoples in Canada. Written from the perspective of a Gitxsan woman, the paper draws on Indigenous epistemologies, storytelling, and feminist scholarship grounded in lived experience. PSD functions as a satirical analytical lens exposing settler denial, historical amnesia, and narratives of innocence that sustain colonial systems. CCF names the cumulative spiritual, emotional, and physical exhaustion experienced through continuous contact with colonial institutions. The article highlights the role of Indigenous women, humor, and matrilineal knowledge as sources of resilience, resistance, and pathways toward healing.

Keywords: settler colonialism, indigenous epistemologies, Post-Settler Disorder (PSD), Colonial Contact Fatigue (CCF), indigenous women

Introduction: Women Who Carry Stories and Keep the Fire Lit

From the place of Indigenous women who carry the stories and keep the fire lit, this paper introduces two Gitxsan-derived frameworks: Post-Settler Disorder (PSD) and Colonial Contact Fatigue (CCF). These concepts name the sickness embedded within settler systems. They also capture the spiritual and emotional heaviness borne by Indigenous peoples who survive ongoing colonial harms.¹ PSD uses satire as subversive truth-telling to expose settler myths and systemic

denial. CCF speaks to the cumulative weariness in Indigenous spirits after generations of erasure and violence.

I come to this work as a Gitxsan woman living in the colonized lands called Canada. I am grounded in the knowledge systems of my people and shaped by the layered realities of living under a colonial state. I witness how colonial structures mark our bodies and spirits. Indigenous women, two-spirit peoples, and gender-diverse kin continue to resist erasure.² This paper grew from lived experience and reflection, from watching the

¹ Arline T. Geronimus, *Weathering: The Extraordinary Stress Of Ordinary Life In An Unjust Society* (Little, Brown Spark, 2023), pt. 1, “The Erasure, the Erosion, and the Withstanding.”

² Qwo-Li Driskill, *Asegi Stories: Cherokee Queer and Two-Spirit Memory* (University of Arizona Press, 2016), 3-20.

delusions of settler institutions, and from grief, rage, and moments of clarity. Writing this was a way to make sense of it all. I aim to name the disorder settlers carry and the fatigue we carry from them.

Indigenous women are central as knowledge keepers and sharers. They are cultural continuers who hold wisdom that sustains community resilience and resistance.³ This paper situates PSD and CCF within Indigenous epistemologies and feminist frameworks. These frameworks emphasize storytelling and healing as acts of resistance.^{4,5}

Context and Witnessing: Growing Up Inside the Machinery of the Settler State

Growing up Gitxsan in what is now called Canada meant growing up inside the machinery of a colonial state that was built on our dispossession. The racism I experienced was not incidental; it was systemic, deliberate, and embedded in every institution around me. It shaped my earliest memories, my schooling, the healthcare we received, the stereotypes I saw on television, and the casual disdain or ignorance in the way settlers talked about us. I came to understand that I was living within a system that required our erasure to sustain itself. The more settlers denied our presence, our sovereignty, and our humanity, the more their nation could hold the illusion of innocence.

I was taught from a young age that settlers believed they were entitled to our lands, our silence, our stories, and even our disappearance. These weren't abstract beliefs. Curriculum, law,

media, and policy made them real. The classroom taught me that Indigenous peoples were “part of Canada's past.” We were often only mentioned in the context of early contact or in the footnotes of settler nation-building. In courtrooms, I saw families criminalized for poverty that colonialism created. On the news, I heard our communities framed as either broken or dangerous—rarely as knowledgeable, sovereign, or resilient.

Before the era of social media, these messages were insidious, woven into everyday life in ways that could be hard to name. But with the rise of comment sections and digital platforms, the hatred became more visible. When the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) disabled comments on Indigenous stories in 2015 due to a flood of hate speech and misinformation, it was not a glitch in the system; it reflected it.⁶ The comment sections became a mirror, showing the ugliness that has always underpinned Canadian politeness. It was no longer possible to pretend that racism was a thing of the past, or that settlers simply “didn't know.” The violence was on full display.

This isn't only about white settlers. Racialized newcomers and second-generation settlers often

³ Leannes Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back: Stories of Nishnaabeg Re-Creation, Resurgence, and a New Emergence* (Arbeiter Ring Publishing, 2011), 35-48.

