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## **Learning Discomfort and Uncertainty**

The KAIROS Blanket Exercise as a Canadian Settler Education Tool

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Cover Page: 'KAIROS Blanket Exercise-Indigenous Awareness Week 2017.' Image courtesy of queensu, creativecommons.org.

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## **Abstract**

The KAIROS Blanket Exercise is an experiential learning activity that takes participants in Canada through Indigenous history in North America from an Indigenous perspective. In a 90-minute workshop, participants embody the role of Indigenous peoples and walk on blankets that represent the land. Through the reading of scripts, they re-enact the chronology of Canadian history and the processes of settler colonization and then debrief together to discuss their experiences in the exercise. The popularity and wide-spread use of the Blanket Exercise since the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Report in 2015 as a settler teaching tool illustrates the need to study its educative impact and aims. The premise of this thesis is that settler education is a needed area of focus for transforming the settler-Indigenous relationship into one that is less colonial and less attached to a settled Canadian future. This thesis uses the Blanket Exercise as a case study to reveal settler Canadian investments in settler futurity and examine potentials for disrupting those investments. This study considers that discomfort and emotions are a critical aspect to this education and uses Boler's Pedagogy of Discomfort and Ahmed's Cultural Politics of Emotions as theoretical frameworks to unpack settler reactions and resistances in the Blanket Exercise. This thesis uses Grounded Theory qualitative methods to present interviews with KAIROS staff and KAIROS blog posts as sources of data analysis in order to study the potential space the exercise creates for unlearning in settler Participants.

The findings of this thesis reveal that though the Blanket Exercise does have the potential to create space for unlearning in settler Participants, this potential is not always reached in the immediate space of the exercise. This is due to the introductory nature of the exercise and Participants' engagement at easier shifts in learning. However, the study considers that Participants in the exercise are experiencing a learned moment of discomfort that can be cultivated in settlers beyond the timeframe of the exercise to reduce the harm that these practices of futurity have on settler-Indigenous relationships in Canada.





# Table of Contents

<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....</b>	<b>iii</b>
<b>ABSTRACT.....</b>	<b>vi</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Research Questions and Scope .....	3
1.2. Key Terminology.....	4
1.3. Methodology and Methods.....	7
1.4. Ethics.....	11
1.5. Position of the Researcher.....	12
1.6. Outline of Thesis.....	13
<b>2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS.....</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1. Pedagogy of Discomfort.....	14
2.2. Cultural Politics of Emotions.....	15
2.3. Settler Colonialism and Settler Futurity.....	15
<b>3. LITERATURE REVIEW.....</b>	<b>17</b>
3.1. A Need to Decolonize the Education System .....	17
3.2. How Canadians Refuse to Know.....	20
3.3. Current Understandings of KAIROS and the KBE.....	21
3.4. Research Gaps.....	23
<b>4. THE STORY OF THE BLANKET EXERCISE.....</b>	<b>24</b>
4.1. History of the KAIROS Organization.....	24
4.2. The Creation of the Blanket Exercise.....	25
4.3. Walking Turtle Island.....	27
<b>5. PEDAGOGY OF DISCOMFORT AND THE KBE.....</b>	<b>31</b>
5.1. Epistemology.....	31
5.2. Emotions.....	39
5.3. Ethics.....	45

<b>6. DISCUSSION .....</b>	<b>65</b>
6.1. A Bridging of Theory and Praxis.....	65
6.2. Unsettling history.....	67
6.3. The Emotionality in Unsettling the Settler.....	68
6.4. Stagnating at Passive Empathy.....	70
6.5. Learned Practices of Discomfort.....	72
<b>7. CONCLUSION.....</b>	<b>75</b>
7.1. Summary of Findings.....	75
7.2. Limitations.....	76
7.3. Recommendations for Further Study.....	77
<b>8. REFERENCES.....</b>	<b>78</b>
<b>APPENDIX 1 – INTERVIEW GUIDE 1</b>	
<b>APPENDIX 2 – INTERVIEW GUIDE 2</b>	
<b>APPENDIX 3 – BLOG POSTS NOT CITED</b>	

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In Canada in August 2020, CBC News released an article with the headline “Alberta social studies curriculum adviser calls inclusion of First Nations perspectives a fad” (French 2020). The subhead below the article title was “Chris Champion writes that colonialism exercise brainwashes children” (French 2020). This curriculum advisor, historian Chris Champion, was hired by the Alberta provincial government to consult on the new Social Studies content for grades Kindergarten (ages 5-6) to Grade 4 (ages 9-10). The “colonialism exercise” that he criticized is the KAIROS Blanket Exercise, an experiential learning activity that takes participants through Indigenous history in North America from an Indigenous perspective. Champion’s comments were pulled from an article he wrote in the semi-annual publication the *Dorchester Review*. The original article, titled “Alberta’s Little History War”, includes this full quote about the exercise:

*“The plug must be pulled on the deplorable agitprop of the “KAIROS Blanket,” which brainwashes children into thinking of themselves as “settlers” stealing the land — the kind of “truth and reconciliation” that is not evidence-based but relies on “knowledge keepers” to “foster truth” (Champion 2019:105).*

Petitions to dismiss Champion from his position emerged following the CBC article, with many organizations and educators calling out his remarks as against the provincial and federal governments’ commitments to adopting recommendations from the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Change.org 2021, Bruch 2020). These recommendations, found under the 94 Calls to Action in the Final Report of the TRC (2015), detail the role that education can play in facilitating transformed relationships between Indigenous Peoples and settler Canadians. The role of education in transforming this existing colonial relationship requires learning uncomfortable truths about Canada’s past and present violence towards Indigenous Peoples that have been ignored by settler Canadians. It also requires an unlearning and unsettling of particular Canadian meta-narratives that have fostered and maintained this ignorance.

This learning and unlearning are often deeply discomfoting experiences for settlers such as myself and Champion. Unpacking his statements unveil many of the themes and issues encountered in educational spaces that attempt to provide these unsettling perspectives. His personal opinions reflect broader conversations surrounding settler resistances and anxieties

toward the current momentum that reconciliation and decolonization have in shaping possible futures where settlers can become “something other than colonial” (Battell Lowman and Barker 2015:11). Champion’s discomfort about these possibilities is apparent when he discusses the KAIROS Blanket Exercise as a form of propaganda (“agitprop”) that is “brainwashing” children, who are the future of Canada. As someone who has participated in the Blanket Exercise a few times in my undergraduate degree, I asked myself how popular must the Blanket Exercise have become, and why, to be singled out by someone in an established position of power, authority, and credibility in the education field? These questions and the unpacking of Champion’s discomfort provided the basis for this thesis in examining the KAIROS Blanket Exercise as a case study of settler education about Indigenous Peoples.

KAIROS is a multi-denominational faith based social justice organisation founded in Canada that works both nationally and internationally on initiatives for ecological justice and human rights (KAIROS 2021). The Blanket Exercise is one of many projects under their ‘Indigenous Rights’ program and is their most popular teaching tool (KAIROS 2021). It was first created in 1997 as the KAIROS Organization’s response to recommendations in the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (1996). It is consistently updated by the organization through consultation with Indigenous Elders and community members in order to reflect ongoing changes to Indigenous-settler relations due to Indigenous mobilization in Canada and globally.

The Blanket Exercise is an approximately 90-minute workshop that begins with participants embodying the role of Indigenous Peoples and physically walking on blankets that represent the land of North America. Facilitators take on the role of European explorers and the Canadian government. Through the reading of scripts, the exercise provides a chronology of Canadian history from an Indigenous perspective, with visual and hands-on enactments of events in the processes of settler colonization. Participants are given an active role and even removed from the activity to observe from the sidelines as they partake in various Indigenous experiences such as ‘dying’ from epidemics, having their ‘children’ forcibly taken from them, and having their ‘land’ removed from under their feet. In the second part of the activity, participants join Facilitators in a Talking Circle where they are given time to process and share their personal experiences from the exercise (KAIROS Canada 2021).

## 1.1. Research Questions and Scope

This thesis is centered around three main tasks that aim to provide some humble insights into this primary research question:

*Does the KAIROS Blanket Exercise in its 2019 version create spaces for unlearning in settler Participants that contributes to disrupting settler colonialism and settler futurity?*

My first task is to provide descriptive background research to explain what the Blanket Exercise is and how the KAIROS organization frames it as a learning space for settler Canadians. My second task is to attempt to apply the Pedagogy of Discomfort as a theoretical lens to the Blanket Exercise to allow for an analysis of the Blanket Exercise's methodology and locate where the potential for 'unlearning' in the exercise might be. Third, in support of existing literature, I aim to analyze settler Participant reactions to the exercise by utilizing the Pedagogy of Discomfort as a framework for unpacking settler epistemological groundings, their discomfoting emotions during the exercise, and their potential for more ethical actions following the exercise. Based on the findings of these tasks, I aim to address the primary research question. In this aim, I do not attempt to be evaluative of the efficacy of the Blanket Exercise or the KAIROS organization, but rather, attempt to provide a case study of the Blanket Exercise to reveal settler Canadian investments in settler futurity and examine potentials for disrupting those investments.

Due to my Grounded Theory approach, multiple iterations of research questions emerged throughout the phases of data gathering. From the beginning, however, this thesis centred on the theme of critical pedagogy and how to effectively teach non-Indigenous Peoples about Indigenous histories and contemporary realities. These early stages of theorizing were only reinforced through the sociopolitical events of 2019, in which Black Lives Matter and anti-police violence protests erupted across North America, despite the Covid-19 pandemic. Conversations surrounding how to educate about systemic racism, power and privilege, and future re-imaginings post-pandemic abounded. Thus, though this research is situated within the Canadian context of settler-Indigenous relations, my goals are to also understand the broader implications of the matrices of power that sustain colonial futurity globally. As such, my hope is that this research can provide relevance for other contexts of Indigenous-nonindigenous relations, and also draw attention to the growing need for critical pedagogy in order to help transform oppressive relations and systems globally.

## **1.2. Key Terminology**

Because the aim of this thesis is to analyze settler identity and the Settler-Indigenous relationships in Canada, it is important to unpack these terms and understand my broad usage of them when they contain such a diversity of experiences.

### **1.2.1 Indigenous Peoples**

Globally, according to the International Labour Organization, it is estimated that Indigenous Peoples make up 6.2 percent of the world's population across 90 countries and, consequently, there is no universal definition (Cultural Survival 2020; Dahl 2012). Therefore, the importance for this thesis in even including a discussion on a definition is not to offer my own opinion on what is or isn't an aspect of Indigenous identities, but rather to engage in ongoing discussions of the complexity of those identities. Though this thesis is localized in a Canadian context, there is a broader, global community of Indigenous Peoples that are interconnected in similar historical and contemporary processes of colonialism and imperialism (Dahl 2012; Smith 2012).

This diversity is also just as complicated within a Canadian context. The use of the term 'Indigenous Peoples', though the most commonly accepted and considered the most appropriate term to use, is also homogenizing of the over 600 distinct Indigenous groups across what is now Canada. For the purposes of this thesis, I will ascribe to the collective term "Indigenous" to describe peoples who self-identify as belonging to one or more of the three constitutionally recognized groups of Indigenous peoples in Canada (First Nations, Métis, and Inuit) and, where possible, these terms are also used. This is also reflected in the KAIROS Organization's approach in the Blanket Exercise which recognizes the colonial constructs of national borders that separated Indigenous groups across North America, or 'Turtle Island', as many Indigenous groups refer to it.

The focus of this thesis is on Canadian Settler-Indigenous relations and settler identity, an identity which is dependent on Indigenous Peoples to define. However, Indigenous Peoples do not need to be defined within the parameters of their relation to settlers, which I feel is an important decolonized perspective to reiterate from Indigenous researchers. As such, though terms such as "Aboriginal" and "Indian" appear throughout the text to reference official government documents

or organizations, these terms are representative of the colonial relationship to the Canadian state. These terms have also come to be considered racial slurs by many Indigenous Peoples. As Indigenous Peoples are not merely racial or ethnic groups in Canada, but rather sovereign *nations*, where possible, specific local community and Indigenous Nation names will be used, and any spelling mistakes and anglicized notations are my errors.

### **1.2.2. Settlers and Settler Colonialism**

Settler is a similarly complicated term and identity to define. It is often an even more contentious one than Indigenous Peoples, as evidenced by Champion's aversion to it in the Introduction of this thesis. Historically, the term was used to denote the difference between the original Indigenous inhabitants of North and South America and the initial Europeans that settled and colonized North and South America. This understanding is still common to most non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. However, it has also become more commonly used in the present to problematize the colonial presences of all non-Indigenous people in Canada regardless of Euro-Canadian background (Regan 2010; Battell Lowman and Barker (2015); Denis 2020). Thus, settlers are understood as a multi-ethnic people who are bound together through their complicity in settler colonialism. In this thesis, I ascribe to using the term 'settler colonialism' in the same analysis as Patrick Wolfe, who describes it as an evolving 'structure', 'not an event' (1999). Such an analysis creates a systemic understanding of how settler colonialism continues to shape and pervade settler consciousness and the structures of Canadian society in the present.

My purpose in using this term as a collective is twofold. First, the limited availability of data on the background of each Participant, and the ethics of collecting it, meant a broad approach to examining non-Indigenous peoples in the Blanket Exercise was necessary. Though settler identity is overwhelmingly shaped by politics of white supremacy in Canada due to Anglo-Saxon colonial and imperial structures, a more specific, in-depth interrogation of whiteness was not possible for this study. Second, choosing to use 'settler' over 'non-Indigenous' was a deliberate decision in order to evoke potential feelings of discomfort among settler readers. Battell Lowman and Barker discuss how the term challenges settler Canadians to reflect on their historic and present implications in the violence of settler colonialism (2015:15). My hope is that the discomfort might challenge readers to reflect on this relationship more critically.

Though this thesis seems to place a dichotomy between ‘settler’ and ‘Indigenous’, these identities are not fixed binaries. Martin Nakata discusses the importance of a ‘cultural interface’ in discussing the ways in which these identities are often blurred, with the key difference marked by relationships to land (Nakata et al. 2012). Land is the central concern driving settler-Indigenous relations, as settlers occupy lands that Indigenous Peoples have a prior, sovereign right to inhabit. Similarly, Denis highlights how in present-day Canada, the fundamental divide between Indigenous peoples and settlers is not one of race or ethnicity, but rather a “...clashing of ideological frames that sustain or challenge the settler colonial system” (Denis 2020:299). He argues that there is more that brings settlers and Indigenous Peoples together than apart. As such, a look to the ways in which settlers can become something other than colonial necessitates an interrogating of settler ideology and epistemology, which this thesis aims to do.

### **1.2.3. Critical Pedagogy**

Critical pedagogy is often conflated with similar terms such as social change education, Popular education, or critical education. Though there are important differences between these terms, Choules describes how the “...common denominator is that the pedagogy is employed as a tool for engaging people to transform unjust social, economic, and political conditions” (2007: 160). Critical pedagogy arose in the Western academy, but has its roots in Paulo Freire’s Popular Education model which stems from the lived experiences of oppressed workers in Latin America, the ‘popular masses’ with limited access to power and resources. Critical pedagogy, on the other hand, is situated in Western contexts and often aimed at transforming dominant minorities. It works off the belief that educational systems are not neutral structures, but are shaped by hegemonic cultural and sociopolitical norms. Boler’s Pedagogy of Discomfort used in this thesis is considered a form of critical pedagogy as she endorses “epistemic vulnerability” and interrogates how education shapes learners’ epistemologies (MacDonald 2018:3). The Blanket Exercise also has its roots in critical pedagogy and Popular education as described by the website in 2019 (KAIROS Canada 2019), but has since updated its description as based on “Indigenous methodologies” (KAIROS Canada 2021). Emerging calls for decolonizing critical pedagogy are possible explanations for why the organization may have changed the description (Grande 2004).



## **1.3. Methods and Methodology**

### **1.3.1. Indigenous Methodologies**

In this thesis, I have used qualitative research methods informed by decolonizing theories as is most appropriate per the Indigenous Studies field (Chilisa 2020; Smith 2012; Kovach 2009). Such an approach emphasizes Indigenous arguments and analysis and provides critiques of the imperializing Western hegemony in academic research that has enacted systemic structural violence on Indigenous communities through forceful projections of ontological and ideological viewpoints (Chilisa 2020; Smith 2012). Thus, this thesis occupies a space academically that is both contextually grounded in this history, and thus accountable to it, but also attempts to facilitate ongoing divergence from this pattern of abuse. This divergence occurs in conducting research in line with what Maori scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith describes as "...more ethical, and concerned with outcomes as well as processes" (Smith 2012:179). As such, the choice of data collection methods that I discuss below are chosen out of deliberate use of Indigenous research strategies that do not hold my final data conclusions as more important, nor at the expense of, the various Indigenous stakeholder groups in this research topic, such as the KAIROS organization and the staff I interviewed. As a non-Indigenous researcher using Indigenous methodologies in order to understand and interrogate settler Canadian perspectives, there is tension between appropriating discourses designed for decolonization and Indigenous community building and healing. It is my aim to decolonize my own thinking and to avoid, or more likely minimize, analyzing to ensure settler futurity in Canada. I rally the authority of Indigenous researchers and settler allies that engage with these methodologies to situate this research in dialogue with ongoing work to deconstruct Western colonial norms and attempts to transform existing Indigenous-settler relations.

### **1.3.2. Primary Data: Interviews**

A preliminary sampling of two interviewees from relevant KAIROS staff were selected as research participants for this thesis from the staff directory on the Blanket Exercise's website and sent an email for initial contact. Upon receiving no response, a more general inquiry of participation was sent to the main email for the KAIROS organization which resulted in email contact with a member of the Blanket Exercise staff. After an exchange of emails about the project and more information

about myself as a researcher, the staff member proceeded to pass on the opportunity to other members of the organization that worked on the Exercise and a group interview was suggested. Though unsure of the efficacy of a group interview done remotely, I agreed to this request as it opened up the possibility for using Indigenous methodologies more deeply and effectively in this thesis. I find this background information particularly interesting to document as part of the experience working with Indigenous methodologies because of this staff member's role as an unofficial 'gatekeeper' to communicating further with other staff and accessing more information (Scheyvens 2014). Additionally, their lead in suggesting qualified staff members as well as the form of interview that would be best for them is a part of taking a less dominant role as a researcher and privileging the perspectives of those that I am learning from (Chilisa 2020).

