International Journal of English Literature and Social Sciences
Vol-11, Issue-6; November-December, 2026

Peer-Reviewed Journal
Journal Home Page Available: https://ijels.com/
Journal DOI: 10.22161/ijels



The Ignominy of Colonialism: A Canadian Perspective

Raj Bhanot MD, PhD

Family Physician
bhanotr@msn.com

Received: 07 Oct 2026; Received in revised form: 05 Nov 2026; Accepted: 09 Nov 2026; Available online: 13 Nov 2026
©2026 The Author(s). Published by Infogain Publication. This is an open-access article under the CC BY license (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/).

Abstract— *Colonialism is a highly controversial subject with diverse views. The problem is not so much that individuals have personal opinions, but that there is clouding of factual information, especially within the lay public. How much of this is a purposeful, calculated situation and how much is simply lack of education is best left for experts to decide. I am addressing such shortcomings by reviewing some findings in the published literature. We discover, and I present evidence, that, indeed, savage murders and robberies were committed in the Americas, and elsewhere. Lands were expropriated and natives were left in penury. I briefly explore this conflagration in the context of philosophy and literature, although this would be the topic of a separate article. My particular concern is the situation in Canada, where many individuals take pride in the "founding of a new country," which should be tempered with the recognition that colonization was a disgraceful act that deserves our full condemnation. This raises the issue of recompensing original nations; to do otherwise would be moral cowardice.*



Keywords— ***Canada, colonialism, genocide, holocaust, native***

Newcomers to Canada inevitably question the current social status quo. Why is there segregation? Why are there discrepancies in the rates of incarcerations, drug use, poverty, alcoholism, suicide, and femicide between our native population and other Canadians? Why have hundreds of burials of native children associated with churches been discovered? Were children really taken away from their parents and families, and how is it possible to justify this? What happened here and in the Americas over the last six hundred years that could account for these findings? Despite having lived in Canada for most of my life, I have never found satisfactory answers to such questions. The usual platitude, rhetoric, caprice, and denial, occasionally tinged with racist undertones, leaves one troubled and dissatisfied. A clear account of the historicity of the Americas has been elusive.

Some individuals claim that native lands were acquired through peaceful treaties, or that natives were decimated by Europe's diseases so that their deaths were beyond anyone's control, or that natives were violent people who were constantly engaged in warfare with each other anyway. We shall keep in mind whether any of these premises accords with the historical record.

Moreover, articles question claims made by our indigenes regarding the manner and number of native lives lost. Did the natives have a written language and did they record social and political events? If so, where are those records? If the natives did not keep a written record, what does their oral tradition say? We tend to dismiss oral narratives as untrue or unreliable when it suits us. Homer was an illiterate bard who described the wrath of Achilles and the exploits of Odysseus in oral verse, yet we hold these works to the highest esteem. One should also inquire what is being taught in the school system; which version of history is it? Is it one that most natives would approve? History is written by the victors virtually guaranteeing an absence of arguments against their own case.

If one were to stop a person on the street in another country and ask them to comment upon the colonization of the Americas, one wonders about the responses. I also suspect that many immigrants living in Canada would not

know the history of their new country, having sworn allegiance obsequiously to the British monarchy.

The Canadian Encyclopedia includes an article by Karl Hele upon the The Doctrine of Discovery, which was a set of legal principles developed in the 15th century stating that European nations could acquire new lands and sovereignty over them: *"*However, the territory had to be unknown to Europeans, unoccupied by a Christian prince or inhabited by people Europeans considered uncivilized." In 1452, a papal bull, known as *Dum Diversas*, granted Portugal the right to "invade, search out, capture, vanquish, and subdue all Saracens and pagans whatsoever...and reduce their persons to perpetual slavery...." In this way, this era's *zeitgeist* was clearly defined for Hele goes on to explain: "They (the bulls) also lay the groundwork for future acquisitions by emerging colonial powers, such as France, England, and the Netherlands." This doctrine was further legitimized by the United States Supreme Court decision of 1823, where the following definition was offered: "discovery is the foundation of title, in European nations, and this overlooks all proprietary rights in the native." You can read all ten of the disturbing components of the Doctrine of Discovery as determined by the Supreme Court in the same article, such as "Nations judged to be uncivilized by European standards were not entitled to full sovereignty." Clearly, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) would not have approved. He wrote (see Durant):