⁴ Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, 2nd ed. (Zed Books, 2012), “Getting the Story Right, Telling the Story Well: Indigenous Activism, Indigenous Research.

⁵ Shawn Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony: Indigenous Research Methods* (Fernwood Publishing, 2008), 32-39.

⁶ CBC News, “Uncivil Dialogue: Commenting and Stories About Indigenous People,” November 30, 2015, <https://www.cbc.ca/newsblogs/community/editorsblog/2015/11/uncivil-dialogue-commenting-and-stories-about-indigenous-people.html>.

absorb and reproduce anti-Indigenous myths. Scholars like Lawrence and Dua have shown how anti-Indigenous ideologies are woven into the social fabric of Canada.⁷ These ideologies serve both white and non-white settlers alike. The “machinery” of the settler state depends on broad complicity. It teaches all who benefit from colonial occupation—regardless of their race—to avoid naming whose lands they are on, whose laws were displaced, and what responsibilities come with living here.

What I came to understand is that white supremacy is not just a legacy; it is a living structure in Canada. John A. Macdonald, Canada’s first prime minister, actively pursued policies of starvation, displacement, and assimilation, seeking to “get rid of the Indian problem.”⁸ His legacy remains in the Indian Act, which continues to legislate Indigenous lives today. The systems that govern our identities, our status, and our access to basic services are colonial tools, designed to control and eliminate us, not support us. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission revealed the scale of this harm, but reconciliation without structural change is just another settler performance.⁹

It was within this context that the frameworks of Post-Settler Disorder (PSD) and Colonial Contact Fatigue (CCF) began to take shape in my understanding. These concepts did not arise solely from theory. They were born from the daily experience of watching settlers cling to myth while we carry truth. PSD names the distortion that settlers must live with to maintain the fiction of innocence. CCF speaks

to the exhaustion we carry from navigating their distortions.

This isn’t just personal reflection, it’s witnessing. Witnessing how systems lie. How institutions silence. How the media turns our pain into spectacle. How policies that claim to protect us often surveil or punish us instead. How settlers weaponize fragility when we name harm, demanding our patience instead of offering accountability.¹⁰ How our truth-telling is seen as aggression, and their denial is treated as reasoned debate.

To grow up Indigenous in Canada is to grow up in a system that gaslights you from day one. You are told your land is not yours, your stories are not valid, your anger is misplaced, and your survival is a burden. Yet, we are still here. Still naming what they won’t. Still refusing erasure. This witnessing is not without cost, but it is also where clarity lives. It’s where we begin to name not just the harms, but the patterns that keep them going. PSD and CCF are attempts to do just that: to name the disorder at the heart of the settler project, and the weariness it leaves in its wake.

⁷ Bonita Lawrence and Enakshi Dua, “Decolonizing Antiracism,” *Social Justice* 32, no. 4 (2005): 121–127.

⁸ John S. Milloy, *A National Crime: The Canadian Government and the Residential School System, 1879 to 1986* (Anniversary ed. University of Manitoba Press, 2017), 5–10.

⁹ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth, Reconciling for the Future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada* (2015), https://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2015/trc/IR4-7-2015-eng.pdf.

¹⁰ Robin DiAngelo, *White Fragility: Why It’s So Hard for White People to Talk About Racism* (Beacon Press, 2018), 115–122.

Post-Settler Disorder: Wit as Medicine in the Face of Delusion

Earlier in 2025, in the province of Ontario, Canada, Premier Doug Ford claimed that First Nations communities had their “hands out,” suggesting that Indigenous peoples are always asking for money and implying that we offer nothing in return.¹¹ His words echoed a long-standing settler narrative rooted in the colonial belief that we are dependent, undeserving, and somehow a burden to the nation. While he later issued a general apology “to all First Nations,” the damage was already done, and the racist backlash his comment stirred up was impossible to ignore. These aren’t just offhand remarks; they are symptoms of something deeper.

That comment stuck with me, not just because of its overt racism, but because of the delusion behind it. How can a leader, in 2025, still speak this way without shame, without pause? What was I really witnessing? The more I thought about it, the more I began to name it: Post-Settler Disorder (PSD).