This first group interview was conducted remotely via the online video platform Zoom for one hour and included four participants from the Blanket Exercise staff who were of diverse identities and held different positions for this section of the organization. It is my opinion that this interviewee sample afforded a fair representation of the diversity of staff at the organization as well as perspectives from all levels of job positions. The tensions between including relevant information on the authority of these participants alongside the possibility of including identifying information is further discussed in the 'Ethics' section of this thesis. A qualitative semi-structured interview method was used to ensure that important queries were addressed, but the overall direction of the conversation remained in the control of the staff (Chilisa 2020). What followed was more of a conversation in which I was able to take a less directive role and instead focus on partaking in dialogue with the staff which included topics that I had not originally planned to discuss. The sharing of stories and descriptive experiences of the Exercise was a prominent feature of the group interview. I have chosen to use the term "Interviewee" instead of the more common "Participant" both to differentiate between the Blanket Exercise "Participants" (which I similarly capitalize) but also to afford more authority to the staff members in the knowledge building that was shaped in the interviews under their guidance. The general interview guideline is attached in the appendix, however, follow up questions and clarification questions were also asked to participants which are not included in the guideline.

A second, follow-up interview was conducted with one of the staff from the group interview the following week at the staff member's recommendation. This was also held via Zoom for an hour. A semi-structured interview approach was once again taken, and the question guide is included in the appendix. Upon suggestion and then audible consent of the Interviewee, this interview was able to be audio recorded. As, Jarvinen and Mik-Meyer discuss, how the screen affects the interview participants' perceptions of the researcher and vice versa are important questions to consider, but have not yet been studied intensively (2020:14). It is my belief that the digital meetings were more of a benefit than a limitation, as I was able to speak with staff members located in offices I would not have been able to access even if I had been in the country. Interview features such as body language were mostly impossible to study due to screen restraints, but I do not believe this impinged upon the data collected.

### **1.3.3. Secondary Data: Text Based Research**

Due to the research occurring during the Covid-19 pandemic, the field work component for this thesis was cancelled. This data collection was initially planned to include participant observation in a Blanket Exercise as well as interviews with Participants following the conclusion of the activity. In lieu of this primary data, I have conducted online text-based research informed by Grounded Theory (explained below) using secondary data from the Blanket Exercise website as well as news articles linked on the website's blog that detail specific moments from the Blanket Exercise such as components of the script and, most importantly, Participant reactions. Only blog posts from 2016-2020 were analyzed to ensure a tighter frame of consistent data as posts after 2020 detail the online component of the KBE due to Covid-19, which is not in the purview of this thesis, and posts from before 2016 do not represent the change in discourse surrounding Reconciliation following the release of the TRC in 2015. I set up a "Google Alert" to ensure that ongoing discussion surrounding the Blanket Exercise could be included in my research to keep the 2020 data as up to date as possible. These online sources were crucial to understanding how the Exercise unfolds differently every time it is enacted. Direct quotes from these sources were invaluable to ensuring that the data collected for this thesis included a multitude of voices and perspectives from the Participants, Facilitators, and other members of the KAIROS staff. The lack of fieldwork limits some aspects of the data collection as online observations emerge in a "messy"

research environment” that constitute numerous ethical engagements (Jarvinen and Mik-Meyer 2020:16). These ethical considerations are included in Section 1.4. Despite such “messiness”, the use of online observations for this thesis remains in dialogue research methods that have adapted to how the “...virtual world is an integrated part of the ‘real world’” (Jarvinen and Mik-Meyer 2020:16) and further enabled myself as a researcher to expend more time on letting the words of others speak for themselves and not place too much of the focus on my experience in the field.

### **1.3.4. Grounded Theory**

In analyzing both the primary and secondary data, the qualitative analysis approach of “Grounded Theory” was selected, which informs both the research design and the methods of research analysis (Jarvinen and Mik-Meyer 2020). Developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967), Grounded Theory’s main principles include “...to remain open to emerging themes, to approach data again and again (the iterative process of this tradition), to use memos and to constantly compare your findings as a way to build theory” (Jarvinen and Mik-Meyer 2020:20). As such, from the first formulations of this thesis, it was imperative that I “remain open” and “active” to the ways in which the data collected informed and evolved my research questions and vice versa (Jarvinen and Mik-Meyer 2020). This enabled me to be more flexible with my finalized research questions until after the interviews had taken place. Thus, multiple iterations of thematic analysis and coding of the transcribed interviews and blog posts occurred as the Interviewees and Participants shaped the theory building that would help me to understand different aspects of the exercise. As I approached the data again and again, the theme of ‘Emotions’ emerged inductively as the main focus of the exercise for Participants and thus a central focus for this thesis. As such, I selected the theories of emotion in education such as Megan Boler’s Pedagogy of Discomfort informed by Sara Ahmed’s Cultural Politics of Emotion as the theories to build final research questions of the Blanket Exercise. The use of Grounded Theory also entails a deep “self-awareness” and understanding of myself as a researcher and how the research and interview questions I construct as well as the codes I produce stem from my own preconceptions. In Grounded Theory, “We are part of the meanings that we observe and define” (Jarvinen and Mik-Meyer 2020:203). Section 1.5 is an account of the continuous practices of reflexivity necessitated by Grounded Theory and Indigenous methodologies throughout the thesis project.

## **1.4. Ethics**

In this research, I had various stakeholders that I needed to be ethically concerned with. The first group includes the actors that are a part of the thesis data gathering methods such as the KAIROS staff that I interviewed. To ensure that these processes remained ethical, I first asked for free, prior, and informed consent (FPIC). Though FPIC has a challenging history, my goal was to adhere to Indigenous Research scholars' approaches to consent forms for both the interview and the recording, initial and ongoing openness to anonymity, and secure data storage (Chilisa 2020). Through the guidelines embedded in the Norwegian Centre for Research Data (NSD 2020), strong suggestions for anonymity were upheld despite the tensions that this creates between Indigenous methodological approaches to decolonizing aspects of the research process that deny credit and authority to Indigenous knowledge production (Smith 2012; Denis 2020). I offered the option (and continue to offer the option) for the Interviewees to be named within the thesis despite the recommendation of the Centre, but respect their decisions to remain anonymous and thus the use of "Interviewee" followed by a coded letter is used throughout the thesis as a pseudonym. I am overwhelmingly grateful for the knowledge and arguments they shared with me and as such attempt to express when they fundamentally impacted my research process and design wherever possible.

The overarching framework I used to govern my actions and reactions during this process of navigating tensions between traditional Western and Indigenous methodologies is the 'Four R's Approach' theorized by Bagele Chilisa (2020). This framework consists of respect, relationality, reciprocity and responsibility (Chilisa 2020). These cornerstones of Indigenous research methodologies were ratified in this thesis through ongoing understanding of my accountability to the KAIROS organization and my Interviewees throughout both the processes of my research and its later outcomes. The recognition that the data collected for this thesis was part of a co-production of knowledge between myself, my Interviewees, and the text-based research conducted is similarly an important aspect to the responsibility of affording intellectual ownership (Chilisa 2020). In attempts at immediate reciprocity, I also offered a quote for which the KAIROS organization could use in a blog post promoting the Blanket Exercise which was published on their website. However, a commitment to an ongoing relationship with my initial contact in the organization has been

offered to me and, as such, I look forward to future engagements with the organization in thanks for the staff's participation.

## **1.5. Position of the Researcher**

One of the most important aspects of Indigenous methodologies and Grounded Theory is engaging critically and continuously in reflexivity and situating oneself in relation to the research and the various matrices of power that structure and privilege aspects of our identity (Chilisa 2020). Furthermore, as Margaret Kovach writes in her book on Indigenous Methodologies: “We need to know our own research story to be accountable to self and community” (2009:120). As a white settler, cis-gendered woman writing from the context of the Global North, I am in constant reflection on the limits and biases that these aspects of my identity posit for the conducting of this research as well as their effects on how my research will be received. As a non-Indigenous Canadian citizen, I am a part of the ongoing system of settler colonialism that continues to dispossess and oppress Indigenous peoples within the country. Thus, I am an insider to the Settler-Indigenous relationship in my country, my province, and my hometown that marks me as complicit in a colonial regime that has violently dispossessed Indigenous Nations that are its original inhabitants and caretakers. The part of what is now Canada that I consider home was traditionally the territories of the Haudenosaunee, Kanien'kehá:ka (Mohawk), Anishinaabe, Omàmìwininiwag (Algonquin), and Wendake-Nionwentsïo (Huron-Wendat Peoples) before the Crawford Purchase of 1783 which was a part of the Upper Canada Land Surrenders between Indigenous Nations and the British Crown before Canada had even formed as a nation-state (Native Land Digital 2021). As a student in the Indigenous Studies field studying in Sápmi (Norway) on traditional Sámi lands, I have a responsibility to put myself in connection with my physical location as a visiting settler here as well. I am in an ongoing learning process of understanding these histories and relations and not just stating or performing them.

Identifying in such broad terms as ‘settler’ or ‘non-Indigenous’ runs the risk of universalizing and homogenizing complex aspects of those positions, but also serves to put me in relation to local, national, and international systems of power. This question of positions and the Indigenous/non-Indigenous or colonizer/colonized binary is a particularly pertinent one for the field of Indigenous studies in Canada. As such, the quote “we are all treaty people” (Epp 2003) is

a message that I actively engage with and traverse in this research, with the understanding that the rights, responsibilities, and relationships in those treaties have not been equally distributed and upheld. Moreover, as these treaties are considered living documents and signed “in perpetuity”, my relationship to Indigenous Nations “must be nurtured-continuously” (Denis 2020:305). Having participated in the Blanket Exercise numerous times in my academic career as well as studying within this field for a number of years, my own positionality and reasoning for pursuing this research and this field is to take on my share as a settler in this responsibility. The unlearning and learning that I have experienced personally in the KAIROS Blanket Exercise has helped to push me in this direction.

## **1.5. Outline of Thesis**

The first Chapter of this thesis has introduced some background information on the topic and myself as a researcher, as well as provided the reader with my primary research question, data, and methods and methodology. Chapter Two will outline the theoretical frameworks used to guide the data analysis. Chapter Three provides a review of the key literature that has informed the relevance of the data within this thesis. The formation of the KAIROS Organization and the creation of the Blanket Exercise is discussed in Chapter Four. This chapter will also walk the reader through a version of the Blanket Exercise. Chapter Five focuses on the application of the Pedagogy of Discomfort as a lens to discuss the space of the Blanket Exercise in more depth. Settler Participants’ epistemologies and emotional reactions are examined in order to analyze the ways in which the Blanket Exercise has the potential to facilitate attention to ethics that transform settler investments in dominant narratives of Canada. Chapter Six includes a discussion on the applicability of the Pedagogy of Discomfort as a framework for analyzing the Blanket Exercise and accounts for the potentialities of unlearning that the exercise creates. The final chapter provides a summary of the findings of the study, outlines limitations, and reflects on recommendations for future research.

## **2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS**

### **2.1. Pedagogy of Discomfort**

The Pedagogy of Discomfort emphasizes the need for educators and students alike to move outside their ‘comfort zones’ in order to achieve social transformation through individual transformation (Boler 1999). Her pedagogical theory centers on how creating discomfort in learners from emotionally stimulating content can be transformative in challenging hegemonic norms that sustain structures of privilege and power (Boler 1999). Boler’s pedagogy follows Freire’s calls for ‘conscientization’ through her emphasis on critical self-inquiry through acts of “collective witnessing” (Freire 1970; Boler 1999). This witnessing encourages learners to question the hegemonic norms that have shaped their “learned ways of seeing” (Boler 1999). Boler differentiates between “Witnessing” as opposed to “Spectating”, as the latter is often a passive learning act that doesn’t create a position in which learners interrogate their epistemologies (Boler 1999). This openness to the vulnerability of learning and unlearning one’s epistemological lens is proposed as a willingness to inhabit a “morally ambiguous self” (Boler 1999). This necessitates that learners learn to see themselves and others with complex and intersectional identities (Boler 1999; Boler and Zembylas 2002). Not without its ethical considerations, Boler’s approach advocates for stepping into these moments of discomfort, rather than avoiding the tension that education surrounding oppression creates (Olsen 2020; MacDonald 2018).

The Pedagogy of Discomfort in the context of this thesis is used to analyze the willingness of settlers in the exercise to begin to understand and reflect on their hegemonic epistemological groundings. When confronted with Indigenous perspectives and experiences in the Blanket Exercise, I use Boler’s framework to examine if discomforting emotions such as anger and shame are settler responses. By learning to understand the ways in which one is implicated in ongoing systems of oppression, it is Boler’s invitation to action for more ethical practices moving forward toward social transformation that are the ultimate aim of her pedagogy (Boler 1999; Boler and Zembylas 2002). With this in mind, I examine the ways in which the exercise advocates for settler calls to action. In this thesis, I attempt to apply Boler’s theory as a framework to open up the Blanket Exercise to examinations of its pedagogy and educative content, as well as attempt to understand the settler Participants’ reactions of discomforting emotions the exercise.



## **2.2. Cultural Politics of Emotions**

Alongside a Pedagogy of Discomfort in analyzing settlers' emotional reactions during the Blanket Exercise, I will use Sara Ahmed's theories in her work "The Cultural Politics of Emotions" (2014). Her theories on "affective economies" are used to address tensions between a sociological understanding of emotions and that of psychological understandings (Ahmed 2014). This thesis focuses on the former due to limitations of the data as secondary sources from the blog posts and stories passed on to me from the KAIROS staff that create a disconnect between Participants stating they felt certain emotions, versus being able to infer whether these emotions have actually taken place. Ahmed's focus on how "emotions 'matter' for politics" because of how they create investments in particular social structures (such as that of the nation) and what emotions do and how they are produced, instead of what they are, allow for a sociological understanding of Participant reactions during the Blanket Exercise (Ahmed 2014:12). In this thesis, then, Ahmed's theories are used as a framework to build on existing literature that describes the emotional intensity of settler Canadian attachments and investments in settler futurity and the nation state (Regan 2010; Dion 2009). Far from being the first time these theorists have been intertwined in an analysis (indeed Ahmed draws on Boler's discomfort and feminist critique in her book), this thesis builds on the combined work of these theorists.

## **2.3. Settler Colonialism and Settler Futurity**

Futurity is a mechanism of settler colonialism. Differentiated from the definition of 'future' which is "an imagined time yet-to-come" (Baldwin 2012:172), futurities are described by Noelani Goodyear-Ka'ōpua as "ways that groups imagine and produce knowledge about futures" (2017:193). While the future is often understood to remain unknown and uncertain, futurity practices allow dominant groups to shape a future that privileges them. As Appadurai theorizes: "While all communities might participate in "future-thinking," not all communities participate in "future-making," (Appadurai 2013 in Mušanović and Manthripragada 2019:399). Critical futurity studies aligns with this understanding that the ability to participate in imagining and producing knowledge of the future is unequal across cultures and communities.

In a Canadian context, a characteristic of settler colonialism is that it works to establish itself as 'settled', it aims to "covers its tracks and operates towards self-supersession" (Veracini

2011:3). As Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández argue: “When we locate the present of settler colonialism as only the production of the past, we overlook how settler colonialism is configured in relation to a different temporal horizon: the future” (2013:80). Mušanović and Manthripragada (2019) discuss how Puar’s theory of “paranoid temporality” frames how settlers’ drive to secure certain and colonial futures maintains logics of assimilation and erasure of Indigenous Peoples in the present.

What this means for a theoretical framework in this research on settler education is twofold. One, as Kulago highlights, education is “...deeply entrenched and motivated by the business of futurity” (2019:243). The education system’s goals of creating model Canadian citizens is informed by a curriculum shaped by “...cultural structures and narratives that ensure and envision a future for settlers” (Hickey 2019:166). Thus, futurity is embedded in any critical discussion surrounding the education system in Canada. Second, Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández are clear in their theorizing that anything that doesn’t seek to disrupt settler colonialism is “fettered to settler futurity” (2013:80). Amid growing critique of the passivity of the reconciliation movement in Canada and how in its most shallow forms it has shown its adherences to ensuring settler futures, I aim to place this research instead alongside Settler Studies theorists that call for radically transfiguring the Settler-Indigenous relationship as one informed by Indigenous futurities. As Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández argue, Indigenous futurity does not “...foreclose the inhabitation of Indigenous land by non-Indigenous peoples, but does foreclose settler colonialism and settler epistemologies. That is to say that Indigenous futurity does not require the erasure of now-settlers in the ways that settler futurity requires of Indigenous peoples” (2013:80). Though these Indigenous futurisms are not able to be theorized by settlers, settlers can reduce the harm they create in negating these futures. In Coulthard’s words as he references the visual of the Two-Row Wampum Treaty, “the settler ship has toppled the Indigenous canoe, polluted the river, and killed the fish. Perhaps it is time for settlers to not only ‘sink the ship’, but also get out of our lifeboats, support the rebuilding of Indigenous canoes (and remediation of the river), and learn how to paddle alongside the canoes” (Coulthard 2014 in Denis 2020:304). This thesis aims to examine in what ways the Blanket Exercise can create spaces for settler Participants to disrupt and fail their own settler futurities by unlearning settler colonial epistemologies.

### **3. LITERATURE REVIEW**

The literature in this chapter contextualizes what Bonita Lawrence describes as the “extreme discursive warfare” created through curriculum and other state apparatuses such as media that have shaped settler knowledges and assumptions regarding Indigenous Peoples since First Contact (2004:39). I will first discuss the ways in which settler epistemologies are shaped by colonial meta-narratives that pervade the school curriculum and public consciousness in regards to Indigenous Peoples’ histories and ongoing presences in Canada. As the Blanket Exercise is an educative activity that takes place outside the curriculum in Canada, questions surrounding why education initiatives about Indigenous Peoples outside of this system are becoming increasingly popular are interrogated here. Second, how these forces are theorized to shape settler behaviours and attitudes towards Indigenous Peoples are also examined in this section. Third, this Chapter provides an account of the few current studies that discuss the KAIROS organization and the Blanket Exercise. Lastly, this Chapter will provide an overview of the gaps in the research that this thesis attempts to fill, such as constructing a more detailed description of the Blanket Exercise as well as a deeper analysis into settler Participant discomfort during the activity.

#### **3.1. A Need to Decolonize the Education System**

Decolonizing theories as a part of Indigenous methodologies maintain that Western education systems legitimize Western-centric knowledges as superior through “cognitive imperialism” that discredits alternative ways of knowing (Smith 2012; see also Dion 2009; Battiste 2002; Battiste 2013). Decolonizing the education system necessitates understandings of the “...relationship between power, knowledge, ideology, and schooling” and how these are products and processes of history (Dion 2009:66). In a Canadian context, the hegemony in the education system and the school curriculum is shaped by the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy that underlie the system’s purpose of creating “good Canadian citizens” (Dion 2009; Regan 2010; Donald 2009; Battiste 2002; Battiste 2013). As Dwayne Donald (2009) describes, the ways in which knowledge regarding Indigenous Peoples has been presented to students in the Canadian school system is metaphorically similar to that of the purposes of the fort in settler-Indigenous history. To Donald, the purpose of the fort palisades in delineating Indigenous and settler European spaces is replicated in both the curricular and pedagogical methods in the school system that

position Indigenous histories and experiences as “outside the concern of Canadians”, despite the cross-cultural interactions the forts historically had (2009:2-3). This is reflected in public opinion surveys that suggest that many Canadians still do not know basic facts about treaties or residential schools (Environics 2010; Godlewska et al. 2013; Ipsos-Reid 2013). More in-depth Canadian academic accounts regarding this lack of knowledge due to the school system are plentiful, with scholars such as Regan (2010), Dion (2009), and Denis (2020) discussing case studies that will be examined in more depth later in this section.