> ...the injustice practiced by them even in their first contact with foreign lands and peoples fills us with horror; the mere visiting of such peoples being regarded by them as equivalent to a conquest...were treated as countries that belonged to nobody; for the aboriginal inhabitants were reckoned as nothing...And all this has been done by nations who make a great ado about their piety....(p. 309)

Christopher Columbus was an Italian explorer who landed on an island in the Bahamas in 1492. He made at least four voyages to the "New World" and explored Hispaniola (Haiti and Dominican Republic), Cuba, Trinidad, Costa Rica, Panama, along with other regions in subsequent trips. He gave the name "Indios" to the indigenous inhabitants of these regions, likely believing that he had reached the East Indies or India. Naturally, there was widespread confusion as to the precise nature of the lands these explorers had discovered. St. Thomas More, who wrote the delightful fictional satire Utopia in 1516, describes a scholar joining up with another explorer, Amerigo Vespucci, who explored the entire eastern coastline of South America. The protagonist believes: "You see, I can't help thinking they must be of Greek extraction, since their language, though otherwise more like Persian, contains some traces of Greek...."(p. 100)

In 1502, a lawyer named Bartolome de las Casas (1484-1566) arrived in Hispaniola. He subsequently became a clergyman witnessing the atrocities committed by his countrymen, the Spaniards, over approximately forty years. He documented their zealotry in a chronicle called A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies, which he sent to the Spanish monarchy requesting intervention. This narrative was first published in 1552, while the following excerpts are from the 1689 English translation. He is generally considered a reliable narrator. He found these lands (West Indies, the North, Central and South American continents) to be densely populated by indolent and affable people but the colonists proved implacable:

> And such a multitude of People inhabits these Countries, that it seems as if the Omnipotent God has Assembled and Convocated the major part of Mankind in this part of the World. (p. 9)
>
> Now this infinite multitude of Men are by the Creation of God innocently simple, altogether void of and averse to all manner of Craft, Subtlety and Malice...and behave themselves very patiently and quietly towards the Spanish, to whom they are subservient and subject....(p.9)
>
> This is a most tender and effeminate people....(p. 10)
>
> ...the Spaniards never received any injury from the Indians, but that they rather reverenced them as Persons descended from Heaven....(p. 13)

The assaults began soon after arrival decimating entire nations:

> The Spaniards first assaulted the innocent Sheep...like the most cruel Tygers, Wolves, and Lions hunger-starved...for the space of Forty Years, after their first landing....(p. 10)
>
> ...that of Three Millions of Persons, which lived in Hispaniola itself, there is at present but the inconsiderable remnant of scarce Three Hundred. Nay the Isle of Cuba...lies now uncultivated, like a Desert, and intomb'd in its own Ruins. You may also find the Isles of St. John, and Jamaica, both large and fruitful places, unpeopled and desolate. The Lucayan Islands...is now laid waste and uninhabited; whereas when the Spaniards first arriv'd here, about Five Hundred Thousand Men dwelt in it...by slaughter....(p. 11)
>
> Once it so hapned, that the Citizens of a Famous City...came to meet us with a splendid Retinue...bringing with them delicious Viands...a quantity of Fish...but behold on a sudden...without the least Pretence or Occasion offered, they cut off in cold Blood above Three

> Thousand Men and Children promiscuously, such...Barbarisms were committed in my sight, as no Age can parallel. (p. 24)

He relates an incident where a Spanish captain "abuses" the consort of the king and the Indians pay retribution: "But, good God, what Arms, do you imagin?...as resembled Reeds wherewith Boys sport with one another...."(p. 14) The figures quoted by Bartolome are astonishing:

> ...nor do I conceive that I should deviate from the Truth by saying that above Fifty Million in all paid their last Debt to Nature. (p. 12)
>
> These two isles (St. John and Jamaica) containing six hundred thousand at least, though at this day there are scarce two hundred men to be found in either of them....(p. 22)
>
> In Three or Four Months time I being there present, Six Thousand Children and upward were murder'd, because they had lost their Parents. (p. 25)