PSD is not a clinical diagnosis. It’s a framework, an Indigenous lens to describe a settler condition marked by historical amnesia, cultural narcissism, and an obsessive need to preserve innocence. PSD refers to a pattern where settlers deny or distort the realities of colonialism to maintain their sense of innocence. It is the disease that arises when settlers are so committed to their myths that they can no longer recognize reality. It is the fragile foundation of a society built on theft, denial, and projection. In that space of denial, settlers develop elaborate justifications

for their entitlement to our lands, our labour, and our erasure.¹²

PSD shows up in the refusal to accept the facts of colonialism and the ongoing realities of Indigenous dispossession. It manifests in performative land acknowledgments that never lead to material change.¹³ It appears in school curricula that name treaties without naming betrayal.¹⁴ PSD flourishes in universities and institutions that tokenize Indigenous presence while resisting Indigenous governance.¹⁵ It thrives when settlers refuse to see themselves as settlers. They choose instead to frame themselves as immigrants, allies, or simply “Canadian.”¹⁶

Settlers living with PSD often cling to the idea that Indigenous peoples are already “included,” that equity has been achieved because they’ve seen our faces in a government ad or heard a few words of our language at a ceremony. But visibility is not justice. Symbolism is not sovereignty. PSD convinces people that they can participate in colonial systems while claiming to

¹¹ Adam Carter, “Doug Ford Apologizes for Saying First Nations ‘Keep Coming Hat in Hand’ Amid Bill 5 Controversy,” *CBC News*, June 19, 2025, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/doug-ford-first-nations-apology-1.7566080>.

¹² Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is Not a Metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 1–40.

¹³ Leanne Simpson, “Land as Pedagogy: Nishnaabeg Intelligence and Rebellious Transformation,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 3, no. 3 (2014): 1–25.

¹⁴ Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, *Honouring the Truth*.

¹⁵ Sandy Grande, *Red Pedagogy: Native American Social and Political Thought* (Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 63–90.

¹⁶ Glean Sean Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 25–49.

support decolonization. It gives them permission to remain comfortable and to confuse their comfort with peace.¹⁷

The disorder is not individual; it's structural. It is fed by the media, policy, law, education, and popular culture. It is why so many settlers are shocked when we speak our truths, name our oppression, or demand land back. It's why Indigenous grief and anger are so often pathologized while settler fragility is coddled.¹⁸ PSD is the condition of a society that tells itself it is good while refusing to reckon with the violence it depends on.

PSD is also ridiculous, and that's where wit becomes medicine. In my community, humor is survival. It is a form of resistance, of clarity, of connection. We use satire, sarcasm, and storytelling not just to endure but to expose. When the weight of settler denial becomes too heavy, sometimes all we can do is laugh, knowing laughter that carries the truth inside it. That laughter is ancestral. It's political. It clears space for truth to land.¹⁹

Calling it Post-Settler Disorder is part of that medicine. It is subversive truth-telling. It flips the script, naming the real sickness as settler delusion, not Indigenous trauma. For too long, Indigenous peoples have been pathologized, diagnosed, and defined by systems that ignore the causes of our pain. PSD reclaims the power to name. It says: we see what you're doing, and we are not fooled.

The satire embedded in PSD allows us to break through the noise of settler fragility. It offers

language for the absurdity we witness daily, when settlers claim to be "offended" by Indigenous resistance, or when institutions ask us to share our truth but only if it's palatable. PSD helps us understand why settlers can't stop centering themselves, even in spaces meant to uplift us. It explains why so many progressive allies stop short when land back becomes more than a metaphor. PSD is what keeps them comfortable while the system continues to dispossess us.

Yet, as much as PSD names harm, it also offers possibilities. If the disorder is denial, then the medicine is the truth. If the condition is rooted in false innocence, then the cure begins with responsibility. Indigenous humor, storytelling, and clarity are tools to interrupt PSD if settlers are willing to listen, sit with discomfort, and transform.

For Indigenous peoples, naming PSD is about regaining the power to frame reality. It is about no longer carrying the weight of settler confusion or educating people who refuse to see. It is a way to redirect energy toward what matters: our sovereignty, our kinship systems, our futures.

¹⁷ Jeff Corntassel, "Re-Envisioning Resurgence: Indigenous Pathways to Decolonization and Sustainable Self-Determination," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 86–101.

¹⁸ Joseph P. Gone, "Redressing First Nations Historical Trauma: Theorizing Mechanisms for Indigenous Culture as Mental Health Treatment," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 50, no. 5 (2013): 683–706, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461513487669>.