When Indigenous histories do ‘permeate’ the fort walls, it is most often under the discursive framework of multiculturalism. Canada’s embrace of multiculturalism as official policy is considered one of the first in the world, and this has shaped prevailing Canadian curriculum discourse since the 1970s (Marom 2016; Dion 2009; Kanu 2006). Simpson et al. (2011), discuss how Canada uses multiculturalism as a mechanism to reduce and ignore how the country is built and operates on systemic racism and the structure of settler colonialism. Viewed in this critical lens, multiculturalism rhetoric in reality operates less as a celebration of diversity in Canada and more as a meta-narrative to cover its colonial tracks.

What the multiculturalism discourse creates in educational contexts specifically is a learned structure of attention to difference through respectful admiration (Dion 2009:71). Dion observes in her study of the Ontario education system that teachers and students engage with multiculturalism in often surface level, material understandings of Indigenous cultures which has limited students to this ‘admiring of difference’ as a frame of reference when learning about Indigenous Peoples (Dion 2009:71). This limitation in both students and the curriculum creates non-engagement in critical reflections on Western-centrism and systemic racism in the education system (Dion 2009:71). Moram similarly argues for “systemic curricular change to present the White-European perspective for what it really is, one perspective out of many” (2016:28). Advocating for a more critical multiculturalism perspective, Dion and Moram align with critical education theorists to prescribe more transformative learning experiences that necessitate interrogating hegemony in the formal school system.

### 3.1.1. Steps Forward

As Dion accounts, Indigenous mobilization and resistances to the ‘fort’ mentality have continually occurred, such as in the form of policy documents written by the National Indian Brotherhood in 1972 titled ‘Indian Control of Indian Education’ which expressed a critique of existing curricula at the time: “Where the Indian contribution is not entirely ignored, it is often cast in an unfavorable light...Courses in Indian history and culture should promote pride in the Indian child and respect in the non-Indian students” (Kirkman and Bowman 1992 in Dion 2009:69). Indigenous mobilization was seen more recently in the establishing of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission that finalized its Report and 94 Calls to Action in 2015. These Calls to Action included recommendations for significant curricular and pedagogical reforms to the Canadian education system as seen in Call to Action 62. i. :

*62. i. Make age-appropriate curriculum on residential schools, Treaties, and Aboriginal peoples’ historical and contemporary contributions to Canada a mandatory education requirement for Kindergarten to Grade Twelve students (TRC 2015:331).*

Since 2015, the TRC has created an ongoing reconciliation discourse in Canada that has shaped curricular reform across the country. The TRC maintains in their Final Report that education is the key to reconciliation (TRC 2015). The honourable Justice Murray Sinclair, Chair of the Commission is quoted as saying: “Education got us into this mess and education will get us out of it” (NCCIE 2020).

Despite these ongoing reforms to existing curriculum, not all settler or Indigenous scholars see the formal education system as the arena in which this education will be most effective. Roger Simon suggests that the K-12 curriculum is not the place to look to for the educational innovation needed to create transformations in settler-Indigenous relations, but rather that other spaces in which Canadians of all ages can participate in different forms of learning must be identified (Simon 2013:129-142). This view is reflected in the sheer number of initiatives outside the formal education system, like the Blanket Exercise, that have been created to fill in the gaps of settler education about Indigenous Peoples. Davis et al. (2016) provide context for this growing number of initiatives in their research conducted in 2015 on over 200 of these projects they identified. The

authors compiled and inventoried the initiatives on a website titled *Transforming Relations: A Snapshot of Initiatives which Create Space for the Transformation of Settler Consciousness* that is continually updated and expanded by Trent University students every year (Davis et al. 2016). The Blanket Exercise has been registered on the site. Their research suggests that there is a momentum outside the formal education system to maintain spaces for increasing settler knowledge about Indigenous Peoples, but also reveals how there are few academic studies of these initiatives (Davis et al. 2016).

### **3.2. How Canadians Refuse to Know**

There are various ways in which scholars have described how settler Canadians “refuse to know” more about Indigenous Peoples histories and contemporary realities, but also how they refuse to know themselves (Dion 2009:65). These refusals, ‘wilful ignorances’, or maintained denials’ are accounted for by Indigenous and settler scholars alike such as Dion (2009), Regan (2010), Denis (2020), Godlewska et al. (2010), and Philips (2011) . Such critical analyses of settler logics and psyches establishes that it is not that Indigenous voices need to be louder about Indigenous experiences, it is settler ears that are voluntarily refusing to hear. In other words, there has always been a “Settler problem”, not an “Indian problem” that characterizes the settler-Indigenous relationship in Canada (Alfred in Regan 2010). Dion describes how a settler’s “failure to listen” is sustained through various mechanisms such as not being able to see how the past affects the settler present, locking events in history, dehumanizing Indigenous peoples, not believing they can do anything so why should they listen, and saying that Indigenous stories and experiences are too hard to listen to (Dion 2009:56).

Overarching these mechanisms are what Dion and Marom detail as “dominant discourses of Canadianness” and “Canadianism” that are part of the dynamics of denial that render Indigenous experiences to the past and ignore responsibilities to the present (Dion 2009:129; Marom 2016:29). A position that many settler Canadians come to hold in that ignorance is that of the “perfect stranger” (Dion 2009; Marom 2016; Higgins et al. 2015). The ‘perfect stranger’ position allows the settler to maintain distance from their implications in settler colonialism by preserving a mentality of innocence in their lack of knowledge about Indigenous Peoples and their refusal to learn more. Jeffrey Denis’ research about settler group positionings sees this investment in

maintaining a “perfect stranger” approach as well as he writes: “A major barrier to change is bringing settlers to the table; they know enough to know that furthering their education on these issues, particularly from an Indigenous or critical perspective, may be uncomfortable, and so they avoid it” (Denis 2020:303). Thus avoidance and discomfort characterize settler approaches to learning about Indigenous Peoples.

Regan’s work on “unsettling the colonizer who lurks within” provides an account of the “Peacemaker” meta-narrative that helps explain why so many Canadians are uncomfortable learning more (2010:11). Regan details how the myth of the benevolent peacemaker became a “bedrock of settler identity” during the negotiated treaty-making processes between Indigenous nations and the emerging Canadian state that were seen as actions of heroic peace and order in contrast to the more openly violent Indian Wars in the United States (Regan 2010). The benevolent peacemaker is a myth that settlers have collectively invested and entrenched their self-image and national identity in as also seen by Dion (2009:61) and Denis (2020:303). Regan argues that this investment “precludes us from examining our own legacy as colonizers” and argues that a transformation in the settler-Indigenous relationship moving forward requires educational interventions that unsettle this meta-narrative (2010:106).

### **3.3. Current Understandings of KAIROS and the KBE**

Providing a descriptive aspect of this thesis that accounts for the history of the KAIROS organization and the Blanket Exercise itself was imperative due to the lack of research currently available on either. During the course of this thesis, the KAIROS website was updated to reflect digital changes to the Blanket Exercise during the Covid-19 pandemic. As such, my initial background research into the exercise provided a paper written by a previous staff member of the organization titled “Honouring the Legacy of the Royal Commission: Living into Truth and Reconciliation, A Case Study of KAIROS: Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives” (2016) that is no longer found on the updated website. This paper provided historical context to the formation of KAIROS, its various initiatives and goals, and described the creation of the Blanket Exercise as stemming directly from the work of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) in 1996. A Master’s thesis written by Donnelly at Dalhousie University in Canada titled “Spaces of Faith Activism in the Global North?: An Exploration of Religious Resistance to Current Notions

of 'Progress' in the Case of KAIROS” (2008) provided the only other academic text detailing the historical contexts for the creation of KAIROS and its aims as a social justice-oriented organization.

According to my research, and confirmed by Eva Lemaire’s article published as recently as 2020, there is little academic research that has been conducted on the Blanket Exercise. Lemaire’s article is one of three academic articles I gathered detailing an analysis of the exercise. Lemaire’s article described a short explanation of the exercise and provided analysis of Canadian Bachelor of education students’ essay responses to the activity. Lemaire’s data resulted in the main themes of students finding the Blanket Exercise to be a ‘highly appreciated learning moment’, a really emotional experience’, and it had ‘possible impacts on future learning’ (Lemaire 2020). They advocated that further research needed to be undertaken regarding the Blanket Exercise and its effects, especially long-term studies, and studies of the difficult feelings involved in the exercise (Lemaire 2020).

Similarly, Bengezen et al. (2019) provide a narrative analysis of their personal experiences participating and facilitating the Blanket. Likewise to Lemaire’s study, this article provided reliability to the blog post articles discussed in this thesis regarding Participant responses to the Blanket Exercise. Additionally, the narrative analysis of this article provided more in-depth storytelling of specific settler Participant responses as the authors provided their background information and interrogated their identities throughout the article. This article also provided a copy of the first four pages of the KAIROS Blanket Exercise script from 2017. This helped to fill in my descriptive questions regarding the playthrough of the exercise, but has not been included in my appendix of this thesis due to copyright reasons.

In contrast to the favourable critique shown by the previous authors, Sheldon (2020) argues for a more critical inquiry into the Blanket Exercise. Her article, titled “Colonial Under the Covers” discusses the limitations of the exercise in its ability to create a decolonized space and further a movement towards decolonization (Sheldon 2020). Her critical approach towards the exercise using content analysis provides a critique of the exercise and the reconciliation discourse in Canada for not disrupting settler colonialism, but reproducing it (Sheldon 2020:123). Her main arguments pull from Tuck and Yang’s seminal article “Decolonization is not a Metaphor” (2012) as she



examines the inherent ‘metaphor’ of the blankets representing land in the Blanket Exercise (Sheldon 2020:116-119). Sheldon also critiques the role-playing pedagogy of the exercise which allows settler Participants to “play a part rather than assume their own roles and the real effects that come from them” (2020:119). This is a critique of the ability of the Blanket Exercise to create space for oppressor self-reflection and interrogations of settler privileges. By critiquing the Blanket Exercise through a decolonizing lens, Sheldon offers a preliminary argument for the narrative of the exercise remaining firmly in line with investments in Canadian settler futures and settler-Indigenous reconciliation, not decolonization (Sheldon 2020).

### **3.4. Research Gaps**

This thesis aims to fill in a gap I perceive in the literature pertaining to the need for a contextualized description and understanding of the Blanket Exercise that also centers the perspective of the KAIROS organization and the experiences of the KAIROS staff. The few instances of literature on the Blanket Exercise include studies conducted from the point of view of the authors and do not draw on knowledge through interviews which I believe to be a pertinent area of analysis. Further, these studies acknowledge the difficult emotions and discomfort that are experienced as Participants partake in the exercise, but my aims in utilizing Boler’s Pedagogy of Discomfort and Ahmed’s Cultural Politics of Emotions are to deepen an analysis of when and why these emotions occur and what their performativity indicates. By drawing on the previous research regarding settler epistemologies at a macro level, I aim to draw attention to the Blanket Exercise and illuminate how these discourses and emotional investments occur at the micro-structural level in Participants.

There is also a gap in the literature pertaining to discussions of settler futurity instead of reconciliation. The latter, though grounded in the mobilization of Indigenous residential school survivors, has been appropriated by the Canadian state and settlers to create a discourse that re-centers the needs of non-Indigenous Peoples and the rescuing of settler futures (Gaertner 2020; Regan 2010; Tuck and Yang 2012). Though key literatures in this thesis problematize shallow reconciliation efforts, I aim to sidestep the need for this already thoroughly accounted for problematizing by instead focusing my analysis on the ways in which settlers can create a less colonial relationship with Indigenous Peoples by interrogating settler futures.

## **4. THE STORY OF THE BLANKET EXERCISE**

### **4.1. History of the KAIROS Organization**

While it is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a full history of KAIROS and its various projects, its foundations in collaboration with Indigenous Peoples as a faith-based organization are important to examine given the complicated history between the Church and Indigenous Peoples in North America and globally. Furthermore, the leadership that KAIROS has shown in responding to Recommendations from policy reports and commissions bears highlighting. The KAIROS Organization is the Canadian Ecumenical Justice Initiatives, a multi-denominational church based social justice organisation in Canada that works nationally and internationally on projects related to ecological justice and human rights (KAIROS Canada 2021 “Who We Are”). Their mission statement emphasizes “Faithful action for justice and peace...in Canada and around the world” (KAIROS Canada 2021 “Who We Are”). The Organization as it is known today emerged in 2001 out of collaborations, coalitions, and joint projects between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples as well as faith-based and secular groups since the 1970s (KAIROS Canada 2019 “Honouring the Legacy of the Royal Commission”).

The earliest structure of KAIROS was called “Project North”, which was created in 1975 following Indigenous leaders’ mobilization that raised awareness of the negative impacts of economic development projects in Northern Canada. Project North consisted of an Inter-Church Project network which brought together various church denominations and their councils to create projects that supported northern Indigenous communities and their opposition to resource developments as well as fostering awareness in Southern Canada among non-Indigenous peoples about these ongoing issues (KAIROS Canada 2019 “Honouring the Legacy of the Royal Commission”). Project North evolved into the Aboriginal Rights Coalition (ARC) in 1988 following a need for a new structure that emphasized partnerships and alliances with Indigenous political structures and networks. In the 1990s, many Indigenous peoples mobilised to seek apologies, recognition, and legal actions for the Churches’ involvement in the Residential School Systems. Several of the churches in the coalition were the focus of these demands for redress. In keeping with their aims for justice and Indigenous rights, ARC responded to these demands by

issuing statements of apology, but also taking action in following the Recommendations for Church Apologies in the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996 (RCAP). They created several projects aimed at increasing awareness of this traumatic history as well as Indigenous Rights in general. One such initiative was the Blanket Exercise (KAIROS Canada 2019 “Honouring the Legacy of the Royal Commission”).

Indigenous rights remained a priority following the emergence of KAIROS in 2001 when the organization as it is known today emerged (KAIROS Canada 2019 “Honouring the Legacy of the Royal Commission”). Since 2016, ‘reconciliation’ has become KAIROS’ Indigenous Rights projects’ overarching theme (KAIROS Canada 2015). Currently the KAIROS Organization has ongoing projects focused on public education in several areas of work such as ecological, migrant, and gender justice. These projects are created and developed in partnership between settler ally staff at KAIROS as well as Indigenous communities, Elders, and staff that hold positions both on the Steering Committee and at project level (KAIROS Canada 2021 “Who We Are”). Since 2015, their most popular project remains the Blanket Exercise as it synthesizes two main goals of KAIROS today: advocacy and education (KAIROS Canada 2019 “Honouring the Legacy of the Royal Commission”).

## **4.2. The Creation of the Blanket Exercise**

Following KAIROS’ commitment to public education initiatives as well as Recommendations in the RCAP that emphasized interactive and collaborative educative models for the building of mutual relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada, the Aboriginal Rights Coalition consulted with Indigenous Elders and teachers to create the first edition in 1997 of what is now known as the KAIROS Blanket Exercise (KBE) (KAIROS Canada 2019 “Honouring the Legacy of the Royal Commission”). Later editions were created following the devolution of ARC into KAIROS. The Exercise is an experiential learning simulation that takes participants through 500 years of Indigenous history in North America, with a focus on the colonial period following First Contact as told from and through the Indigenous perspective (KAIROS Canada 2019 “Honouring the Legacy of the Royal Commission”).

Based in participatory popular education methodologies and Indigenous methodologies, the aim of the KBE is to foster reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples by building an “understanding about our shared history” through engagement on an “emotional and intellectual level” to “promote empathy” (KAIROS Canada 2021 “Indigenous Rights: Blanket Exercise Workshop”). It has been continually updated by the organization in collaboration with Indigenous Elders and Knowledge-Keepers in order to reflect the ongoing process of reconciliation and Indigenous mobilization in Canada and globally. Its popularity has dramatically increased in the last five years following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Report in 2015 (KAIROS Canada 2021 “Indigenous Rights: Blanket Exercise Workshop”; KAIROS Canada 2015). The Exercise has been conducted thousands of times in schools, healthcare facilities, and with law enforcement and all levels of government. Blanket Exercise Participants vary in ages, genders, and ethnicities as do the Facilitators. However, it is recommended that an Indigenous Elder is present at the KBE to assist with emotional challenges that may occur. KAIROS has multiple Elders on staff for this purpose (KAIROS Canada 2021 “Indigenous Rights: Blanket Exercise Workshop”).

It is important to note that though this research has a geographical focus on settler education in Canada, the KBE has been conducted internationally for staff at Canadian embassies in foreign countries, as well as in countries such as Australia, New Zealand, the United States, El Salvador, Brazil, and Guatemala with scripts that match the specific histories and languages of these regions (Interviewee B 2020; Bengezen et al. 2019). Further, an international script was in the process of being completed prior to the Covid-19 pandemic (Interviewee B 2020). Other editions of the script include a French version of the North American history, two youth versions that complement the formal school environment of grades 6-9 and 3-5, scripts adapted to church congregations, and a new adapted version for online learning that can be conducted remotely via ‘Zoom’ due to the Covid-19 pandemic (KAIROS Canada 2021 “Indigenous Rights: Blanket Exercise Workshop”). Increasingly, the KBE has also been adapted to specific locations or tribal histories in Canada according to community partnerships with various Indigenous groups (KAIROS Canada 2021 “Indigenous Rights: Blanket Exercise Workshop; Interview J 2020).

The outline of the Exercise that I will provide below is based on the English version of the Canada-wide national script utilized for adults, as this is the content most widely used (Interviewee P 2020b). Though there are protocols that must be followed and standardized scripts, each KBE experience is unique due to the background of the Facilitators and Participants (Interviewee P 2020b). There are several videos and news articles online that detail some aspects of the Exercise, but the scripts remain copyrighted material by KAIROS and cannot be fully accessed for analysis in this research. The following explanation of the KBE is based on excerpts from scripts that were included in academic papers, descriptions in blog posts from the KAIROS website, and interviews with KAIROS staff.

### **4.3. Walking Turtle Island**

In a 90-minute workshop, Participants take on the role of Indigenous peoples and physically step onto blankets on the floor that represent the land of North America prior to First Contact. The space where the exercise takes place must be open and large enough to place multiple blankets spread out on the ground, all touching each other to create an unbroken blanketed space in the centre. If in a classroom or office setting, desks and chairs are pushed to the far corners to open up the centre of the room. Participants are asked to take off their shoes and step onto “Turtle Island” and the Exercise begins. The KAIROS Facilitators hand out short numbered scripts that will be read by the Participants as the exercise unfolds. The scripts contain historical content and quotes from Indigenous Elders, leaders, and community members that help draw Participants into their roles as well as centre Indigenous voices during the exercise (KAIROS Canada 2019 “Honouring the Legacy of the Royal Commission”). Participants are also randomly given specific cards and items to hold (such as dolls) to hold that signal various events that they will experience during the exercise (Interviewee P 2020b).