The invaders had a singular objective according to the author: "Now the ultimate end and scope that incited the Spaniards to endeavor the Extirpation and Desolation of this People, was Gold only...."(p. 12) The writer goes on to show how populations of entire continental nations were decimated in an account which is so disturbing that one can only read a few pages at a time:

> ...they mounted on generous Steeds, well weapon'd with Lances and Swords, begin to exercise their bloody Butcheries...spar'd no Age or Sex, nay not so much as Women with Child, but ripping up their Bellies, tore them alive in pieces...They snatcht young Babies from the Mothers Breasts, and then dasht out the brains of those innocents against the Rocks....(p. 14)

There are extensive accounts of the weaponization of fire against the natives:

> They erected certain Gibbets...under which they made a Fire to burn them to Ashes while hanging on them....(p. 14)
>
> I once saw four or five of their most Powerful Lords on these Gridirons, and thereon roasted....(p. 15)
>
> ...he summoned about 300...Noblemen to appear before him, and commanded the most powerful of them, being first crouded into a Thacht Barn or Hovel, to be exposed to the fury of the merciless Fire, and the rest to be pierced with Lances....(p. 19)

Some Indians fled to the mountains to escape imminent death but succumbed to a different fate: "...they bred up such fierce hunting Dogs as would devour an Indian like a Hog, at first site in less than a moment." (p. 15) Many lost hope and accepted their lot:

> ...above Two Hundred Indians hang'd themselves of their own accord; and a multitude of People perished by this kind of Death. (p. 25)
>
> It was a thing worthy of pity...They came to them naked, their Privities only vail'd...they laid themselves quietly on the ground...exposed themselves to their Swords. (p. 36)

Apologists should take note that Friar Bartolome does not blame Europe's diseases *prima facie* for the human toll in the New World. Instead, he relates crimes of moral turpitude, a detailed description of which would be gratuitous for our purposes here. If one were to argue that these colonists would not be expected to share a modern moral imperative, Immanuel Kant notwithstanding, one should also explain how the contemporaneous Friar had such a thorough understanding of the atrocities being committed in his presence.

We have seen that these natives were largely innocent bystanders as their wealth and lands were misappropriated. This approach did not vanish along with that era, the modern analogy being asymmetric warfare. Countries selectively wage wars against enemies that are weaker, economically and militarily. The British historian, John Newsinger, describes in his book The Blood Never Dried, that when the British invaded Egypt to recover their investments in the Suez Canal project, the Sudanese rose to protect their northern territory. In the battle of Omdurman, on September 2, 1898,

> Modern rifles, machine guns, and modern artillery destroyed the Sudanese army before it got close enough to the British to begin inflicting casualties..... The British themselves estimated the final Sudanese death toll from the battle at 16,000. British losses were 48 killed....(p. 106)

By the 1700s several islands in the West Indies had become British colonies. A lucrative trade was established to grow sugar cane to supply sugar to Great Britain, and the slave trade provided the labor for these plantations. Unlike the cowed Indians, Africans proved more challenging to control; accordingly, terrorism and barbaric punishments (Newsinger) were meted out:

> For rebellion, slaves were usually punished "by nailing them down to the ground...and then by applying fire by degrees from the feet and hands, burning them gradually up to the head...For lesser crimes, castration or mutilation ("chopping off half the foot") was the norm...." (p. 21)

Some may not realize that the story of colonization of India was quite different. India's historian William Dalrymple, in his book The Anarchy, describes the

machinations of the East India Company, followed by the British government, in their rapacious exploitation of India. Their reception was certainly acrimonious:

> ...the Nawab of Bengal, Shaista Khan...wrote "...the English were a company of base, quarrelling people and foul dealers." (p. 24)
>
> We are..."despised and trampled upon" by Mughal officials. (p. 24)
>
> ...in 1686 a considerable fleet sailed from London to Bengal with 19 warships, 200 canons and 600 soldiers....The Mughal war machine swept away the English landing parties as easily as if it were swatting flies....(p. 24)

But the booty was just too lucrative and the British prevailed: "...India...was producing about a quarter of global manufacturing...it was the world's powerhouse...."(p. 14) King George III wrote..."the real glory of this nation depended on the wealth of India...." (p. 231) Shashi Tharoor, in his polemic An Era of Darkness, provides disturbing figures illustrating the magnitude of destruction of the Indian economy:

> ...the British economic historian Angus Maddison has demonstrated, India's share of the world economy was 23%, as large as all of Europe put together...By the time the British departed India, it had dropped to just over 3 percent....Britain's rise for 200 years was financed by its depredations in India. (p. 4)

Both authors describe a policy of 'divide and conquer' by the avaricious colonizers to de-industrialize the nation and expropriate the wealth. Will Durant called the colonization of India "the greatest crime in all history." Another ignominious epithet is Newsinger's opening sentence in the chapter entitled The Opium Wars: "The British Empire was the world's largest drug pusher the world has ever seen." (p. 56)

By 1862, the town of Victoria on Vancouver Island had a population estimated at 5,000 colonists. It was surrounded by camps that housed indigenous people who worked for the town. On March 12 of that year, a steamer arrived carrying a passenger infected with smallpox. Colonists were preferentially vaccinated while police forced infected natives at gun point into their canoes to return, starting an epidemic in their own communities. The article in MacLean's magazine (2017) includes this quote:

> The colonial authorities...knew that would spread smallpox throughout British Columbia...That was an act of genocide against Indigenous people.... At that point in time the [government] wanted to be able to claim those lands without having to compensate or recognize Indigenous title.

East coast colonialists were well aware of the risks of diseases arriving from Europe, for example, there was a smallpox epidemic in Nova Scotia from 1800 to 1801 from which, in Halifax, there were 182 deaths in a population of 6,627 (Cameron, p. 24). There were regular presentations of several diseases on the east coast including scarlet fever, cholera, yellow fever, smallpox, typhus, typhoid fever, diphtheria and measles, most of which were subject to quarantine. The first official quarantine in Canada was imposed in 1721 to prevent introduction of the plague (Cameron, p. xi). Obviously, the principles of quarantine were well-established in Canada by the 1800s.

There is also the issue of *weltanschauung:* for example, what is the perspective of individuals of other nations on this subject. As far as I know, this has not been formally studied. Some insight may be gleaned from an article published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China, entitled The American Genocide of the Indians-Historical Facts and Real Evidence, in which there is a disturbing enumeration of atrocities for which I am not qualified to determine the biases or political motivation:

> Before the arrival of...settlers in 1492, there were 5 million Indians...the number of Native Americans in 1900 was only 237,000....
>
> Statistics reveal that since its independence in 1776, the US government has launched over 1,500 attacks on Indian tribes, slaughtering the Indians, taking their lands....
>
> In 1930, the US Bureau of Indian Affairs began sterilizing Indian women...even performed without the woman's knowledge...in early 1970s, more than 42% of Indian women of childbearing age were sterilized.
>
> The US government has also systematically used Indian reservations as toxic or nuclear waste dumps...in the Navajo Nation reservation...about a quarter of women and some infants have large amounts of radioactive substances in their bodies.

Colonization is the theme of the famous novel Things Fall Apart by the Nigerian author Chinua Achebe. It follows the life and exploits of Okonkwo, who won fame through wrestling. The villagers' lives are completely upended when strangers appeared, and Okonkwo even becomes estranged from his first son, Nwoye, who has joined the ranks of the church. In the end, it is Okonkwo who commits suicide since he fails to adapt. Africa's most famous novel was written in 1958 and Nigeria obtained its independence in 1960. George Orwell made some disparaging remarks regarding colonialism, which is ironic since he actually worked for the British Empire in Burma: "The soldier holds the Burman down while the businessman goes through his pockets." In Shooting an Elephant, he wrote: "For at that

time I had already made up my mind that imperialism was an evil thing...In a job like that you see the dirty work of Empire at close quarters." (p. 3) Orwell selected his words carefully and it is noteworthy that he used the adjective "evil" to describe imperialism. (Granted, Orwell's use of the term "yellow faces" is rather plebeian; he does the same thing in his most famous book 1984.) Like Orwell, Rudyard Kipling was born in India. Despite his reputation, Kipling's quintessential novel Kim, set in colonial India, is remarkably nuanced and culturally appropriate.