¹⁹ Emma LaRocque, "Chapter One Insider Notes: Reframing the Narratives" In *When the Other is Me: Native Resistance Discourse, 1850-1990* (University of Manitoba Press, 2011), 17-36, <https://doi.org/10.1515/9780887553929-003>.

There is power in naming. And when we call it Post-Settler Disorder, we are not just being clever, we are being precise. We are saying: the sickness is not ours to hold. The delusion is not ours to fix. But we will name it and move forward in our truths regardless.

Colonial Contact Fatigue: Born into the Battle

As a Gitksan woman, I have never known a life untouched by colonial infrastructure. From my first breath, my body and spirit were placed inside systems that were never built for me. Reserves carved from stolen land. Laws like the Indian Act that defined who I was before I had a chance to define myself. Education systems that erased my people from textbooks. Health systems that feared, ignored, maimed, or murdered our bodies.²⁰ All these systems operate as if we do not belong here, on our own land. Every generation born into these conditions carries a weight that is often invisible to settlers but deeply felt in our bones. This is what I call Colonial Contact Fatigue (CCF), the spiritual, emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion that accumulates over a lifetime of unrelenting contact with settler-colonial systems. It is the long echo of invasion, dressed in bureaucracy and policy, masked as neutrality or progress.

The term is rooted in and builds upon Racial Battle Fatigue (RBF), a concept explored in a volume edited by Hartlep and Ball to describe the stress responses experienced by racialized individuals navigating persistent racism in everyday life, particularly in academic and

professional spaces.²¹ RBF names the toll of microaggressions, surveillance, exclusion, and the constant need to defend one's presence. For Indigenous peoples, the contact goes deeper and is more pervasive. The entirety of the settler state is structured to erase, assimilate, or manage us. There is no "off switch." We don't walk into and out of colonial space; it surrounds us.

Colonial Contact Fatigue is what happens when your entire life, your education, healthcare, legal status, identity, and even your body, are shaped by the reach of colonial policy.²² It begins before birth and never lets go. It is the grandmother who couldn't pass down the language because she was punished for speaking it. The parent who fought the school system to stop their child from being labelled. The student who learned about their own people from the perspective of a white author. The professional who must represent the entirety of Indigenous peoples at every meeting. The youth who gets followed in the store. The woman who gets silenced in the boardroom. The community that grieves loss after loss while being told to "be resilient." It is the suffocating loop of having to justify your existence, constantly, politely, and often in spaces where the rules were never written for you.

²⁰ Dennis Ward, "Physician Barry Lavallee on Standing Up to the 'Smiling Faces' of Systemic Racism," *APTNews*, November 10, 2020, <https://www.aptnnews.ca/featured/physician-barry-lavallee-on-standing-up-to-the-smiling-faces-of-systemic-racism/>

²¹ Nicholas D. Hartlep and Daisy Ball, eds., *Racial Battle Fatigue in Faculty: Perspectives and Lessons from Higher Education* (Routledge, 2020).

²² Billy-Ray, *A History of My Brief Body* (Two Dollar Radio, 2020), 108-117.

This fatigue is not about personal weakness. It is about chronic exposure to systemic violence. It is about the cost of survival, and it is cumulative. When I walk into a room as the only Indigenous person present, I carry not only my voice but the weight of countless unspoken histories. I become both representative and target. The assumptions start before I speak: Is she angry? Is she qualified? Is she going to make us uncomfortable?

This burden to constantly translate our realities for others, to be digestible, palatable, non-threatening, is its own kind of violence. Over time, that violence settles into the body. It can look like burnout, like depression, like anxiety, like silence. It can look like leaving a job, or losing sleep, or withdrawing from community. CCF is the weight of never being able to rest because the system never stops pressing against you.

Even when we succeed, earn degrees, secure positions, and find platforms, we are rarely allowed to just be. Instead, we must justify our presence. Explain our identity. Soften our critiques. Translate our joy and rage into something that makes sense to others. When we finally hit a wall, when we name the harm or refuse to carry the load, we are framed as the problem.