First, Participants are encouraged to ‘live’ on their land by walking around the blankets and engaging in silent communication such as ‘trading’ with the other Participants (Bengezen et al. 2019). Facilitators have their own story-telling scripts and assume the role of the early European explorers such as the British, the French, and the Dutch. Opening with a monologue about Pre-Contact Indigenous societies and histories, the Facilitators emphasize the diversity of peoples on Turtle Island, but also the shared traits in common such as their own laws and forms of governance,

treaty-making as conflict resolution, and relationship to the land (Bengezen et al. 2019). Depending on the specific territories on which the exercise takes place and the discretion of the Facilitators, a more precise history is outlined to the Participants in order to pass on context-specific, land-based teachings (Interviewee J 2020; Interviewee P 2020b).

The Facilitators then move on to explaining First Contact with European explorers and how the initial relationship was one in which Europeans relied heavily on Indigenous Nations for their survival (Bengezen et al. 2019). The birth of the Métis Nation as a distinct Indigenous culture is also explained as a result of intermarriages between Indigenous Peoples and Europeans. Already, however, the Facilitators, as the explorers, act out the encroachment of Indigenous lands and resources by pushing and folding the blankets to make Indigenous territories smaller, symbolizing the expansion of the Fur Trade and early fort establishments following the “Doctrine of Discovery” (Bengezen et al. 2019) The Participants are reminded that Indigenous peoples were not passive victims of these acts by the Europeans and are encouraged to ‘fight back’ against this encroachment by continuously unfolding or taking back the blankets as they see them taken away as well as ensuring that all of their ‘territory’ is being defended from the Facilitators (Bengezen et al. 2019). At this early stage, Participants and Facilitators usually embody a game-like mentality and often have fun trying to outplay the other (Interviewee P 2020a; Bengezen et al. 2019).

However, as the exercise continues, the playfulness is replaced by a more serious tone. This begins during the next stage of the exercise in which Participants and blankets are rapidly removed from the exercise to symbolize ongoing colonial violence such as disease epidemics like smallpox that were introduced and weaponized by Europeans, settler encroachment, treaty-making, and the Indian Act (KAIROS Canada 2021 “Indigenous Rights: Blanket Exercise Workshop”). Facilitators and Participants continue to read chronologically about these historical events from the scripts and Participants bearing certain cards are the targets for these removals as their lives or their identities as Indigenous Peoples are stolen. Removed Participants are allocated to the sidelines of the room to watch the rest of the exercise unfold (Bengezen et al. 2019) . As the history continues to be told, the Facilitators then take on the role of the Canadian government, re-telling the nation building practices and policies that are predicated on the erasure and assimilation of Indigenous Peoples into Canadian society (Bengezen et al. 2019).

During this stage, specific historical events are highlighted for Participants to undergo physically (i.e. not just read from the scripts). One of the first of these is the removal of a Participant as representative of the genocide and extinction of the Beothuk People (original inhabitants of what is now Newfoundland) due to violence and diseases brought by the Europeans (Bengezen et al. 2019). The political border between what is now the United States and Canada that continues to divide First Nations communities is symbolized through the forced separation of two Participants who were standing on the same blanket to two different ones (Bengezen et al. 2019). The dramatic restructuring of the blankets in the exercise space reaches its peak in the creation of the reservation system. This effectively ends the free movement of the Participants as the remaining blankets are folded to be made much smaller and separated from each other, leaving the last of the Participants to remain standing on small pieces of ‘land’ and isolated from their peers (Bengezen et al. 2019). Some Participants are also chosen to undergo the experience of re-enacting the forced High Arctic Inuit Relocations during the Cold War as Facilitators move one blanket and its Participants to a far corner of the room (Bengezen et al. 2019). Most dramatically, Participants who were given dolls, or other items to symbolize their ‘children’, have these items forcibly taken from them in re-enactments of the residential school system, the 60s scoop, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, and the ongoing over-representation of Indigenous children in foster care systems in Canada (Bengezen et al. 2019). Recently, however, the use of dolls has ended due to Facilitators’ beliefs that they were often too emotionally detrimental to Participants (Interviewee P 2020b).

Towards the end of the kinetically active part of the Blanket Exercise, there are, however, reminders of Indigenous Peoples’ resistance and ongoing survivance in the face of assimilation and colonization. Facilitators and Participants read from scripts that detail significant events both globally and nationally that have brought positive changes for Indigenous Nations in Canada such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the mobilization for Idle No More and Standing Rock, and the Final Reports of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015) and the Inquiry on Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls (2019) (KAIROS Canada 2019 “Honouring the Legacy of the Royal Commission”; Interviewee B 2020; Interviewee P 2020b). The final Participants are asked to unfold parts of the

remaining blankets to symbolize the positive gains of these (Bengezen et al. 2019). The first half of the exercise concludes by asking Participants to take a moment to think about the atmosphere and size of the activity space when the exercise began and compare it to the small portion of Participants and blankets that are left (Lemaire 2020; Bengezen et al. 2019).

Following the conclusion of the physical portion of the exercise, Participants are asked to form a sharing circle or talking circle in order to debrief and process their emotions and experiences (KAIROS Canada 2021 “Indigenous Rights: Blanket Exercise Workshop”). The Facilitators will usually speak a few words to open the circle and encourage every Participant to speak if they feel comfortable and to be a respectful listener to their peers (Interviewee P 2020b). A token or talking stick is sometimes passed along in order to ensure that only the holder of the item is expected to speak at that time (Interviewee J 2020). Ideally, the talking circle will run for as long as Participants have thoughts to share to ensure that what is needed to be said is discussed (Interviewee P 2020b). The KAIROS organization encourages bookings to allot for extra time for this portion of the exercise as the talking circle is considered an essential time for reflection and building bonds with fellow participants (Interviewee P 2020b; KAIROS Canada 2019 “Honouring the Legacy of the Royal Commission”). Participants are encouraged to share what they’ve learned from the Blanket Exercise, what parts stood out to them the most, and whatever thoughts, feelings, and emotions they may be carrying. Many speak to specific parts of history they did not know before, the failures of the school system in addressing these topics, as well as more emotional personal connections they had with the experience (Interviewee H 2020; Interviewee P 2020b). Feelings of anger, guilt, and shame are also often shared by many Participants, particularly non-Indigenous Participants (Interviewee H 2020; Interviewee P 2020b). Facilitators are trained to close the talking circle in a way that ensures Participants and Facilitators leave with productive feelings and attitudes towards further reflection and education (Interviewee P 2020b). The Talking Circle is considered an important cultural teaching practice, as many Indigenous communities practice it in differing forms to create spaces of dialogue and sharing together (Interviewee P 2020b).



## **5. PEDAGOGY OF DISCOMFORT AND THE KBE**

### **5.1. Epistemology**

This section examines how settler Participants engage with the Blanket Exercise methods and content and how this engagement is shaped by their epistemological groundings in structures of settler colonialism as accounted for previously in Chapter 3. As Philips maintains, settler learners are not “blank slates, they come with emotional strategies and coping mechanisms already” (139). Due to the impossibility of accounting for every Participants’ specific epistemological lens, Boler’s Pedagogy of Discomfort is useful in understanding how dominant group positions are entrenched due to specific educational experiences that create inscribed habits of (in)attention to different narratives and human experience (Boler 1999). Incorporating Dion’s useful analysis of the various “scaffolding” (2009) that teachers and students must navigate in learning about Indigenous cultures, Paulette Regan’s discussions on the “settler colonizer within” (2010), as well as Jeffrey Denis’ assessment of settler group positions (2020), this section analyzes Participant reactions and resistances to their epistemologies clashing with the epistemologies embedded in the Blanket Exercise. This section, then, accounts for the learned positions and habits that Participants’ exhibit in the KBE, but also moments in which the exercise creates space for becoming aware of these habits.

#### **5.1.1. Emotional Selectivity and Inscribed Habits of (In)Attention**

As Boler (1999) describes, “inscribed habits of (in)attention” are how habits of “emotional selectivity” create investments in particular narratives and structures and thus shape how we view and don’t view the world. She explains how “...the approach can be applied to our listening habits, to how we see ourselves and our attachments to personal and cultural identities, and to how we view representations of difference...” (1999:186). For settlers in Canada, some of these habits have been described by Regan and Dion in depth in Chapter 3, but it’s important to showcase how Participants in the Blanket Exercise come into the exercise space with these habits shaping how they come to see the experience of the KBE.

For Regan, the “peacemaker” myth is a common Settler “coping mechanism” and this emerged in the data as well. An organizer of and Participant in several KBE describes:

*“I think as Canadians we like to pride ourselves on the fact that while our systems are not necessarily perfect, at least it’s better than United States ... But in fact, all the reserve lands in Canada combined would not cover one half of the reservation held by Arizona’s Navajo Nation”* (Aube 2017b).

This quote is describing one of the main facets of the history of the peacemaker myth as identified by Regan, that of a consistent and “prideful” comparison to the United States in an attempt to alleviate and hide Canada’s implication in a similarly violent history towards Indigenous Peoples (Regan 2010).

Participants upholding the peacemaker myth that Regan describes is most evident by this quote following a settler’s participation in the exercise:

*“I think that the historical mistreatment of Indigenous peoples in Canada is the most glaring blemish on our historical record and one that it’s incumbent upon us now to not just have conversations about but to actually take action”* (KAIROS Canada 2017b).

Though ending with a justice-oriented and positive call to action, this Participant’s description speaks to an investment in a historical record that is not “blemished”; an investment in a dominant ideal of Canada and Canadians as not ‘normally’ committing acts of mistreatment towards others. A “blemish” denotes a meaning of a ‘spot’, of an outlier act on an otherwise mostly clean historical record. This Participant is seeing the historical mistreatment outlined in the KBE as a singularity in the history of Canada, and not the settler colonial “bedrock” on which Canada has been built (Regan 2010:11). As described further by Dion, this Participant has an investment in an identity of “Canadianness” that necessitates instances of intolerance to be “rationalized, denied, or repressed so that the subject and her national identity can remain” (Dion 2009:167). As such, this Participant’s investment in the peacemaker myth creates an inscribed habit that upholds dominant settler epistemologies.

Another common coping mechanism that settlers use when confronted with learning about Indigenous Peoples is the “perfect stranger” as previously examined in previous research. Dion, in parallel with Boler’s discussion on habits framing what one does or doesn’t see in the world, describes how the perfect stranger position is informed simultaneously by what a person knows, doesn’t know, and refuses to know (Dion 2009:179). As such, Dion maintains that the ‘perfect stranger’ is not an “uncomplicated position” and the “ease” to which many settlers are comfortable with claiming this relationship should be examined as it cements a privileged “willful ignorance” (Dion 2009:179).

This Participant describes how they lived in close proximity to Indigenous Peoples, yet never really thought about that implication on their school life:

*“I don’t think it ever occurred to me until today that I grew up near several reserves, yet how many of those kids did I see in my school? The only one I can think of disappeared after Grade 10”* (Aube 2017b).

Many KBE Participants exhibit this lack of engagement with Indigenous Peoples when reflecting on how much information in the exercise they had never known before. One participant at a KBE remarks *“I didn’t realize how systemic the violence has been”* (Sarazin 2019a). Another had *“...previously thought of the atrocities that have happened to indigenous peoples, such as residential schools, as having happened in the past”* (Sarazin 2019e). Another shares *“It turns out that all the things I didn’t know about colonization could fill, well, the facilitators’ 10-page script”* (Sarazin 2019b). The Blanket Exercise’s existence as a learning tool of course suggests that there is information still needed to be imparted on settlers, but these reflections and positions that the Participants ascribe to unveil a deeper and “motivated denial” (Dion 2009:62) that shapes how Canadians “refuse to know” (Dion 2009:56) .

### 5.1.2. Unlearning Popular History and Dominant Representations

What has made the Blanket Exercise so successful in moving Settler Participants beyond the inscribed habits described above is the space it creates for many Participants to become aware of these epistemological settler groundings. Substantially in the data gathered, the Blanket Exercise does contribute to Participants' understanding that their knowledge of Indigenous Peoples is imperfect and is missing from the education system in Canada. Interviewee J described how the draw of the Blanket Exercise is its emphasis on how the KBE "*brings people into the story*" by giving participants a role in which they have to think about how things were and are from Indigenous perspectives (Interviewee J 2020).

What Interviewee J highlights here is twofold: the methods of the Blanket Exercise as bringing Participants *into* the story, and the content of the Blanket Exercise as told from Indigenous perspectives. Both of these aspects are seen to contribute greatly to the learning and unlearning that takes place during the Blanket Exercise sessions. This is due to their divergence from the dominant forms of learning in Canada, and indeed most Western nations, that is characterized by passive, "banking systems" of education that allow students to remain at a distance to the content (Freire 1970). Interviewee P refers to this as the "*double shock*" of the KBE: how first the training methods are not what Participants are used to in educative settings and second, how the historical information imparted is often completely new for some settlers (Interviewee P 2020b). Poking fun at the exercise when conducted in the context of often strict government office settings, Interviewee P describes how a Participant might see the exercise:

*"Who has kinds of trainings like that where it's viewed as like "okay I had to go there, I had to take my shoes off, they gave me a card, I took the role of an Indigenous person, it was weird and we sat down in a circle and we spoke with each other" (Interviewee P 2020b).*

Here, Interviewee P is portraying how the pedagogy of the Blanket Exercise is seen as outside the normal, or "weird", amongst common trainings given in a workplace. They are singling out specifically how the exercise differs from the more formal, Western office settings where instead shoes are off and coworkers interact with each other in a circle format.

Interviewee J further highlighted differences in dominant modes of teaching by comparing the participatory nature of the exercise to traditional classroom methods of PowerPoints and textbooks that are “*written from the settler side*” (2020). They remark how some participants will say “*Oh I’ve known this information, but never learned it this way*” (Interviewee J 2020). This is reiterated by many Participants in blog posts detailing how the visual and interactive components of the exercise made it much more impactful than what they had learned in schools:

*“As a student, it is easy to read a paper, read a chapter, close the chapter, finish the paper, put that away, and then explore something new. But when you go through with the motions physically it’s quite different”* (Aube 2017a).

*“This isn’t like a typical lecture, where you’re hearing statistics and talking about social determinants of health. As the blankets are removed, the issues are being visualized in front of you”* (KAIROS Canada 2018c).

This departure from dominant Western teaching methods is further highlighted by Interviewee B when they explain how the Blanket Exercise incorporates elements of Popular Education and breaks with “*traditional ways of teaching which comes from one perspective and is packaged*” (2020). Here, Interviewee B is speaking to how dominant representations are shaped by traditional Western methods of teaching that limit epistemological disruptions and understandings from the “other”, in this case Indigenous epistemologies. Interviewee B (2020) argued in this interview *how* information delivery is just as important as *what* information is delivered when working to disrupt “popular histories” and dominant representations. This is particularly true in regards to working with disrupting settler epistemologies, echoing Regan’s recommendations on this as well (2010:11). Dion emphasises this in her work as attending to “alternative listening positions from which teachers and students can hear differently” so that they do not disengage from the content (2009:17).

The importance of the Interviewees describing how the KBE is different in methodology from traditional classroom settings becomes increasingly pertinent when content that challenges settler conceptions of identity emerge during the exercise and in the Talking Circle. Participants that rely on the maintained distance in Western approaches to education find themselves feeling that “double shock”. This is exemplified in this quote from a KBE blog post:

*“The exercise works so well because participants are more than attendees — they are both audience and storytellers. They become living embodiments of the traumatic past”* (Sarazin 2020a).

Many participants also stress their unlearning and relearning of Canada’s history, not just learning the history of Indigenous Peoples. The important distinction here is the reactions of Participants that are beginning to realize how fragile their notions of Canadian identity are in the face of previously hidden histories disrupting meta-narratives (Dion 2009). As Boler notes: “In learning to see, one is challenged to disrupt the oversimplifications of ‘popular history’. Rigorously learning the ‘untold’ histories enables a recognition of how truths have been constructed in relation to particular silences” (1999:184) Boler’s notion of “popular history” describes the dominant representations in, for example, school textbooks, mass media, and dominant cultural values such as that of Regan’s peacemaker myth (Regan 2010; Boler 1999).

Some Participants react to this unlearning with frustration and disbelief, and express “dismay”<sup>1</sup> that “they never learned this history in school and it’s still not always taught to their children today” (Sarazin 2019d). This Participant’s expression of dismay that even their children are not taught this information highlights the temporal aspect of ‘popular history’ that is reiterated across generations to create the meta narratives that shape settler identity. This understanding is mentioned by Interviewee P: “*We’re not in a post-colonial era, it’s about hiding history from Canadians, we like to concentrate on what we think we’re good at and not our own history*” (Interviewee P 2020b).

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<sup>1</sup> In this Chapter, I will use italics when referring to a direct quotation from my Interviewees as well as Participants or Facilitators in a blog post in order to highlight their voice. Regular, non-italic font type is used when referring to the blog post author’s descriptions and interpretations.

Other Participants remark how their opinions of Canada became more negative following the exercise:

*“Canada is more evil than I thought”* (KAIROS Canada 2018d).

*“I knew Canada had done some bad things, I didn’t know it was that bad. That they pushed people into this small amount of space. And the amount of people who died because of Europeans, we’re definitely not the best nation in the world”* (KAIROS Canada 2018d).

These Participants’ new understandings of Canada as “evil” and having done “bad things” are disrupting the peacemaker myth. Further, the Participant in the second quote is identifying themselves as a “we”, as a part of the nation of Canada in not being the “best in the world”. This co-implication creates a disruption of Dion’s aspects of “Canadianness”, such as the intense value Canadians place in themselves as defenders of human rights (Dion 2008:61).

Other participants, however, resist the unlearning of these Canadian state narratives that the KBE offers. Interviewee H discusses how they commonly hear participants say *“oh the government wouldn’t have done that”* (Interviewee H 2020). They share how two of the strongest areas of resistance in settler Participants are specifically in regards to the parts in the scripts where the deliberate use of smallpox blankets for spreading infection are described, as well as the pass system which inhibited Indigenous peoples from leaving reservations without government permission. According to them, the policies enacted by the government in order to acquire Indigenous lands are *“really, really hard for people to accept”* (Interviewee H 2020). This resistance, according to Interviewee H, stems from an inherent belief that humans couldn’t do that to other humans. In response to the Participants that believe this, H articulates strongly: *“I keep reminding people we weren’t human. We weren’t considered people. So it was easier to do those things”* (Interviewee H 2020). This struggle to recognize some of the worst atrocities committed by early settler Europeans and the Canadian state is seen by Interviewee H to be a lack of understanding in Participants of the ideology behind settler logics of elimination in order to acquire land. It can also be viewed as an inherent investment in Regan’s peacemaker myth that upholds innocence and benevolence of White, Anglo-Saxon peoples in Western conceptions of history (Regan 2010).

