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Exploring Canadian and Indigenous relations with/in Graphic (Hi)stories

By connecting comics to the broader social contexts in which they originate, circulate, and are consumed, scholars have shown how this hybrid medium can effectively comment on contemporary issues and historical events, challenging, contesting and subverting conventional narratives. Indeed, as Nick Sousanis (2015) discussed, comics function as “a push against considering things from a single perspective and instead draw on multiple ways of seeing to expand our understanding.” Hence, this medium can be used to meta – narratively ask the reader to question historical sources and generally held assumptions to adopt a collaborative/active role in the historical reconstruction/investigation.

Being a “cool medium” (McLuhan, 1964) comics provide less sensory information and therefore demand more involvement and/or ‘completion’ by the reader/viewer. They ask for slowness, as the viewer has to recompose, understand, and question the existing relation between words and pictures. This mode of fruition contrasts with the rapid way we generally consume news (even though they might use a similar visual – verbal syntax). Their slowness help comics visualize the stories of those who have been ignored/neglected by the international arena and make the reader witness human rights violation and abuses.

Given the above, this presentation aims to discuss how contemporary comics (re)narrate the past and present relationship between Aboriginal people and (all) Canadians. These graphic narratives aim to acknowledge and resist the (not so) past histories of expropriation, oppression, exploitation, and genocide; and they also seek to present the present – day impact of this past. Interestingly, this work of historical revision sees the participation of both white and Indigenous comic artists alike. For example, *This Place. 150 Years Retold* (Akiwenzie – Damm et al., 2019) and *A Girl Called Echo* (Vermette et al., 2017) are clear example of the First Nations’ willingness to reclaim their right to self – representation and teach the public about their history. At the same time, Chester Brown’s *Louis Riel* (1999) and Joe Sacco’s (2020) *Paying the Land* testify the existence of allied depictions that aim to break (even controversially) the silence about past and present sufferings of Indigenous peoples in Canada.