This is how settler colonialism maintains itself, not just through force, but through exhaustion. It makes survival itself a struggle. It places Indigenous peoples into positions where we are overextended, under-supported, and expected to educate those who benefit from our dispossession. It wears us down until we doubt our own voices or start to believe we must leave

parts of ourselves behind to survive. Yet, this is not new. Our ancestors endured contact that was never consensual. They also endured residential schools, pass systems, child apprehension, sterilization, poverty, and incarceration. They lived through policies designed to destroy Indigenous life, and still, they protected languages, teachings, and kinship systems. The fact that we are here today is testimony to their strength. But strength does not erase the harm. It does not lessen the fatigue.

CCF is not just individual, it is intergenerational. It shows up in our nervous systems. In how our bodies carry stress. In the ways we scan rooms for safety, monitor our tone, and question our intuition. It shows up in the health disparities we face, higher rates of heart disease, diabetes, autoimmune disorders, mental health challenges, all deeply tied to structural violence and cumulative stress.²³

It shows up in our grief. In our communities, we are losing loved ones too soon. In the unhoused Indigenous peoples walking the streets of their own territories. In the parents who must fight child welfare agencies, and in the youth who carry despair too heavy for their years. None of this is accidental. CCF is the natural response to an unnatural system.

This section is not where I pivot to resilience. That comes later. Here, I honor the cost. I name the toll. I acknowledge the rage and sorrow

²³ Amy Bombay et al., "The Intergenerational Effects of Indian Residential Schools: Implications for the Concept of Historical Trauma," *Transcultural Psychiatry* 51, no. 3 (2014): 320–338, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1363461513503380>.

that come with surviving in a system that was never meant for us. I say: if you are tired, if you feel stretched thin, if you have moments where you want to disappear, it is not your fault. Your fatigue is not failure. It is evidence of the resistance you carry every day. CCF is real. Naming it is part of our medicine.

Women's Roles, Matrilineal Strength, and Gitxsan Resilience

I write this as a Gitxsan woman. These words carry the teachings of my ancestors, the grief of survival, and the beauty of strength handed down through women. I was born in Terrace, BC, and raised in the Gitxsan villages of Anspayaxw (Kispiox) and Gitwangak (Kitwanga), where our rivers, ridges, and stories shaped me before I even knew how to speak them.²⁴ Like many families, my parents made the difficult decision to move to the city, to Prince George, BC, believing that it might offer a better life. What followed was not a clear path to opportunity, but deeper layers of colonial struggle.

We left behind our territory, kinship, and the languages of the land for a city that made us feel like outsiders at every turn.²⁵ We were there less than a year before we had to return to Anspayaxw, but there was no physical home to return to. We were, by every definition, homeless. My parents and two siblings stayed with my grandparents, while my sister and I stayed with our aunt. It was the first and only time our family was separated. It was painful. But we got through it because of kin. Community held us.²⁶ That's who we are as Gitxsan people.

Eventually, my parents saved up enough money for us to try again, and we returned to Prince George. This time, we stayed. We all finished high school, but the cost was high. I was bullied relentlessly. The racism was overt, targeted, and unrelenting. I had to transfer schools because it became too much. These are just some of the early experiences of Colonial Contact Fatigue (CCF). It was everywhere, outside, in school, in the systems meant to support us.²⁷ My story is not unique. So many of us "make it" in spite of the odds, and so many others do not. Addiction, suicide, homicide, and poverty are not random tragedies. They are the aftermath of settler violence.²⁸ These harms follow us wherever we go. But so does our strength.

In our Gitxsan ways, we are a matrilineal society. Our house groups, our names, our responsibilities, they come through our mothers.²⁹ Our governance, our laws, our feasts,

²⁴ Valerie R. Napoleon, *Ayook: Gitksan Legal Order, Law, and Legal Theory*, PhD diss., University of Victoria, 2009.

²⁵ Linda Liebenberg et al., "Spaces & Places: Understanding Sense of Belonging and Cultural Engagement Among Indigenous Youth," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 18 (2019): 1–10, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406919840547>.

²⁶ Gerald Taiaiake Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness: An Indigenous Manifesto*, 2nd ed. (Oxford University Press, 2009), 91–113.

²⁷ Chelsea Vowel, *Indigenous Writes: A Guide to First Nations, Métis & Inuit Issues in Canada* (HighWater Press, 2016), 169–232.

²⁸ Cynthia C. Wesley-Esquimaux and Magdalena Smolewski, *Historic Trauma and Aboriginal Healing* (Aboriginal Healing Foundation, 2004), 1–10, 29–64.