This struggle is further exemplified when Participants realize they are personally implicated in the unlearning process as well. It is not just the dominant representations of Canada's history that are challenged in the KBE, but often Participants' perceptions of themselves as 'Canadians' is transformed into the understanding that they also embody the more discomfoting identity of 'settler'. Interviewee H explains that this understanding is difficult for people and brings up a lot of emotions because for some it's a "*rewriting of their idea of their entire family history and that can be a difficult process to be confronted with*" (Interviewee H 2020) Furthermore, they express how "*People tend to put their ancestors on pedestals*" which can make it more complicated for participants to understand how they could possibly be implicated in the historical events portrayed in the exercise (Interviewee H 2020).

A personal testimonial from the KBE blog expresses how complex these realizations can be for Participants:

*"I have heard and read about participants' experiences, but little did I know that there would be a wave of emotions coming my way, to wash away my own stereotypes, notions, ideologies, burden of colonizers and pain of my forefathers that I myself carried"* (Sarazin 2019c).

These complex reactions and resistances to coming to terms with the colonial legacy we as settlers have inherited in Canada are described by Boler as a part of understanding one's "...emotional selectivity that shapes what and how we see" (1999:182). The particular ways in which popular history and dominant representations shape from a young age a person's way of seeing and not seeing the world are the "Inscribed Habits of (in)attention". For settlers, these inscribed habits are particularly discomfoting when they are made known as they can create feelings of guilt and shame; the "burden of colonizers" as quoted above. It is these emotions that are examined next.



## 5.2. Emotions

As Boler describes, a main focus of the Pedagogy of Discomfort is discussing the “...emotions that often arise in the process of examining cherished beliefs and assumptions” (Boler 1999:176). However, Boler is firm that this pedagogy does not *intentionally* try to cause emotions such as anger or fear in learners, but rather that social justice education pedagogy always has the potential to evoke such responses (Boler 1999:183). What’s critical for emotions in an analysis of settler contexts is the ways in which strong affective responses can create both unsettling moments that transform settlers, but also have the potential to create a backlash of denial (Regan 2010). As previously explained, my ability to access the reality of the emotions presented here are blurred through secondary data and the differences between the discursive levels of performing, feeling, and vocally describing an emotion. To account for this, Ahmed’s sociological framing of emotions is utilized. Her theories on affective economies are important in analyzing how the emotions analyzed in this section are effects of judgments, not the origins of them, and thus relay investments in social norms (2014:196).

Engaging Participants in an educational activity on an emotional level and not just intellectually, is one of the main aims of the Blanket Exercise (KAIROS Canada 2021). As such, Interviewee P explained to me how an emphasis on mental health is stressed throughout all steps of the Blanket Exercise, illustrating how intensive this aspect of the activity can be:

*I send them a document about the KBE, testimonies, but I also send them the mental health resources. And for teachers we do have a prep page and an after-care page. And we do have a trigger warning at the beginning as well for the KBE. Which is super important to say, like ‘before we begin I just want you to know you will be touching hard subjects, if you do need to leave the room at any time if you feel like you can’t do it anymore and just want to sit down you can sit down. We don’t make anyone actually do the KBE; we respect everyone’* (Interviewee P 2020 b).

They further explained how hands-on the Facilitator training is in ensuring that the Blanket Exercise staff are equipped to deal with Participants who are emotional, but also how the Facilitators themselves can be affected by the exercise. They explain how they would rather a Facilitator who isn’t feeling mentally well enough that day to cancel on a KBE session instead of

push through. They explain: “*you can’t go do a KBE and expect yourself to go take care of people who are emotional if you don’t take care of yourself first*” (Interviewee P 2020b). This highlights the role of Facilitators in needing to attend to the emotionality of participating in the KBE.

Where and when these emotions occur during the Blanket Exercise was also an important area to highlight for the Interviewees. As previously mentioned, Interviewee H highlighted the moments in the exercise when the smallpox blankets, the pass system, and the residential schools are described as being the most resisted by Participants, but they also describe them as some of the most emotionally charged moments (Interviewee H 2020). This is illustrated graphically by a staff member’s blog post detailing how an Elder stopped to smudge<sup>2</sup> the blankets before she laid them down to begin the exercise:

“But [he] stopped me and said ‘*these blankets hold history ... I can feel the emotions of the people who have walked on them before. We need to smudge these blankets.*’ Carefully, we began to smudge each and every blanket that we would be using over the next two days, spending particular time on the iconic Hudson’s Bay blanket we would use for the ‘smallpox blanket’, and the dark grey sheet that we would use for the ‘residential school blanket’” (Aube 2017d).

Interviewee P (2020b) also describes how important the Talking Circle is for both creating a space to discuss the emotions from the interactive portion of the Blanket Exercise, but also in creating more emotions as Participants connect and share with each other. They describe how “*some people will have a few tears during the KBE, but oftentimes it’s the circle when they sit down and really think about it and they start talking about their own experience*” that will create more emotional moments (Interviewee P 2021b). They explain how the Talking Circle often gets overlooked by Participants, who will try and just book a KBE for the first part as they don’t think it’s as integral to the exercise. On the contrary, Interviewee P insists on giving adequate time for the Talking Circle:

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<sup>2</sup> Smudging is often also done before and/or after the Blanket Exercise to help cleanse the room and Participants of negative energy. Though every Indigenous community has differing protocols, a general definition of smudging is: “a ceremony for purifying or cleansing the soul of negative thoughts of a person or place” (Indigenous Corporate Training Inc 2021).

*“And I think mental health wise it’s important for people to take part in the circle to be able to debrief, to say and to hear what other people have to say so you can be like ‘okay you’re not the only one who feels like crap and that you feel cheated by what you’ve been taught’. I think it’s a way to keep yourself grounded as well, to come back to yourself. Few deep breaths, we’re going to talk about it, we’re going to debrief about it, and then you can continue on to your day”* (Interviewee P 2020b).

Interviewee P is describing the importance of a collective debriefing and unpacking of Participant’s experiences as integral to mental health following the exercise. Participants feeling “like crap” and like they’ve been “cheated”, are common enough for Interviewee P to remark upon them generally, and as such, I turn to further analysis of more specific emotions remarked upon by Participants.

### **5.2.1 Discomfort**

It seems rather obvious to specifically highlight ‘discomfort’ as an emotion described by Participants during the KBE considering the suggestions that a use of the Pedagogy of Discomfort as a lens proposes. Nevertheless, a short account of how discomfort is described by Participants and purposefully utilized by Facilitators adds to the relevancy in using Boler’s pedagogy as a framework for analysis.

‘Discomfort’ and feeling ‘uncomfortable’ are common feelings described by Participants in the data. Similar to the moments of high emotions described above, many Participants describe the most discomforting moments to be the residential schools and other descriptions of policies where “...*decisions were made and without any consultation or without any active participation*” (Aube 2017e). This suggests a link to feelings of discomfort to feeling difficult emotions.

Facilitators of the exercise also actively mention how the exercise can potentially create discomfort as revealed in these quotes:

*“[My prayer] is that your spirits give you strength to sit in what could be very uncomfortable for you... and that you’re willing to be open and authentic in that”* (KAIROS Canada 2017a).

“The most profound moment of the day came when [the Facilitator] asked participants to observe a moment of silence for those who endured these adversities. *“Take a moment to sit in discomfort. Move away from the habit of disconnecting from uncomfortable feelings”* (Sarazin 2020a).

Both of these quotes reveal an understanding by Facilitators that feelings of discomfort can close Participants off to the content of the exercise. Both Facilitators are instead challenging Participants to refrain from this “habit” of disconnection and hope that they will be willing to be uncomfortable. This was also a topic that Interviewee P discusses in our interview in which they described how, often, Participants do not wish to engage in their discomfort as it is seen as a sign of “weakness”, especially in workplace settings:

*“We’re taught in society that emotions equal weakness and no one wants to be the weak person. But I think being in a KBE, it takes off those barriers... in Indigenous cultures emotions are seen as a sign of not weakness, as a sign [someone] is powerful, strong, versus someone that is weak. You’re courageous to be able to show your true self, your true emotion”* (Interviewee P 2020b).

In this discussion, Interviewee P is making connections to the Indigenous methodologies embedded in the exercise that reduce the “barriers” that Participants may feel in accessing emotions or discomfort. As explained by Ahmed, the discourses surrounding emotions has been shaped by Western philosophy and psychology that delineates a hierarchy between emotion and thought/reason in which humans evolve to control emotions and experience them at the appropriate times and places (Ahmed 2014:3). The Indigenous methods in the exercise, however, are shaped by Indigenous epistemologies that seek to engage in this discomfort by connecting the head and heart in learning. The importance of the Facilitators of the Blanket Exercise in creating this dialogue with Participants is also reflected in Regan’s calls for educational spaces that reconnect the Western dichotomy of emotion and reason as an essential practice for unsettling settlers (Regan 2010: 12).

### 5.2.2. Anger and Fear

One of the most common emotions Participants claim they feel is ‘anger’. Many say they experience similar feelings such as ‘outrage’, ‘frustration’, and or ‘rage’ (see, for example, Sarazin 2020a; KAIROS Canada 2017a; Aube 2016c). It is also a common reaction that Facilitators see in the Talking Circles:

"For non-Indigenous people, there's often a lot of anger or guilt that they didn't know this or that their ancestors may have taken part in this" (McGillivray 2017).

“For some, there is astonishment and anger that they had been so ignorant of Indigenous history” (Aube 2017d).

Anger is the emotion that Boler most extensively highlights in her work “Feeling Power” (1999). She explains how “To respond in anger does not ‘mean’ the same thing in every circumstance” (1999:187). In this argument, Boler differentiates between the “anger of indignation” and “the anger of defensiveness” (1999:190). The former she describes as “...what I feel when I perceive something as an *injustice*, either against myself or some other person.” (1999:190). The quotes above demonstrate what can be perceived as this “anger of indignation” as the Participants are expressing that the lack of knowledge about Indigenous Peoples and histories is an injustice. This anger is directed at themselves, their ancestors, and often at the school system as exemplified by one participant who stated “*I realize I have only just begun to skim the surface of others’ experiences*” due to “having been taught so little about Indigenous history” (Sarazin 2020a). This anger seems to come from the “heightened awareness” after taking part in the KBE (Sarazin 2019d).

Sometimes that anger is also channeled towards the Facilitators in the form of violent actions or words. Interviewee H described that they have had a few instances of intense animosity during a KBE where Participants “*didn’t want to accept what they’ve heard or didn’t think it was true*” (Interviewee H 2020). They also revealed that there was even one time where they thought their life might be in jeopardy. They explained how they sat with the aggressor afterwards to understand their reaction to the content in the Blanket Exercise, but doesn’t believe they “*changed a mind that day*” (Interviewee H 2020). However, H also retains hope that Participants take

something from the KBE experience and “*when the time is right, make their own changes*” (Interviewee H 2020).

These examples demonstrate Boler’s “anger of defensiveness” which she describes as a “...protection of beliefs, a protection of one’s precarious sense of identity” (Boler 1999:190). She describes them as a “defense of one’s investments in the values of the dominant culture” (Boler 1999:190). When Participants don’t see some of the content of the KBE as “true”, they are rallying and defending a learned “truth” shaped by their habits, as described by Boler (1999). It is not possible to discern from this data what each Participant’s “truth” is, but what is important here is the reaction of anger in a Pedagogy of Discomfort that emerges when one’s truth is challenged by other ways of seeing, in this case an Indigenous perspective of Canadian history.

These reactions further reveal the underlying feature of defensive anger in which the need to defend in anger is driven by fear of these differing ways of seeing. As Boler maintains: “Two key features seem to underlie defensive anger: fear as a response to change, and a fear of loss. Fear of loss may be a fear of losing personal or cultural identities, or a literal, material loss” (1999:191). This fear is most exemplified in a personal story told to me by Interviewee H where one time before the event had even started, a woman hurriedly ran up to their friend, who is Indigenous, and said ‘*But we had to take you to residential schools so you could get an education*’ to which the friend replied ‘*How do you think we survived before you got here? We had our own systems in place and our own knowledges and we were surviving just fine without your help*’ (Interviewee H 2020) This woman, in identifying herself with a “we”, is trying to establish a defense for a particular identity and its investments, which in this case is a protection of ‘innocence’ or ‘goodness’ of a colonial regime and a violent act of colonization. Her ‘we’ is not identified, she could be aligning herself with the Canadian state, the church, white people, or even settlers overall, but the rush to defend the value of what aspect of dominant culture she identifies with suggests the precarity of that identity in the face of alternative ways of seeing (Boler 1999:190).

### 5.2.3. Guilt and Shame

The other most common emotions expressed by Participants in the data is that of guilt and shame. This is despite what is one of the key tenants of the Blanket Exercise, and often said to Participants before the exercise begins, which is a version of “*We’re here not to place shame or guilt. We are here to lift the veil of denial and shed light on truth*” (Sarazin 2020a). This aligns with Boler’s insistence that a Pedagogy of Discomfort doesn’t intentionally seek to assign guilt or shame, but also that it cannot be “done away with all together” (Boler 1999:183-185). When asked about guilt and shame in a KBE context, Interviewee P had this to say:

*“Sometimes people feel bad about the things they’ve said in the past. Things that they’ve done in past during youth. Like when they were kids and they’re like ‘oh I should have known that, I was old enough to know better. Like I knew it wasn’t nice what I was doing to that person, but I didn’t know why’. And now they feel really bad”* (Interviewee P 2020b).

Here, Interviewee P is explaining the causes of guilt in some Participants to be related to past wrongdoings they’ve committed against Indigenous Peoples. These incidents are often racist and discriminatory beliefs or remarks, or jokes as revealed by some Participants. For some, it is also inaction and silences that that make them feel shame. An example of this is a Participant who described experiencing a “*tsunami of emotions*” in which they felt shame for “*those times when conversations were happening around me and not knowing enough and not choosing to find out more, to become proactive in being part of the change*” (KAIROS Canada 2017a) This Participant is portraying understanding that they have always had a choice in finding out more and creating change, and they are ashamed for not equipping themselves to do so. They are expressing shame for their willful, and ‘maintained ignorance’ of Indigenous Peoples (Dion 2009).

Interviewee P (2020b) also describes how there is often guilt expressed for not knowing about the history explained in the KBE: “*And sometimes what hurts also people is when they have kids. They’re like ‘I hope my kids learn this earlier than that’. But I want them told what actually happened”*. This expression of guilt due to ignorance is often paired with anger as seen in quotes earlier in the section regarding Anger. The guilt is aimed at their own actions of not knowing “their ancestors may have taken part in this” (McGillivray 2017) but also aimed at their future and present selves to ensure their kids are told “what actually happened” as Interviewee P described above.

Sometimes the Participants feelings of guilt or shame can lead to them offering apologies as exemplified here:

“One participant offered a public apology to the group for failing to recognize that oppression and racism are at the root of issues such as poverty and alcoholism, which affect Indigenous peoples on and off reserve” (Aube 2016d).

Here, a Participant is expressing an apology for not understanding the historical groundings and systemic structures that have created the lived socioeconomic realities for many Indigenous Peoples. This speech act of ‘apology’ is something Ahmed also analyses in her work, though she focuses on official apologies taken up (and not taken up) by nation states in response to social injustices (2014:101-121). Despite this, her analysis is still interesting in examining what is actually occurring when Participants apologize and what this ‘apology’ does. Ahmed reflects on this by stating that “What the apology does or performs also depends on actions that follow from the apology” (2014:115). Unable to follow up with this Participant and others who express apologies, it is hard to infer from the data whether this Participant takes any further responsibility for this admission. However, what Ahmed also declares is that an apology “at the moment of its utterance goes through a passage of the undecidable, both opening up the past, and keeping open the future” (2014:116). Thus in this apology, the Participant opens up to their past shame and guilt, but also leaves themselves open to change. The importance of the future is linked to discussions surrounding “unproductive guilt” that Boler argues can close people off to further conversations and self-reflection (1999:186). This is examined further in the following section.



### **5.3. Ethics**

This section presents the ways in which the Blanket Exercise provides various pathways for more ethical actions by Participants toward Indigenous Peoples following the culmination of the exercise. The analysis of these pathways is only inferred from immediate Participant reactions, but also from the long experience the staff have had in conducting the exercise. In this sense, I apply the use of the term “ethics” in attention to Boler’s understanding of the term as the possibilities of creating more responsible and understanding relationships between groups of people. Regan also discusses ethics in regards to unsettling settlers in order to create “morally and ethically responsible socio-political actors in Canadian society” (2010:22). This section uses Boler’s concepts of ‘spectating’ and ‘witnessing’ to discern in what ways her ideal goal of an invitation for a ‘call for action’ are realized. I present in what ways the Blanket Exercise is able to impart upon Participants more ethically self-reflexive understandings of their identities and actions going forward.

#### **5.3.1. Spectating and Passive Empathy**

According to Boler, spectating describes a critical distance placed between the student and ‘other’ – a privileged position that allows one to waiver any responsibility (Boler, 1999). This is a common outcome of settlers learning about Indigenous Peoples, as seen by Susan Dion in her research in regards to how non-Indigenous learners are familiar and comfortable with this paternal style of learning from a distance whereby the learning about the other in a multicultural framework is about ‘putting oneself in the victim’s shoes’ (Dion 2009:58). However, as Boler states, this passive empathy is more of a “projection” of the learner than an “understanding” about the other person or culture the learner is attempting to learn more about (Boler 1999:159). Boler (1999) outlines several risks that this spectating and passive empathy entail, risks that I turn to now.

##### *Limited Responsibility*

Despite some Participants either coming into the KBE with the understanding that they are implicated in settler colonialism in the present or ultimately leaving the KBE with this understanding (see the following section 5.3.2), fewer transformative learning experiences that turn the gaze inwards and outwards towards decolonization are seen in the data. However, due to limitations in accessing long-term Participant reactions and experiences after the exercise, strong

conclusions cannot be made about whether or not this is the case from outside the data available. Despite this, aspects of the Blanket Exercise and Participant responses still allow for an analysis of spectating positions.