Some have claimed that the actions of historical figures, or even their own forefathers, have no relationship to today's mores. Friedrich Nietzsche in Beyond Good and Evil, written in 1886, argued that morality depended upon one's circumstances, distinguishing slave morality from master morality. Morality lacked absolute qualities being ephemeral and capricious, and, in some cases, supported opposite sides of a given situation. (Contrary to popular belief, this idea had been expressed at least a hundred years before Nietzsche (see Jean Paulhan p. 21).) We are all well aware of the mockery Niccolo Machiavelli makes of ethics in The Prince on the Art of Power (1513). These mephistophelian arguments can be dismissed as the musings of misguided philosophers; they are disingenuous reflecting little more than moral cowardice. Nevertheless, as a society, we are also avoiding terms such as genocide or holocaust. Holocaust can be defined as the massive loss of human life caused by other humans, which, as far as I can tell, aptly describes the whole hellish affair. Either some of us are in denial or the whole issue is being whitewashed. Similarly, there is widespread discontent when the Canadian government attempts to make reparations.

The concept of ACEs in pediatrics, which stands for adverse childhood experiences, describes the impact that events experienced during maturation have upon one's ultimate development and life achievements. Basically, there is a negative consequence associated with each adverse event. In this way, severe personal, family, or community trauma levies consequences echoing across generations. It is ironic how comfortably some people absolve any responsibility for this conflagration while victims still carry their burden.

As we have read, colonization was a brutal, barbaric affair with little evidence that it was within the moral imperative or mores of the day. The motives appear to be equally disgraceful, that is, the rapacious expropriation of wealth, lands, and resources that belonged to others. I have questioned why terminology appropriate to this dark period of history is not being used widely. Finally, I have compared the situation in the Americas with colonization elsewhere. Spinoza wrote: "He who seeks equality between unequals seeks an absurdity"; let us still try to mitigate inequity for there has already been too much recidivism this century.

REFERENCES

[1] Bartolome de las Casas & Anon. (tr). (1689). A Short Account of the Destruction of the Indies. Pantianos Classics

[2] Newsinger, J. (2013). The Blood Never Dried: A People's History of the British Empire. Bookmarks Publications Ltd., c/o 1 Bloomsbury St, London WC1B 3QE

[3] More, T. & Turner, P.(tr.) (1965). Utopia. Penguin Books Ltd., 27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ

[4] Tharoor, S. (2016). An Era of Darkness: The British Empire in India. Aleph Book Co., 7/16 Ansari Rd. Daryaganj, New Delhi 110 002

[5] Nietzsche, F. (2020). Beyond Good and Evil in Nietzsche. Arcturus Publishing Ltd., 26/27 Bickels Yard, 151-153 Bermondsey St. London

[6] Dalrymple, W. (2019). The Anarchy. Bloomsbury Publishing Inc., 1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA

[7] Orwell, G. (2021). Shooting an Elephant in Selected Essays. Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon St., Oxford 0X2 6DP, United Kingdom

[8] Hele, K.S. (2016). Doctrine of Discovery. Retrieved from https://thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/doctrine-of-discovery

[9] Ministry of Foreign Affairs People's Republic of China. (2022). The American Genocide of the Indians-Historical Facts and Real Evidence. Retrieved from https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/zy/gb/202405/t20240531_11367454.html

[10] Paulhan, J. (1965). *The Marquis de Sade and His Accomplice* in *Justine, Philosophy in the Bedroom, and Other Writings.* Grove Press, 841 Broadway, New York, NY 10003

[11] Durant, W. (1927). The Story of Philosophy. Garden City Publishing Co., Inc., Garden City, New York

[12] Achebe, C. (1958). Things Fall Apart. Everyman's Library, Alfred A. Knopf publisher, New York

[13] Ostroff, J. (2017). How a Smallpox Epidemic Forged Modern British Columbia in MacLean's magazine. Retrieved from

[14] https://macleans.ca/news/canada/how-a-smallpox-epidemic-forged-modern-british-columbia/

[15] Machiavelli, N. (2019). The Prince on the Art of Power. Shelter Harbor Press, 603 West 115th St, Suite 163, New York, NY 10025

[16] Cameron, I. (2007). Quarantine: What is Old is New. New World Publishing, P.O. Box 36075, Halifax, NS B3J 3S9, Canada