²⁹ Val Napoleon, "Gitksan Legal Personhood: Gendered." In *Interrupting the Legal Person*, edited by Austin Sarat, Richard Mailey, and George Pavlich, vol. 87A, (Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1108/S1059-43372022000087A002>.

and our decision-making all rest in the hands of matriarchs.³⁰ This has always been our way. The colonial systems that tried to erase us didn't count on our women. I was raised by women who never gave up. My mom. My aunts. My cousins. My sisters. I grew up watching them hold together families, stand their ground, raise children, challenge systems, and carry knowledge.³¹ We didn't learn strength through theory. We learned it through living. That strength lives in our teachings, our territories, and our responsibilities to each other. Even as we navigate the exhaustion of CCF, Gitxsan matriarchal knowledge guides us. That's where our resilience comes from. In this context, we are reminded that decolonization is not a metaphor, but a material, lived, and relational process.³² Being Gitxsan means learning to hold space for complexity and to be true to yourself while being accountable to the community.³³ I carry this in how I move through the world. I have had to fight to be seen, but I have also always known where I come from. Our teachings remind us that everyone has a role and that our purpose is not just for ourselves but for the collective good.³⁴

This section names that the pain we carry is real, but it also makes visible what colonial systems try to erase: our continuity. Our governance. Our love for each other. Even when pulled away into cities, into silence, into colonial institutions, I am still Gitxsan. We are still connected to our names, our ancestors, and to the matriarchal ways that hold us steady.³⁵ To be a Gitxsan woman is to carry fire, not just for yourself, but for the next ones. Even while we survive in systems that were never built for us, we are also quietly rebuilding the ones that are.³⁶

Pathways Forward: Healing, Wit, and Responsibility

Healing is not a linear journey, nor is it a solitary one. For Indigenous peoples, healing is deeply relational, rooted in collective responsibility, and carried through generations. The wounds inflicted by settler colonialism are profound, spanning centuries of dispossession, genocide, and systemic violence.³⁷ Yet, within this history of harm lies a persistent thread of resilience, sustained by our knowledges, our stories, and our relationships.

There is a kind of medicine we carry that doesn't come in a bottle, or a clinic, or a system. As Gitxsan people, we know medicine is the land, our family, our stories, our laughter, and our wit. Simpson reminds us that resurgence is rooted in these everyday practices of love and care.³⁸ It's our aunties joking at the kitchen table after a hard day, our cousins teasing each other in the feast hall, and our quiet humor that arrives just in time to break the tension in the room. It heals something you can't see, but you feel in your bones.

³⁰ James Y. Henderson, and University of Saskatchewan, Native Law Centre, *First Nations Jurisprudence and Aboriginal Rights: Defining the Just Society* (Native Law Centre, University of Saskatchewan, 2006), 116-177.

³¹ Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 54-63.

³² Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," 1-40.

³³ Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*, 80-96.

³⁴ Kim Anderson, *A Recognition of Being: Reconstructing Native Womanhood*, 2nd ed. (Women's Press, 2016), 135-170.

³⁵ LaRocque, *When the Other Is Me*, 17-36.

³⁶ Corntassel, "Re-Envisioning Resurgence," 86-101.

³⁷ Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, "Imperialism, History, Writing and Theory."

³⁸ Leanne Simpson, *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom through Radical Resistance* (University of Minnesota Press, 2017), 83-94.

Indigenous humor and wit function as forms of survival and resistance.³⁹ In the face of relentless colonial oppression and the exhaustion of Colonial Contact Fatigue (CCF), humor becomes a way to maintain spirit and dignity.⁴⁰ It allows us to confront painful realities without being overwhelmed. Through satire, storytelling, and wit, we create a space where truth can be spoken without immediate retribution and where shared laughter becomes an act of defiance against erasure.

As Gitksan, we are often perceived as quiet people. Maybe we are. We've learned to listen first, to read the room, to move with care, and consider the collective before speaking. This resonates with broader Indigenous experiences of cultural engagement and belonging.⁴¹ Even those considered more extroverted carry themselves with the same grounding. This isn't shyness in the colonial sense; it's attentiveness. It's relational awareness. In that space, wit has power. It helps us reach each other, build relationships, and clear space for truth.