The terminology that is used in education settings impacts the ability to move from spectating to witnessing and critical self-reflection (Davis et al. 2016). Terms like “settler” and “colonialism”, when used in the present, implicate current Canadians in ongoing settler colonialism and makes explicit the need for decolonization and individual transformative action. Interviewee P (2020b) acknowledged the use of terms “settler” and “settler Europeans” in parts of the script and was adamant that in a KBE *“We’re not going to deny the fact that non-Indigenous peoples are settlers”*. However, they acknowledged that it would take some reading between the lines of the script for some participants to see examples of current Indigenous Peoples’ experiences as a continuation of colonialism:

*“Do I think we actually take a stand on colonialism right now? No. But if people read between the lines of the script, just because at the end it says there’s still a lot of things that disadvantage people like the fact that some reserves have no running water. It’s a way of government to take people out of the reserve to put them into the White society and make them move away. So, I think right there it’s a huge [example] of colonization (Interviewee P 2020b).*

Despite their argument that colonialism as an ongoing process by providing an example of lack of basic infrastructure on reserves to push Indigenous Peoples to assimilate, they state the KBE leans away from explicitly making this claim: *“So I think we just, we won’t say it, because that’s still like a personal opinion considering that we are told we’re in a post-colonialism era”* (Interviewee P 2020b). Terminology implicates and upholds identities that demand responsibility to those in which they are shaped alongside. When calling oneself a “settler” it puts you in relation to past, present, and future locations of colonialism (Regan 2010; Davis et al. 2016). Not driving these identities home can create takeaways such as this from the KBE:

*“You had a sense of European guilt. You also had a sense of incredibly deep empathy of people upset with the pain that others were going through, so I think it was a great healing exercise” (KAIROS Canada 2017b).*

This was a reaction by a government representative to participating in the KBE. Attributing ‘guilt’ to the past “Europeans” relieves the personal responsibility this person feels towards the present Indigenous-settler realities. Considering the position of power this participant holds in a provincial government, this alleviation of responsibility becomes more concerning.

Beyond terminology, the one-time event that is a KBE, though having the ability to “snowball” into further actions as hoped by the Interviewees, does lend itself to a ‘one and done’ approach when participants are not followed up with to ensure ongoing learning and transformation. When the KBE is used as a one-time “Indigenous” training event, particularly in mandatory workplace cultural safety trainings, in which many of the organization’s contracts now take place, the training becomes another part of a busy work day:

*“So, from testimonies we’ve got in circles, they do take steps as to what’s next. But does everyone? It’s hard to say right. Capitalism is hard on us, we’ve got to get this report, this report. Kids have homework, they want to play soccer. So, it’s hard. We tend to forget fast, just like anything” (Interviewee P 2020b).*

Interviewee P is making larger connections to macro structures such as capitalism that hinder the ability of Participants to engage in activities that create learning opportunities that establish their need to take responsibility for present privileges and power dynamics. It also, hinders their ability to engage in critical self-reflection following the actual learning moment:

*“I think that if they decide, whether it’s mandatory or not, the fact that they decided to close their laptop and go into a different room and be away from their cellphones for a few hours, be away from their computers for three hours, and actually be a part of the KBE, I think that’s a huge step forward. Because after the KBE, you can’t deny and say ‘Oh I didn’t know this was happening’. You’d really need to not listen. I think the way the KBE is done, you’re going to retain some type of information. Just them being at the KBE, the KBE is a huge step” (Participant P 2020b).*

This quote also makes connections to the actual aims of the KBE itself. Despite how a Pedagogy of Discomfort analysis necessitates uncovering parts of the exercise that don't lead to transformative self-reflection and potential action afterward, the KBE advertises itself first and foremost as an educative tool about the shared history of Indigenous Peoples and the nation now known as Canada. In this educative goal, it does not explicitly aim to create transformative self-reflection in participants. Thus, though the KBE was created in response to calls for reconciliation, the facilitators are very conscious that the exercise is not a solution or final step:

*“A lot of people say that now that you’ve done the KBE you can’t deny what happened because you know. It gives you responsibility for what’s next. Whether you decide to talk about it, to ignore everything. But you need to live with that decision afterward”* (Participant P 2020b).

*“One of the elders I work a lot with says ‘there’s a reason why truth comes before reconciliation’. The blanket exercise is a tool that allows us to have that fundamental base level of understanding and truth”* (KAIROS Canada 2017b).

In the first quote, Interviewee P is emphasizing the role of the KBE as one of simply learning the history in order to go forward. Further, the second quote from another facilitator is emphasizing that the KBE offers space for learning and unlearning first, for “truth”, before trying to shift participants into acts of reconciliation they cannot fully understand the need for.

### Objects of Study

Part of Boler’s analysis of spectating is that it “allows oneself to inhabit a position of distance and separation, to remain in the anonymous spectating crowd” (1999:184). This spectating lends itself to a continuation of a binary subject vs. learner position that some participants continue to replicate even as the KBE aims to remove itself from this binary (Boler 1999).

Though the KBE aims to impart a “shared” history lesson on participants, and does so successfully from the script, a review of Participant reactions from the blog posts shows how some Participants still view the historical overview presented in the exercise as “Aboriginal” or “Indigenous” history, as opposed to “history” or “histories”, a part of “Canada’s” history, or their

own settler “ancestral history”. This allows for settlers to remove themselves from implicating themselves in this history. Further, this replicates the colonial gaze in which reflexivity and subjectivity of the settler are not examined. These distances are exemplified in the following quotes from settler participants:

*“The blanket exercise deeply impacted me, and it is an extremely effective way of teaching people about the history of indigenous people. I do believe that the exercise should continue in the future years, just so that the story of the indigenous people get heard and more people become aware of it”* (KAIROS Canada 2020 “Testimonials”)

*“Although I’ve learned about the history of colonization throughout my indigenous studies minor, having a visual representation of the destruction of their lands, cultures and way of life makes it much more real”* (Aube 2016a).

Interviewee J (2020) revealed that after the KBE, Participants have increased awareness of the issues that the KBE covers and Participants therefore *“have more interest in “learning more about Indigenous Peoples”*. This statement exemplifies the curiosity that Participants have in studying Indigenous Peoples, but not themselves in relationship to Indigenous Peoples. Though it is of course important to understand that Indigenous Peoples exist outside of their relationship with settlers and should not be defined always with the colonizer in mind, a Pedagogy of Discomfort analysis demands understanding power relations and how they shape identities. Indigenous peoples and cultures as subjects of study can lend itself to surface level understandings that can end at material culture for participants when more introspective direction is not given (Denis 2021; Dion 2009).

### *Passive Empathy and Reductions of Difference*

One of the outcomes of the KBE cited by the KAIROS organization is that it effectively increases empathy in those who participate. Critiquing the role of empathy in anti-racist education is becoming a common theme in the literature, with scathing quotes such as this on one side: “It is revolting to think that our only hope for a decent society consists in softening the self-satisfied hearts of a leisure class,” (Rorty 1998:185 in Choules 2007:167) and more middle of the line critiques coming from Boler: “Empathy, as I argued in the previous chapter, often works through

reducing the other to a mirror-identification of oneself, a means of rendering the discomfiting other familiar and non-threatening” (1999:177). As the Blanket Exercise upholds ‘empathy’ as a clear desirable outcome in participants, a critical analysis is necessary to account for when settlers exemplify the more passive moments of empathy.

As seen in the section above, many Participants and Facilitators express consistent emotions of heartbreak, sadness, and anger upon learning the history embedded in the KBE. Many participants account for these emotions as having stemmed from now “understanding” Indigenous experiences and history due to the experiential and performative aspects of the exercise:

*“I feel pretty emotional. When I played the part of the child that was forced from the community to go to residential school, that was one thing. But then they said, 'Turn your back because you're not really recognized by your community anymore' — Wow. That was so hurtful, and so heartbreaking (Fieber 2020).*

The above quote is an example of the many participants expressing how they were able to ‘feel’ Indigenous experience as though they have lived through it themselves. The participant expresses how she was able to feel how ‘heartbreaking’ and ‘hurtful’ it is to experience the impacts of residential school trauma from the exercise. Other reactions, such as these quoted below show that participants say how they are able to “understand” centuries of oppression from the short exercise:

*“To hear it also told kind of chronologically and to understand the centuries of oppression—it was staggering” (KAIROS Canada 2017b).*

*“Students can understand experientially – in a mild way – some of the emotional trauma Indigenous Peoples have faced and are continuing to face” (KAIROS Canada 2018c).*

Though the second quote highlights how participants can only “mildly” experience some of the trauma Indigenous Peoples face, this focus on understanding Indigenous experience is embedded in the KBE methodology.

On the main webpage for the exercise, the following quote is given priority for the viewer to take in:

*“The Blanket Exercise will get you, for a time at least, walking in someone else’s shoes, and will raise your awareness and understanding of Aboriginal people in Canada.” (Rev. Curtis Korver) (KAIROS Canada 2021 “Blanket Exercise Workshop”)*

Questioning the actual ability of these above participants to fully ‘understand’ and ‘feel the same’ as Indigenous Peoples is an important area to highlight, especially in a Pedagogy of Discomfort analysis. It affords a false sense of authority on Indigenous experience, especially to those in positions of political and economic power. As Boler maintains, the empathy exemplified above finds Participants seeing Indigenous Peoples and their experience as a “mirror-identification of oneself” wherein they reduce the impact they as settlers have on the actual perpetuation of these traumas they are supposedly ‘experiencing’ (Boler 1999:177).

Furthermore, this questioning of how much non-Indigenous people can ever fully understand and empathize with, not just in a KBE but over a whole lifetime, with Indigenous experiences becomes particularly pertinent when the preoccupation of how ‘safe’ and ‘comfortable’ it needs to be to learn and unlearn the information that the KBE engages with. Of course, the KBE is not just for non-Indigenous peoples, therefore attention to the safety and triggering moments of the exercise for Indigenous Participants is extremely important. However, configuring learning opportunities and spaces with the ‘comfort’ of dominant groups in mind has become a large conversation in anti-racist and decolonizing education discourse. For Susan Dion, “The extent to which we have concerned ourselves with the needs of non-Aboriginal people may imply, yet again, that Canadians are controlling the representation of Indigenous People” (2008:62).

With this in mind, the extent to which settler participants are able to empathize with Indigenous experiences in the KBE must be questioned when the organization has taken steps to ensure not to alienate participants, even when some actions or methods in the exercise would contribute to more accurate knowledge transmission:

*“Before, we would give dolls away, like for residential schools or things like that, but I think that’s one of the reasons we took them away because we realized we don’t need the dolls because it was just too much to take their kid away. It was way too emotional. Like you didn’t need them”* (Interviewee P 2020b).

Interviewee P is discussing the choice made to remove the dolls for Participants because they were causing “too much” emotion. This choice, though clearly important to reducing trauma in Indigenous participants, does indicate a regard for ensuring non-Indigenous participants have their needs met, even if those needs negate participating fully in an experience that Indigenous peoples had to go through in the past with the residential schools and contemporarily with disproportionately high rates of Indigenous children in the foster care system.

Another aspect of the Blanket Exercise that might cater more towards assuaging the needs of settler Canadians in the KBE is where the story often ends: hope. This is exemplified most through one of their blog posts that is written in first person by a settler Participant about their experience in the KBE. The blog post ends with the story shared in the Talking Circle about an Indigenous woman feeling good about how her children are able to learn and practice their culture in ways that she and her generation were not allowed to (Sarazin 2019b). When clicking on the full article link, however, the writer ends their original article in a different place on purpose. The writer asked an Indigenous advisor to check over the article before it was published to check for any missteps. The advisor “...asks for only one thing in the story to be changed: it can’t end where I had previously ended it, with the boy growing his hair out. With the word good”. The advisor explains why by saying: “The situation is not that clear, however...that positive story isn’t the norm. It risks giving a false sense of resolution in a larger issue that is far from being resolved”. The writer also reflects: “As a non-Aboriginal person, I realize that that’s the kind of hopeful ending I want, a clear starting point for a new beginning.” Thus, the original article’s revised ending moves away from framing Settler-Indigenous relations in this usual ‘hopeful’ way (Messenger 2018).

Even though the KBE posted the article on their website after the original was published, they chose to cut the article off before the actual ending that problematizes the message of hope and resolution. The hope that the Blanket Exercise embodies lends itself to settler participants who



feel they ‘understand’ and ‘empathize’ with this hope when it’s not necessarily the view that all Indigenous Peoples have, especially not that easy of a relationship with hope. Such good feelings and hopefulness obscure the hard work that must get done now. The concept of hope is effused into the KBE as well, as exemplified by Interviewee P: *“We want to finish with there’s hope. I think there is hope. I don’t think no one at KAIROS would be working if we think that there’s not hope”* (Interviewee P 2020b). Though hope is not negative by any means, and there are emerging calls for ‘pedagogies of hope’ that push ‘hope’ as a discourse and an important tool going forward in education (hooks 2010, Regan 2010; Olsen 2020) it can be a stagnating emotion that covers the tracks of transformative self-reflection and the violent present of settler colonialism; plus, the violence in creating decolonized futures (Fanon 1967:27).

What passive empathy and this hope also does is reduce transformative action, according to Boler. This is exemplified by the following quotes from Indigenous community members:

*“In my opinion, the blanket exercise is not able to challenge the Doctrine of Discovery in practicality. It allows one to remain a passive learner, not an active doer dismantling the oppressive systems and confronting the racist attitudes held deeply in the national psyche”* (KAIROS Canada 2018a).

*“In my opinion after reading the first effort of the original KAIROS blanket exercise, I felt it really only ended with the participants feeling pity for Native folks. I.... did not feel this was what we wanted, pity”* (KAIROS Canada 2018b).

Both these quotes highlight the root of the risks of empathy being reduced to sympathy, pity, and inaction. Though the KBE has made revisions to the script since the ‘original’ that the second quote refers to, the new versions still spend the majority of time focusing on injustices perpetuated by the Europeans and Canadian state on Indigenous Peoples. It ends with a message of hope, resistance, and resurgence, but still does not create space for future imaginings that move much further beyond pity and empathy for the present.

Another aspect of passive empathy is the “means of rendering the discomforting other familiar and non-threatening” (Boler 1999:177) as explained earlier. For Canadian settlers, this making of the unfamiliar familiar aligns with the multicultural rhetoric that pervades Canadian

narratives of itself as a welcoming and diverse country (Dion 2009). This narrative is particularly destructive to Indigenous sovereignty and decolonization in Canada (Tuck and Gaztambide-Fernández 2013). The KBE is often used in diversity trainings or cultural competency courses as part of multicultural legislation. As such, views such as this below are quite common in Participants:

*"I grew up in Saskatchewan in an area that was a large population of Indigenous people ... I have a good base but there's a lot that I don't know, so I'm here for more understanding, Here in Canada we are such a diverse culture, I think it just helps us to live more cohesively if we understand each other and where we're coming from"* (Fieber 2020).

This Participant is explaining how they have come to a KBE session in order to understand Indigenous Peoples culture as a part of the diverse mosaic that is Canada. This ‘understanding’ that some participants come to a KBE for and potentially leave with even after the fact, upholds settler investments in this version of Canada that does not call on them for active decolonization of Indigenous lands. Instead, they are empathizing with their fellow “Canadians” and reducing many Indigenous Peoples’ conception of themselves as members of Nations under colonial rule. In short, it is ensuring and “rescuing” a settler future (Tuck and Yang 2012).

### **5.3.2. Collective Witnessing**

Though the previous section unpacks the ways in which the KBE might miss the mark on achieving “witnessing” and simply reaches the “spectating” aspects of critical learning in Participants, this section serves to showcase examples of when the exercise meets this goal according to Boler’s Pedagogy of Discomfort framework. Witnessing is a dynamic process in which learners are moved to “turn the gaze equally upon our own historical moment and upon ourselves” (Boler 1999:177). Witnessing is thus a step forward from “spectating” that reduces the privileged gap that a person of the dominant culture is able to take when learning about critical issues and instead co-implicates their emotions, beliefs, and actions in upholding these issues. Indigenous and settler scholars in Canada also discuss ‘witnessing’ or ‘testimonial listening’ as a learned behaviour and Indigenous cultural practice that needs to be cultivated in settlers (Gaertner 2021; Dion 2009). Similar to Boler, Métis scholar Judy Iseke refers to “pedagogical witnessing”, which “allows my reading, viewing, or listening to be an event in which I allow the understanding of someone’s life to interrupt my

own life” (Iseke 2011 in Gaertner 2020:10). This section highlights the movement of some participants from a position of spectating to witnessing and the importance of such a changed position.

### Creating Space for Witnessing to Take Place

First, accounting for how the Blanket Exercise is initially set up for participants to achieve moments of “witnessing” was an important theme ultimately expressed by the Interviewees. The methods of the KBE reduce the likelihoods for the “spectating” that often comes with dominant paradigms of education by immersing participants in the story as discussed above in Section 5.1.2. This successfully experiential aspect of the exercise is lauded often throughout interviews as well as the KBE blog as exemplified in this quote: “*For no longer were we spectators at a distance, pondering the abstract. We were there. Right there. In the mix*” (Sarazin 2019f). Thus the KBE’s embedded methods are a jumping off point for reducing the passive learning that can keep the gaze off of the participants themselves when one is stuck in a spectator position.

Critically implicating oneself and reflecting on one’s relationship with Indigenous Peoples is another crucial aspect that moves a learner into “witnessing”. As mentioned, the goal of the KBE is to focus on building knowledge of the ‘shared history’ between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada. Thus, the KBE operates from a standpoint that there is a need to address a lack of this critical understanding, while also providing the space for this understanding to take place.

In addition, Interviewee B (2020) at length discussed how the exercise is not just a “teaching tool”, but a “*relationship building tool*”. They further express how when facilitators are conducting the exercise, they are “*not there to teach, they are there to share and learn and develop relationships*” (Interviewee B 2020). Lastly, they describe how you need to process the exercise with your whole body, with your heart because “*this is not just history, this is not just words. This is people’s lives and experiences. Not just in the past but in the present*” (Interviewee B 2020). This embodies Boler’s understanding of collective witnessing as “always understood in relation to others, and in relation to personal and cultural histories” (1999:178). Further, Interviewee B’s statements align with Boler’s emphasis on Minnie Bruce Pratt’s analysis that “[t]o understand the complexity of another’s existence is not to deny the complexity of our own” (Pratt 1984 in Boler

1999:178). The KBE framework and staff acknowledge the complexity of Indigenous and settler identities and relationships, as well as knowledge holder and learner identities and relationships.

### Participants' Questioning the 'Normal'

One of two quotes on the “Testimonial” section of the KBE website offers an overarching example of aspects of what “witnessing” in Participants can look like:

*“This exercise was immensely impactful. I wish I had done it earlier. Canadian history is taught through the eyes of the settlers, and this perspective is flawed. I am so grateful to have had this experience and I will use it to think critically about my assumptions and behaviours. This brought up a lot of emotions, which I hope I can use to fuel more personal inquiries and grow my understanding”* (KAIROS Canada 2020 “Testimonials”).

This Participant is questioning the education structures and ideology that uphold how Canadian history is taught from a particular point of view. Thus, the Participant recognizes how the education system is not neutral. Further, they recognize that it is particularly from a “settler” point of view, a term that includes identity, investments, and responsibility into the present to that which it is a binary i.e. Indigenous perspectives. This participant is also using critical self-reflection to co-implicate how their emotions during the exercise stem from assumptions and behaviours, or as Boler would refer to them as “habits of emotional selectivity”. This insertion of the self as needing examination and understanding highlights Boler’s ‘turning the gaze’ and reducing the neutral spectator role that passive empathy rests on (Boler 1999).

Reactions from Participants questioning the quality of content in the education system are becoming more common, according to the Interviewees. More and more Participants are remarking upon their realization that *“the country is not what they thought it was”* as Interviewee J remarked (2020). In regards to Participant changes, Interviewee H also illustrated that more and more Participants are asking questions such as *“why didn’t I know this before?”* or *“why have I learned more in the last hour than four years of university?”* and asking if they can become facilitators and bring the Exercise to their communities and their jobs in order for others to learn the history they never did (Interviewee H 2020).

A quote from a participant in the KBE exemplifies the questioning that some Participants exhibit when they are actively witnessing how the dominant paradigm of education has shaped their belief systems and understandings of themselves:

*“But it’s enough to say that being part of the exercise also reveals how ignorant I am, which makes me angry at and disappointed in myself. Blaming a grade-school curriculum riddled with omissions is just an excuse. The responsibility – and obligation – to learn these truths, I realize as I sit outside Turtle Island and listen, is mine”* (Sarazin 2019b).

This Participant doesn’t simply learn new facts from the content of the KBE and move on, they actively question why they had known so little and then assume responsibility for continued unlearning and learning going forward.

This questioning and witnessing is carried through with the following quote from a Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) cadet:

*“I want to carry the knowledge and the empathy I got today with me going forward. More than ever, I am inspired to build bridges between this uniform and Indigenous people”* (RCMP 2017).

Recently, the KBE has been adopted as part of RCMP training for cadets (Aube 2017f). The cadet Participant stating this is acknowledging the implication of their identity (RCMP “uniform”) and the historicized and present day disconnect between the RCMP and Indigenous peoples (they want to “build bridges”). They have witnessed a shared history and present responsibility to critically self-reflect on what that uniform and identity mean for Indigenous peoples versus what it means under the dominant paradigm for non-Indigenous peoples.

### Participants’ Questioning Identities

The ‘questioning’ embedded in witnessing is not just of external structures that shape the dominant paradigm, such as education and policing, but also necessarily internal. Boler (1999) argues for a Pedagogy of Discomfort that calls learners to critically self-reflect upon themselves and witness how their beliefs and behaviors harm others. This co-implication is seen in the testimonial that opened this section, but is also seen in other parts of the data.

In the interviews, Interviewee H (2020) emphasized how amazing it was to see how most participants will have a “*change of heart*” after the exercise. Interviewee P expressed how the exercise made people “*feel heavy*” because “*it makes them think about themselves*” (2020b). This Interviewee also stated that in their experience they have seen that:

*“I think people at the end do understand that if we want things to change we need to change ourselves first. Like what we say in private. Because I think that does impact everything whether it’s like, and I’m not even just talking about indigenous issues, but if it’s racial issues or LGBTQ2S+ communities. What you say in private with friends will impact”* (Interviewee P 2020b).

Interviewee P is illustrating how the ‘inscribed habits of (in)attention’ that Participants have need to be reflected on in terms of how they harm others. They are also making wider connections to how it is not just in Settler-Indigenous relations in which this witnessing of the self needs to take place, but in all power dynamics in Canada. These links align with the Pedagogy of Discomfort and its applicability to wider instances of learning about discrimination and oppression. Various Participants explained their experience of questioning themselves:

“What I ended up feeling throughout the exercise was a gradual stripping of identity. I studied Canadian history in university and was already aware of what happened to First Nations people after colonization, but the blanket reenactment placed me inside the history for an evening” (Aube 2016b)

“For [him], he says the blanket exercise made him think about what is behind his own personal opinions and values, which ultimately allows him to question them” (Aube 2017e).

These understandings of power dynamics also don’t just include human to human relationships. Participants questioning dominant paradigm structures of land ownership and private property occur occasionally in the data as exemplified by this quote after a KBE from a Participant:

*“We don’t own anything, I found myself desiring to go back to that relationship with the land – we don’t own it, we don’t own anything”* (Sarazin 2020c).

This questioning of one's relationship to land can be seen as both an acknowledgment of Indigenous title to territory, but can be further analyzed according to an Indigenous epistemological framework that acknowledges land as an equal, non-human actor. Boler's framework does not include this epistemological outlook, but the Participant's comments nevertheless reflect a critical moment of this settler's de-investing in a colonial relationship with the land. They are imagining alternative settler realities, perhaps even imagining a different future in which their relationship to the land is less colonial. Boler's "minimal hope" in the use of a pedagogy of discomfort is for the learner to understand how their inscribed habits lead to investments and how the protections of those investments lead to discomforting emotions and resistances (Boler 1999:198). The aim of the learner is then to reduce the harm of those reactions by accepting an invitation to action. Viewed in this way, when participants voice a need for a renewed relationship to land, they are partaking in not just witnessing of a shared history and potential unsettled future, but also accepting a call to action.

### **5.3.3. Inviting Action**

The final aspect of Boler's Pedagogy of Discomfort is the "call to action", which is an extension of witnessing. This action occurs after critical inquiry, as "bearing witness" is intended to spur learners to continue to try and see differently (Boler 1999). This call to action is expressed not as "...a demand or requirement, but an invitation" (Boler 1999:183). Boler doesn't prescribe what this action must or must not be, leaving this instead up to the learners and the educators individually or as a group. Due to this thesis' inability to access long-term participant reactions and learning journeys, whether these calls are taken up cannot be analyzed from the data. As Boler maintains though, these actions need not be demanded or required from learners, merely posited forward (Boler 1999) Thus this section accounts for some of the actions that the KBE and the KAIROS organization see as steps forward in in transforming the Settler-Indigenous relationship as well as personal experiences of these transformation from the staff.

#### *Asking the Critical Question*

Participant reactions following the conclusion of the KBE as well as discussions taking place during the Talking Circles are increasingly being led by the question of "what can I do next?", according to each of the staff that I was able to interview. Interviewee P explains how

more often than not, Facilitators will lean into inviting participants to engage in next steps: “*We tell people that this is not what you should do next, this is what you **can** do next*” (Interviewee P 2020b). This question of “what now?” is what ‘catalyzes’ the invitation to action according to Boler (1999:197). It often gets posed when the critical self-reflection in “witnessing” moves learners to transformative action (Boler 1999).

This motivation on future actions following the Blanket Exercise is a critical component of witnessing and unlearning. It highlights settler Participants’ understandings from the exercise that this is not just history, there are intergenerational traumas and ongoing colonial violence into the present and into the future if more ethical relationships aren’t built now. The majority of Participants do seem to take from the Blanket Exercise that though this 90-minute training focuses on teaching about history, it has implications for present and future relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Peoples. This is exemplified in these Participant experiences:

“This experience was educational, emotional, touching, and inspiring for all involved. It’s at events like this that we learn both what has happened and what we need to do to move toward a better future together” (Sarazin 2020b).

“For me, it was a particularly moving experience as I was holding my young daughter in my arms. I felt tears coming to my eyes as I lamented the struggles of the past while hoping for improved relationships for future generations” (Sarazin 2019g).

### *What are the Exercise’s Calls to Action?*

Speaking with the staff during the interviews, it became clear that each KBE offers different steps forward depending on the facilitator, the participant demographics such as age and ethnic identity, the geographic location of the exercise, and the fields in which the exercise takes place (for example healthcare professionals, students, lawyers, etc.). As such, a full account of these suggestions is not possible, but what becomes interesting in the data gathered are to what micro and macro levels the aims are directed at as well as what authorities they are derived from.

The framework of the Truth and Reconciliation Report’s 94 Calls to Action section is the most used set of recommendations that guide the staff according to the data. Not only do they use it for recommendations of steps forward, it was the catalyst for increased attention in the Blanket



Exercise. All four staff members interviewed included it as a catalyst, and Interviewee J described the Report like this:

*“It completely changed everything. All of a sudden, and I think from that point, KAIROS was getting an influx of requests. The TRC really started to change conversations and it opened people’s eyes to what they had been missing for a long time”* (Interviewee J 2020).

The recently released Final Report on the Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), and one of the first official state inquiries into Indigenous-Settler relations, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP), are also looked to for guidance. This is exemplified in Interviewee P’s explanation for what guidance they offer participants:

*“If you really want to see something change, go take a recommendation and all those reports, and whether it’s the criminal justice system, health system, education system, take one you really want to work on and try to apply it in your everyday life. It doesn’t need to be big because people, I think, they don’t know where to start. They see all of these issues and think ‘I’m one person, what can I do to change the world? What can I do? I am one small white individual, what can I do?’ But I think if everyone does a small action, it will have a snowball effect in the end”* (Interviewee P 2020b).

Interviewee P also brings up how a lot of Participants “don’t know where to start” and feel a bit helpless when faced with the enormity of some of these huge issues. This reflects important themes in the literature such as the passivity and unproductiveness that can come with guilt or helplessness. Second, it reflects Denis’ recent findings of a lack of a settler “intellectual centre” which settlers can look to for leadership on facilitating dialogue on these issues outside the education system (2020:225). The Participants’ and the staff see the space of the Blanket Exercise as facilitating these conversations.

Interviewee P is also discussing an emerging theme from the data which is that of advocating for actions taken on an individual, micro level as further exemplified in these Facilitators’ perspectives:

*“As individuals, we have a responsibility to deepen our understanding of history and make meaningful steps in our personal journeys of reconciliation”* (Sarazin 2020a).

*“People ask, ‘What can we do?’ They say, ‘Now that we know better, how can we do better?’ To them I say this ‘Don’t go out and do grand gestures — those feed the ego. Go out and do small acts. Talk to others. If each of you reached out and shared this new knowledge with one more person, and that person in turn did the same, think of what we could accomplish. We would chip away at the misunderstandings and the damaging stereotypes, leading us to a place free from judgment where compassion can flourish”* (Sarazin 2020a).

This emphasis on the individual is understood in the context of a settler Participant being invited to engage in further dialogue and relationship-building processes with Indigenous peoples. This emphasis on ‘relationship’ is seen throughout the aims and goals of the exercise and in the individual perspectives of the staff as well. In the previous section, Interviewee B (2020) was quoted as saying how the perception of the Blanket Exercise as just a *“teaching tool”*, is shifting to a view of it as a *“relationship building tool”* because a *“one-time exercise is not going to change everything, it is part of an ongoing process”* of creating relationships that are needed. Interviewee H described their role in the KBE and in life as one of *“braiding understanding and building bridges between the people who live on this land”* (2020).

A Facilitator in one of the blog posts also exemplifies this when discussing the place of settlers going forward:

*“I really believe in reconciliation. Every system is against us, education, health, childcare. Pick one that’s important to you and ask us what we need. Always walk with me, not before me or behind me, but beside me”* (KAIROS Canada. 2017b).

This was told to a group of Participants and highlights the importance of individual allyship and solidarity in order to dismantle collective colonial institutions and infrastructures in Canada. It also highlights the Blanket Exercise’s call to action as one characterized by fostering settler ethics in relationship with and following the guidance of Indigenous peoples.

## **6. DISCUSSION**

To answer my primary research question of what unlearning potential the KAIROS Blanket Exercise has for settler Participants, I now turn to discussing the outcomes of the tasks that I had set for myself in order to understand the space the exercise creates. This thesis described and accounted for the creation of the Blanket Exercise according to the goals of the KAIROS organization in order to contextualize and fill in the gaps in knowledge of what exactly the exercise aims to create for Participants. This thesis revealed the applicability of a Pedagogy of Discomfort as a lens through which the Blanket Exercise's methods can be examined. However, the limits of this lens in examining the Indigenous pedagogies of the Exercise were also learned. The qualitative analysis of the staff interviews and blog posts revealed how the Blanket Exercise creates spaces for potentially transformative practices for settler Participants through a discomfoting emotional experience. The results suggest that the Blanket Exercise creates a space in which some Participants remain in a "spectating" position that remains uncritical to their implications in settler colonialism. However, the exercise can also be seen to create a meaningful space for "witnessing" that motivates an affective practice of Participants' turning inward and acknowledging their own investments in their settler identity. What the Pedagogy of Discomfort as a lens reveals about the Blanket Exercise is its success in creating a space for discomfort and uncertainty in Participants about their own shaped epistemologies and investments. The exercise creates a learning moment that settler Participants can take forward and potentially keep seeking to reduce the harm that their investments in a settled Canadian future have on Indigenous futurity.

### **6.1. A Bridging of Theory and Praxis**

The data contributes a clearer understanding of the ways in which the Pedagogy of Discomfort as a theoretical framework can be used in praxis through the methods of the Blanket Exercise. This is revealed through the applicability of the Pedagogy of Discomfort as a lens through which to analyze the KBE, as I have shown in the previous chapter. One of the tasks of this thesis was to place the KBE in dialogue with the critical education field by examining its methods through that of the Pedagogy of Discomfort. The data gathered from the staff interviews and the blog posts affirm how the KBE utilizes similar strategies to that of the Pedagogy of Discomfort as seen by

staff who ask Participants to lean in their discomfort. It also points to practical methods that best foster the aims and goals of Boler's theory. In doing the latter, this data bridges a key gap between critical pedagogy and on-the-ground praxis that is in line with previous research that critiques this disconnect (Choules 2007; Freire 1970; Grande 2004). Boler herself limits providing a guiding praxis in her work in order to allow for more broad applicability for various social justice and power relations to be examined in differing contexts. This creates an extensive reach for her pedagogy in multiple educational scenarios as an overarching framework, but doesn't provide teachers and educators with a process to realize the aims in her pedagogy.

In the Blanket Exercise, the data points to the spaces of the highly visual and participatory learning components of the activity, as well as the Talking Circle, as critical aspects that allow for Participants to engage in the discomfiting emotions and processes of witnessing. These methodologies or praxis of the Blanket Exercise create the most emotional impacts on Participants and thus facilitate the aims of Boler's pedagogy in fostering and working through discomfiting emotions. Rather than highlighting *what* historical or personal information is shared in these moments, Participants point to the *ways* in which this information is shared as the key to the discomfort. The participatory nature of the first part of the exercise where Participants "walk through the history" and the Talking Circle when Participants share and debrief from the experience together are where the transformative aspects of her pedagogy are most engaged.

### **6.1.1 Where the Bridge Has Holes**

The above discussion is in line with previous research discussing discomfiting emotions during the KBE and even Lemaire's conclusions regarding how pedagogies of discomfort may be useful for further analyses of the exercise (Lemaire 2020:309). The applicability of the Pedagogy of Discomfort in examining the Blanket Exercise does provide a useful lens in opening up analyses of Participant responses during the exercise. However, there are limits to how much the Pedagogy of Discomfort as a critical pedagogy framework can account for all aspects of the Blanket Exercise's methodology. As mentioned earlier in this thesis, critical education and critical pedagogy are rooted in and deeply informed by Western theory's individualism, rationality, anthropocentrism, and progressivism (Grande 2004:66). There are tensions and gaps in the data presented due to applying a Western theory of education as a framework to an exercise that is also

rooted in Indigenous pedagogies of land-based teaching and holistic learning that connects the head and the heart of learners.

This tension is first noted in how my focus is on individual Participants' learning moments and responses instead of collective experiences, or how the group dynamics could be a factor in facilitating the most transformative learning moments. Second, Boler's pedagogy is based on progressive stages of learning, in how learners must move from positions of spectating to that of witnessing. And third, Boler's pedagogy is anthropocentric. This created the most tension between myself as a researcher in Indigenous Studies and the Western framework I was employing. The data gathered that highlighted Participants' responses to other-than-human relationships, such as that seen in quotes regarding land, are not given decolonized space to be investigated within this framework. This suggests that though the Pedagogy of Discomfort and critical education can be valuable in examining settler-Indigenous educational spaces, they are still colonial frameworks. This thesis evokes further questions regarding an analysis of settler discomfort in the Blanket Exercise through Indigenous pedagogical and epistemological lenses.

## **6.2. Unsettling History**

As expected in an exercise that is told solely from the perspective of Indigenous histories, the data overwhelmingly highlights the space the KBE creates for unsettling Canadian settler histories. From the outset of the theorizing of this thesis, this was a hypothesis that I surmised would be thematic all aspects of the research. Participants in the KBE and the Interviewees agree that at the bare minimum of participating in the exercise, a person can "never not know" the history that is articulated in the sessions. When contextualizing this claim within previous research, this 'forever knowing' aspect of the Blanket Exercise is highly significant. As Mohawk scholar Taiaiake Alfred explains: "The convenient way to deal with the founding injustice of Canada is to allow colonialism to continue by ignoring the truth, to erase it from our memory, ban it in schools, and suppress it in public" (Alfred in Regan 2010:ix-x). Dwayne Donald's reference to the fort palisades keeping Indigenous histories outside the concern of Canadians is similarly reflected in some Participants not knowing much about Indigenous Peoples (2009). These scholars point to the "open secret" of the socially sanctioned "silences in the public memory" of Canada that is the suppression and denial of the violence of settler colonization and colonialism (Atwood 2005 in Phillips 2017).

The significance, then, of the Blanket Exercise in facilitating ongoing public education of these histories and making them a ‘concern’ for Canadians is not lost on the Participants nor the staff at KAIROS. The data reflects how participating in a KBE shows Participants, at the very least, how Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous histories have been absent in their inscribed habits or ‘ways of seeing’.

In an even more positive direction, many Participants express productive unlearning of those ‘ways of seeing’ by not just learning about Indigenous histories, but unlearning prevailing Canadian meta-narratives that have constructed histories through dominant paradigms. These results build on existing research of these meta-narratives and in what circumstances settlers come to unlearn them. Regan’s theorizing on the predominance of the ‘peacemaker myth’ is seen in many instances to both make an appearance in the attitudes of Participants and is also actively unlearned throughout the exercise. These results affirm and add a further case study to her research. Dion’s research on students and teachers in the public-school systems in Canada highlight an individual investment in the peacemaker myth through articulations of “Canadianness” that consists of a willing and maintained ignorance of intolerance. The importance of unsettling these particular meta-narratives is due to how invested Canada and Canadian settlers are to them across all temporal locations, past, present, and future. By disrupting these narratives, the Blanket Exercise creates space for Participants to more truthfully consider their own emotional selectivity and inscribed habits of (in)attention that have shaped how they see history through this lens.

### **6.3. The Emotionality in Unsettling the Settler**

The affective reactions settlers have while learning about Indigenous histories and Canadian settler colonialism are well documented in previous research (Regan 2010; Dion 2008, etc.). Initially, emotions were an area of research that I wasn’t interested in necessarily centering in this thesis, which was instead to be focused on the pedagogical praxis of the Blanket Exercise itself. Nevertheless, during the first interview I engaged in with the staff, the role of emotions became a central theme of discussion between us. Due to my Grounded Theory approach, this emergence in the data was given space to become a new area of research and a new research problem to investigate. What the coding of the data revealed was a consistent and significant emotionality in the experience of the Blanket Exercise, in line with that of the few previous studies of the exercise

(Lemaire 2020; Bengezen et al 2019; Sheldon 2020). Thus, a Pedagogy of Discomfort analysis coupled with Ahmed's research on the cultural politics of emotions provided understandings of how the praxis of the Blanket Exercise created space for these emotions. What these frameworks provided was an analysis of the cultural and political implications of these emotions, rather than what they necessarily suggest for individual Participants. This is an important area to highlight when discussing this aspect of the data results as there are many layers of distance that blur my ability to access the reliability of these emotions, such as the design of my research methods and the tensions between the discursive levels of performing, feeling, and narrating/naming an emotion (Ahmed 2014). Despite these tensions, a discussion surrounding what these emotions do and what role they play in the exercise is important in illuminating broader trends in settler education.