I carry that with me. I know when I speak with wit, people listen. It sometimes surprises them, especially those who don't expect it. That's part of its medicine, too. It breaks through defenses. It brings people closer. It lowers walls. That kind of subtle truth-telling is what Post-Settler Disorder (PSD) calls for, something that wakes people up without crushing them under the weight of their own fragility.⁴²

For those of us who experience Colonial Contact Fatigue (CCF), that kind of humor can be a lifeline. It lifts us when the burden is too

heavy. It reminds us we're not alone. It creates solidarity where exhaustion might otherwise lead to isolation. The collective laughter echoes the strength in our shared histories and affirms that even in pain, there is power.

But I won't romanticize it. The hurt is real. The systems that drain us are real. Lateral violence, internalized oppression, and the exhaustion of surviving racism day after day are part of our reality, too.⁴³ These forms of violence fracture communities and relationships, making healing even more urgent and complex.⁴⁴ Still, even then, our values remain: Care. Collectivity. Relational accountability.⁴⁵ These are what see us through. They remind us that healing is not about individual success but about restoring balance in our relationships, with each other, with the land, and with our ancestors.

The path forward requires truth. It means waking up to the ways PSD and CCF operate in

³⁹ Michael T. Garrett et al., "Laughing It Up: Native American Humor as Spiritual Tradition," *Journal of Multicultural Counseling and Development* 33, no. 4 (2005): 194–204, <https://doi.org/10.1002/j.2161-1912.2005.tb00016.x>.

⁴⁰ Devery Jacobs, "LOLing Is Good Medicine: How Indigenous People Use Humour For Survival," *Refinery29 Canada*, June 21, 2021, <https://www.refinery29.com/en-ca/2021/06/10477340/how-indigenous-people-use-humour-for-survival>.

⁴¹ Liebenberg et al., "Spaces & Places," 1–10.

⁴² Garrett et al., "Laughing It Up," 194–204.

⁴³ Teresa Evans-Campbell, "Historical Trauma in American Indian/ Native Alaska Communities: A Multilevel Framework for Exploring Impacts on Individuals, Families, and Communities," *Journal of Interpersonal Violence* 23, no. 3 (2008): 316–338, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0886260507312290>.

⁴⁴ Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart, "The Historical Trauma Response Among Natives and Its Relationship with Substance Abuse: A Lakota Illustration," *Journal of Psychoactive Drugs* 35, no. 1 (2003): 7–13, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02791072.2003.10399988>.

⁴⁵ Anderson, *A Recognition of Being*, 190–199.

daily life. These aren't abstract theories; they are patterns of harm that shape relationships, policies, and how settlers move through Indigenous lands.⁴⁶ For settlers, healing from PTSD isn't about personal guilt or performative allyship. It's about responsibility. It's about making a choice: either uphold settler colonialism or uphold Indigenous rights. There is no neutral ground.

Settler colonialism is a structure, not an event.⁴⁷ Healing thus demands structural change, not just interpersonal understanding. It means transforming institutions that have long been complicit in Indigenous dispossession.⁴⁸ For settlers who seek to stand in solidarity, this means engaging in ongoing unlearning, centering Indigenous leadership, and shifting power rather than appropriating it.⁴⁹ The "cure," if there is one, lies in upholding Indigenous sovereignty. In listening deeply. In learning the histories that were kept from you.⁵⁰ In choosing to walk a different path, even when it's uncomfortable. It's about transformation, not comfort.

For Indigenous peoples, our healing must continue to be led by our own knowledges. Our matriarchs. Our laws. Our languages. Our laughter. Our land.⁵¹ That's where we return, not just for survival, but for something more: joy, sovereignty, and freedom. Healing is also about responsibility. Not just to us, but to those who came before and those who will come after. It is a commitment to relational accountability, living in ways that honor the sacredness of all life and the interconnection of our communities.⁵²

This responsibility demands difficult conversations. It asks us to confront internalized oppression and lateral violence within Indigenous communities. It challenges us to build spaces of care that do not replicate colonial dynamics.⁵³ It requires us to nurture our young people with pride and strength, equipping them to carry this work forward.⁵⁴

Wit and humor, then, are not distractions from this work but essential components of it. They enable us to name pain while also naming possibility. They create room for joy amidst sorrow, and for resistance within survival. I offer this not as a prescription but as an invitation. To Indigenous peoples, may you find your own ways to hold your pain with laughter and strength. To settlers, may you hear the call to responsibility and transformation. To all who read these words, may this article be part of what opens new paths toward truth, toward justice, and toward the full recognition of Indigenous rights, strength, and sovereignty.

⁴⁶ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 1-24.

⁴⁷ Lorenzo Veracini, *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, 2nd ed. (Springer Nature Switzerland, 2024), 24-29, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-63926-5>.

⁴⁸ Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, 119-127.

⁴⁹ Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," 1-40.

⁵⁰ Paulette Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada* (UBC Press, 2010), 83-110.

⁵¹ Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy," 1-25.

⁵² Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*, 73-77.

⁵³ Lindsey Jaber, Cynthia Stirbys, Jesse Scott, and Emma Foong, "Indigenous Women's Experiences of Lateral Violence: A Systematic Literature Review," *Trauma, Violence, & Abuse* 24, no. 3 (2022): 1763-1776, <https://doi.org/10.1177/15248380221077316>.

⁵⁴ Gone, "Redressing First Nations Historical Trauma," 683-706.

Conclusion

From the perspective of a Gitxsan woman who has lived within the machinery of settler colonialism, this chapter has sought to tell truths that often go unspoken or are unheard. I have named the pervasive sickness of Post-Settler Disorder (PSD), a settler condition marked by denial, delusion, and an unwillingness to reckon with the ongoing realities of Indigenous dispossession.^{55,56} I have named Colonial Contact Fatigue (CCF), the spiritual, emotional, and physical exhaustion born from a lifetime enmeshed in systems never designed for our survival or thriving.^{57,58} These frameworks are more than academic concepts; they are lived realities carried in our bones, in our grief, and in the resilient hearts of our communities.

Yet, even as we carry these burdens, this article has also lifted up the quiet, unyielding strength of Gitxsan women, our matriarchs who hold the law, the stories, the names, and the fire of our people. Through them, we learn that resilience is relational, that strength is collective, and that healing flows through connection to land, language, and kinship.^{59,60} Our matrilineal ways are not relics of a distant past, but living guides that sustain us amidst the fractures colonialism seeks to deepen. Healing is not an individual endeavor but a responsibility carried by the community and the generations yet to come. It requires truth, the difficult reckoning with history and present realities, and the courage to walk paths of transformation, not comfort.^{61,62} It demands that settlers choose between complicity in colonialism or solidarity with Indigenous sovereignty. There is no middle ground.^{63,64}

During this hard work, wit and humor emerge as essential medicines. Indigenous humor does not minimize pain; it holds it up to the light and breaks the weight of despair with laughter and clarity.^{65,66} It is a form of resistance and relational repair, a way to reach each other and build community in spaces fractured by both lateral and systemic violence.^{67,68} This article is offered with open hands and an open heart, a Gitxsan voice reaching through time and space to affirm that our stories, our laws, and our love continue. To those who have seen their own lives reflected here, may you find affirmation and strength. To those encountering these frameworks for the first time, may this be a doorway, an invitation into responsibility and action.

Our healing is ongoing, complex, and collective. It calls us back to the land, to ceremony, to language, and to the teachings of our ancestors. It calls us forward into futures defined not by settler colonial frameworks but by Indigenous freedom, sovereignty, and joy.^{69,70}

⁵⁵ Simpson, *Dancing on Our Turtle's Back*, 64-75.

⁵⁶ Coulthard, *Red Skin, White Masks*, 105-130.

⁵⁷ Evans-Campbell, "Historical Trauma," 316-338.

⁵⁸ Hartlep and Ball, eds., *Racial Battle Fatigue*.

⁵⁹ Anderson, *A Recognition of Being*, Part V: Construct.

⁶⁰ Simpson, "Land as Pedagogy," 1-25.

⁶¹ Regan, *Unsettling the Settler Within*, 171-192.

⁶² Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," 1-40.

⁶³ Alfred, *Peace, Power, Righteousness*, 119-127.

⁶⁴ Veracini, *Settler Colonialism*, 133-139.

⁶⁵ Garrett et al., "Laughing It Up."

⁶⁶ Grande, *Red Pedagogy*, 11-30.

⁶⁷ Heart, "The Historical Trauma Response," 7-13.

⁶⁸ Jaber et al., "Indigenous Women's Experiences," 1763-1776.

⁶⁹ Simpson, *As We Have Always Done*, 175-189.

⁷⁰ Wilson, *Research Is Ceremony*, 80-96.

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