Boler's and Ahmed's frameworks revealed productive affective responses in Participants in the forms of 'anger of indignation' and healthy 'guilt/shame', but also unproductive affective responses such as 'defensive anger' fueled by fear and passive guilt. When Participants provided detail on what emotions they were feeling, it was 'anger' and 'guilt/shame' that were most described and listed. In the blog post data, many Participants simply described 'being emotional' or that the KBE was 'very emotional' which makes it difficult to analyze the effects of these emotions and when and where in the exercise they become predominant. In line with previous research of the emotional work that critical learning entails, these broad statements of emotion can be contextualized in the Blanket Exercise as an anticipated affective connectivity deemed necessary to create unlearning experiences in those outside of oppressive relations (i.e. dominant paradigm learners, which is in this case, settler Canadians) (Choules 2007). This analysis leans into the "progress of sentiments" theorized by Annette Baier that articulates how caring and induced empathy (i.e. emotional intelligence) needs to be championed over reasoned logical intelligence when attempting to engage in anti-racist and anti-oppressive transformative learning (Baier 1991:166 in Choules 2007). The KAIROS organization's intentions in creating the exercise in a way that engages people on an emotional level to increase empathy maintains this view (KAIROS 2021 "Indigenous Rights: Blanket Exercise Workshop"). Due to these links in discomfort and uncomfortable emotions, similar critiques aimed at Boler's work regarding the ethics of inducing discomfort in learners are problematized in regards to the work of the Blanket

Exercise (Olsen 2020; MacDonald 2018). Though not engaged directly in this thesis, these critiques are important when discussing how to reduce harm when learning about traumatic experiences as well as when considering how settlers often turn away from difficult emotions rather than engage them.

In the interviews with the staff, a more nuanced picture of the Blanket Exercise was shared with me through their experiences and personal stories. This data revealed the most affective moments of the sessions occur during the highly visual moments of the participatory section, for example: the holding of dolls as ‘children’ (before they were taken away for being ‘too emotional’), the restriction of free movement of Participants as the reservation and pass systems are enacted, and placing an ‘infected’ blanket across the shoulders of a Participant(s) to symbolize the purposeful infections and deaths contrived by European settlers. Further, there was a correlation between these visual moments as also being the most resisted and denied historical events by Participants. A contextualization of this view of the affective responses of settlers is seen in the literature as the emotional response that is triggered due to a disruption of previously held investments, a disruption that can feel like a ‘living death’ of a worldview (Ahmed 2014:12). This second analysis provides a potential explanation of how some Participants in the KBE experience strong reactions and resistances to the content in the exercise that questions their personal and national identity.

#### **6.4. Stagnating at Passive Empathy**

When hypothesizing about the role of discomfort in the Blanket Exercise while laying out the framework for the Pedagogy of Discomfort, I had initially theorized that this discomfort came from learning about their ongoing settler identities and their implication and guilt in Canadian settler colonialism. This hypothesis included a premise that not all Participants would get to this understanding and unlearning of Canadian meta-narratives, but that those who felt the most emotional would be because of this educational aspect of the exercise. Instead, what emerged from the data was that most Participants remained at a “spectating” level of engagement with the content and when expressing empathy, expressed it in a way as to not implicate themselves in the suffering and pain they were empathizing with.



From the data, Participants that remain at this position showcase a limited understanding of their responsibility to and co-implication in settler colonialism in Canada. Instead, many retain a spectator distance that allows them to keep their gaze on the objects of study: that of Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous history, despite the KBE's aim of imparting a "shared" history lesson to Participants (KAIROS 2021 "Indigenous Rights: Blanket Exercise Workshop"). As reflected in the data and in previous research on settler learning moments, this 'move to innocence' is common as education regarding Indigenous Peoples is seen as an "add on", another diverse perspective in the multicultural mosaic that is Canada (Denis 2020; Regan 2010; Marom 2016; Tuck and Yang 2012). As Dion explains, Canadians are comfortable with this form of paternal, "learning about" Indigenous Peoples that does not force them to have to "learn from" and recognize an implication in relationship and responsibility to themselves as oppressors and Treaty Partners (2008:58). The Participants that remain in this spectating position are indeed committed to 'learning about' and thus this data is in line with existing evidence of the often unequal burden of Indigenous testimony and Settler consumption (Ahmed 2014; Smith 2012; Davis et al. 2016:11). From the data, often the burden of the Blanket Exercise falls unequally as Indigenous peoples share their history, their personal experiences, and their time as Facilitators and Elders in each exercise. Participants remaining in this spectating position consume the knowledge of the Blanket Exercise and then have the privilege of engaging or disengaging from critical self-reflection and witnessing.

When I went back to the data to understand why my initial hypothesis was incorrect, the conversation with Interviewee H about strong emotions in the exercise was a catalyst for deeper understandings. There are limits of how the Blanket Exercise can actually facilitate "witnessing" in Participants who are only at the "easy shifts" of acknowledging settler colonialism, a position described as gaining new knowledge and perspectives about these concepts for the first time (Davis et al. 2016). As the exercise is often conducted with settler Canadians that have received limited and biased education on Indigenous Peoples, many Participants are at these initial 'easy shift' positions, as seen in the data where many settler statements reveal a lack of knowledge of some of the more basic contents of the exercise. Interviewee H (2020) described how they often have to explain to Participants the settler logics of dehumanization that created symbolic, representational, and material inequalities between Indigenous Peoples and non-Indigenous Peoples in Canada and

globally (Harris 2004; Smith 2012). It is Interviewee H having to explain these ideologies to Participants that prompted a recoding of the data and a more in-depth analysis of Boler's Pedagogy of Discomfort which revolves around an explicit unpacking of the power dynamics involved in knowledge production.

As stated by the Interviewees and corroborated by Sheldon's analysis (2020), the KBE doesn't explicitly discuss and unpack concepts such as Euro- or Western-centrism, dominant modes of knowing, and how knowledge is produced through systems of power. It does, however, provide detailed descriptions of Canadian nation-building practices such as terra nullius, the Doctrine of Discovery, Treaties, and government policies such as the Indian Act in order to provide explanations for the structure of settler colonialism today. The KBE is first and foremost an opportunity for Participants to learn Canada's history from the perspective of Indigenous Peoples. As such, it provides a learning opportunity for a new way of seeing that history, but doesn't necessarily provoke an *unlearning* opportunity that intentionally interrogates Participants' epistemologies. These learning opportunities at the 'easy shift' positions are still crucial, however, as detailed by Davis et al., who argue that settler education initiatives that represent entry points to the discourse still create spaces for critical inquiry (2016:11). As Interviewee H (2020) has seen, the exercise creates learning moments that grow over time in Participants.

## **6.5. Learned Practices of Discomfort**

As explained above, the data reveals that the Blanket Exercise doesn't always and consistently create space for reflexive unlearning in settler Participants who come into the exercise at an 'easy shift' position. However, the exercise can and does create witnessing experiences for critical self-reflection in settlers who have less entrenched inscribed habits and epistemologies coming into the exercise. The experiences of productive discomforting emotions such as anger and guilt in some Participants are able to catalyze a transformative learning moment. This learning moment turns the gaze of the learning and unlearning unto themselves. This unlearning also creates a "restorying", to borrow a term from Regan (2010), of some Participants' worldviews. Some also experience an acceptance of their identity as a settler. The applicability of moments of discomfort as 'productive' is in line with previous research regarding productive guilt and anger in settlers in order to "unsettle the colonizer within" (Regan 2010). What makes the discomfort productive is

the potential to respond to calls to action of reconciliation and decolonization, rather than causing a stagnation or paralysis due to feelings of helplessness (Regan 2010; Davis et al. 2016). Participants are able to productively engage with their discomfoting feelings during and following the culmination of the Blanket Exercise when they are open to seeing differently. By seeing differently, they reduce the harm of epistemologies that depend on the erasures of Indigenous Peoples and histories. The KBE thus has the potential to create space for productive and transformative engagements with discomfoting emotions.

What is critical in a discussion on the Blanket Exercise is how this space can create productive discomfort long after the session is finished, even for those who are not seen to move into positions of witnessing and critical self-reflection. As seen in the data, many settler Participants understand that the educational content in the Blanket exercise is not something that is just going to go away. Even if they remain at a passive empathy position, they grapple with a focus on how to ethically go forward after the exercise in order to create change and ‘help’ Indigenous Peoples. An acknowledgment of needing to create change going forward into the future is thus a recurring feature of the Blanket Exercise. Though the exercise is an initiative that can fall into a ‘one and done’ approach, the data reveals the ways in which the initial space of and participation in the Blanket Exercise creates a learned experience of discomfort for settlers. As seen in the data, Participants cannot leave the Blanket Exercise and continue to live in ignorance unless it is a maintained, willful ignorance. The data reveals a similar pattern in most Participants not being able to experience the Blanket Exercise without feeling some level of discomfort or discomfoting emotions. As such, the space that the Blanket Exercise creates in allowing settlers to be discomfoted, and feel and *practice* that experience of discomfort, can become a catalyst for a potential learned *habit* of discomfort for Participants. Discomfort and uncertainty as learned and cultivated skills are in line with Boler in which she advocates for learning to inhabit more ambiguous sense of selves that don’t seek certainty in one way of seeing (1999:197). Ahmed similarly advocates for an ethics of being open to uncertainty in understanding someone else’s emotional pain and trauma (2014:30). Uncertainty is thus a thread throughout the analysis.

Learning to be okay with discomfort and uncertainty is a growing call to action in settler studies by both Indigenous and settler scholars. The results of the Blanket Exercise consider how

the space of the exercise creates a blueprint for how Participants can answer this call actively in negotiating discomfiting educational moments in their lives. Further, it provides a learned experience to fall back on when uncertainty and discomfort act upon the Participants without them actually seeking it out. Instances of the latter will only become more common as settler and Indigenous scholars turn towards futurity studies and decolonization over the more comforting discourses of reconciliation that settler Canadians are more comfortable with (Regan 2010; Tuck and Yang 2012). For example, in Denis' study, his white settler interviewees seeking certainty to the land claims with Indigenous Peoples so they can "get on with life" is complicated by growing knowledge of Indigenous arguments that we are in a "treaty relationship" with Indigenous Peoples, Nations and Lands, a relationship that must be nurtured continuously (2020:305). As such, the certainty that settler Canadians aspire to and have cultivated through settler logics that secure a settled future with no more "Indian problem", is a future that is rightfully compromised by a failed settler project characterized by ongoing Indigenous resurgence and decolonization.

Instead of continuing to engage in this "paranoid temporality" (Puar 2007 in Mušanović and Manthripragada 2019:404) to safeguard settler futurity, I propose that the space the Blanket Exercise creates be seen with regard to Coulthard's metaphor of the Two-Row Wampum I discussed previously, in which he describes the need for the settler 'ship' to be toppled (Coulthard 2014 in Denis 2020:304). If it is the time for settlers to 'sink the ship' and encourage the failures of the Canadian state and settler colonial project, there is uncertainty and discomfort in our place as settlers in the processes of how to do so and in what capacity. But the results of the data from the Blanket Exercise in creating a meaningful space for Participants to engage in a moment of discomfort and uncertain emotions and identities can be seen as participating in a "settler harm reduction strategy" (Tuck and Yang 2012). This harm reduction does not inherently lead to decolonization, but it does have the potential to disrupt settler Participants' processing of futurity as one characterized by a comfortable, settled colonial future. The discomfort experienced in the Blanket Exercise rocks the 'ship' that many settlers once thought of as unfailingly stable, and has the potential to even create holes in the ship's sides for some Participants. I argue that the data points to the Blanket Exercise as providing a space for learned moments of discomfort that creates unlearning of these stable, settled notions of futurity.

## 7. CONCLUSION

### 7.1. Summary of Findings

Attitudes of distrust and ignorance in settlers like Chris Champion illustrate the settler-Indigenous relationship in Canada that is bound up in mythic, dominant narratives. The importance of centering settler opinions like Champion's highlight the ways in which settlers, and settlers with power and authority, still have ongoing investments in these narratives and aversions towards education that disrupts their certainties. These comforting ignorances and aversions, though entrenched habits, are being destabilized and discomfited through Indigenous mobilization that is holding Canada and settler Canadians accountable to Indigenous futurisms and other ways of envisioning dynamics of power in Canada and globally. The release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in Canada spurred a movement since 2015 towards transforming settler-Indigenous relations through education initiatives. Since this, the Blanket Exercise has received more attention in the last few years as a space for this education. This research is an attempt to provide a more critical understanding of the exercise and its impacts as a settler learning tool. This thesis set out to answer the following question:

*Does the KAIROS Blanket Exercise in its 2019 version create spaces for unlearning in settler Participants that contributes to disrupting settler colonialism and settler futurity?*

By analyzing the Blanket Exercise through the lens of a Pedagogy of Discomfort, I have shown how the exercise uses discomfiting emotions and content in order to catalyze settler Participants' transformative unlearning moments. The effects of the exercise, however, are uneven across Participants. Though the study has shown that the exercise creates significant learning opportunities for settlers to see history from an Indigenous perspective, the exercise most often provides space for Participants at initial stages of learning to engage with these topics. Though Participants also engage in a practice of unlearning dominant narratives of "Canadianess" such as Regan's 'peacemaker myth', the exercise doesn't unpack the ways in which these narratives are disseminated through dynamics of power in knowledge production. As such, the space of unlearning in the exercise does not necessarily evoke a decolonizing discourse.

However, the study does highlight that some Participants are able to engage in significant moments of unlearning that motivate an affective practice of turning inward and acknowledging their own investments and implications in their settler identity, such as land use and the oppression of Indigenous Peoples. Participants that reach this understanding are able to ‘restory’ these investments and work on “unsettling the settler within” (Regan 2010). This reveals that the Blanket Exercise does have the potential for settlers to disrupt settled notions of futurity by creating a space of unlearning dominant paradigms and calling attention to the harm the settler futures have on Indigenous livelihoods.

What this study also found was that even though the data points to an unevenness of settlers reaching critical unlearning moments in the immediate space of the exercise, the impact the exercise has afterward is key to understanding the ways in which settler futurity can be disrupted over time. What the Pedagogy of Discomfort as a lens reveals about the Blanket Exercise is its success in creating a space for discomfort and uncertainty in Participants about their own shaped epistemologies and investments. The exercise creates a learned moment of discomfort that settlers can take forward, cultivate, and rely on amid growing experiences of uncertainty in Canada and globally. In this way, the Blanket Exercise can be seen as creating an introductory space that disrupts settler Participants’ worldviews and fosters a learned moment of discomfort that creates unlearning of these stable, settled notions of futurity.

## **7.2 Limitations**

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, this thesis experienced limitations both in research design and data gathered. The methodological choices were constrained by an all-digital experience that impacted access to in-person qualitative research methods such as participant observation in a physical Blanket Exercise session that could have added to the reliability and variety of the data gathered as well as access to interviews with Participants. As such, a lack of access to Participant data resulted in a homogenized and passive voice afforded to Participants that is filtered through the KAIROS Organization’s blog content and the long-time experience of the KAIROS staff I interviewed. Further, investigating intersectionality in non-Indigenous Participants’ identities was impossible without access to in-person meetings, and thus a more generalized “Settler” Participant and the structure of settler colonialism was examined instead. As such, the data doesn’t reflect the

diversity of Settler positionalities and further research questions surrounding the important role of “Whiteness” as a historical and present-day structure in maintaining Canadian Settler-Indigenous relations is an area in which I seek to understand more in white settlers participating in the Blanket Exercise.

The time period for writing a Master’s thesis created a limitation on a long-term study of Participants that could have created a deeper and more reliable analysis of outcomes following the culmination of the Blanket Exercise in regards to the success of its transformative learning potential for settlers. I have further questions regarding in what ways the Blanket Exercise changes attitudes, behaviours, or values in Participants in the weeks and months after the session that there was no temporal space for in this research. Access to repeated interviews or surveys over a longer time period could have provided more in-depth analysis.

### **7.3 Recommendations for Further Study**

Due to the limitations outlined above, I have further questions regarding the Blanket Exercise and the practice of settler education about Indigenous Peoples in Canada. I recommend further studies analyzing the Blanket Exercise from an Indigenous pedagogical framework that provide deeper analysis of its methods and impacts on settler Participants. In reflecting on the large impact they have made in this study and in my own learning, I also recommend future studies to engage more deeply in discussions with KAIROS staff and Facilitators in order to lean into the experience of those who are on the front lines of settler conversations and transformative learning moments. More studies that highlight what educators see and understand might provide another framework of analysis for the ways in which settlers are able to engage in disrupting settler futurities.

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## **APPENDIX 1 - INTERVIEW GUIDE 1**

1. How does the KBE aim towards actively fostering new and more positive relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada?
2. As an informal educative tool (i.e. outside the formal school system for Canadian students), how does the KBE complement and/or fill in the gaps of existing curricula that teach Indigenous histories and realities in Canada?
3. What are some common conflicts and tensions that have arisen during the KBE? How are these conflicts and tensions resolved?
4. How are the fluid dynamics of Indigenous, non-Indigenous, settler, and arrivant identities approached when the KBE is conducted? What is the KAIROS Organization's understandings of these identities? Does the KBE challenge these positionalities and if so, in what ways?
5. The KBE is described as using "participatory popular education methodology". Could you elaborate on how these methodologies present themselves during the exercise?
6. Why was popular education pedagogy used as a model for this exercise and how does it allow for the aims of the KBE to be achieved?
7. Do you think the choice of pedagogy impacts the popularity of the exercise? If so, please explain how and why.
8. Are there any last points that you think I didn't touch on that I should know about a KBE?

## **APPENDIX 2 - INTERVIEW GUIDE 2**

1. One of the things that got brought up the last time was about how the KBE has gotten deeper. What exactly does this mean? What's changed that's made it deeper?
2. What terms and identities does the KBE stand by and utilize (settler, colonialism, etc.)? What is your explanation for how the identities are flipped around or engaged with during the KBE itself?
3. What kinds of preparations are the Facilitators given in their training?
4. Could you speak more about the emotions that get brought up during a KBE?
5. What's your understanding of the space the KBE fills in educating Canadians?
6. In your experience how do people become aware of the KBE?
7. Could you speak to the importance of the Talking Circle afterwards? The pedagogy, the methods?
8. Are there any last points that you think I didn't touch on that I should know about a KBE?

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