

**Sentiment Analysis: Counter Narrative Analysis on Indigenous Water Crisis  
Analysis of Comments under VICE (2015) “Canada's Waterless Communities:  
Neskantaga”**

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## **Introduction to The Media**

The water crisis on Indigenous communities and reserves goes beyond just affecting the water they use, it has a serious impact on these communities' physical health, mental health, and as well as continuing the colonial pattern by interfering with their land and preventing these individuals from living their daily lives through their culture. This sentiment analysis will analyze the YouTube video, "Canada's Waterless Communities: Neskantaga," specifically looking at the boil water advisories issued to several reserves and how these communities, specifically Neskantaga in Northern Ontario, and how the government continues with broken promises of prioritizing safe drinking water, (VICE, 2015). VICE reporters go down to the community of Neskantaga interviewing the members and viewing their lifestyle living under a boil water advisory for about twenty years, (2015). These reserves are sent bottled water by the government to give them access to healthy water, however, the bottles per household are not enough to even last a week, (VICE 2015). For example, one of the community members displayed four litres of water bottles intended to last a week for a household of six, these bottles of water are not only meant to be used to drink but also bathe in and cook with (VICE, 2015). Throughout the video, it shows the uncensored living conditions on these reserves because of corporations buying rights over certain parts of the land and abusing their power by polluting the water, (VICE, 2015).

This media explores how the restriction of fresh water effects individuals in these communities physically, looking at rashes and illnesses due to the water, and how water restrictions effect citizens mentally, looking at the suicide rates in the community because of the "lack of hope for the future," (VICE, 2015). The video demonstrates how the water crisis issue in these communities impacts the mental health of the younger generation, many of the younger

population within these communities have never been able to see what clean water looks like, (VICE, 2015). This is the reality for Indigenous communities, many media platforms censor the mental effects that a water crisis can have on a community. The general sentiment for this topic consists of comments that attempt to provide a “solution” for the water crisis, while also defending the Canadian government, as well as some sentiments attacking these Indigenous communities blaming them for the water crisis and boil water issues in their communities.

### **Type of Research**

This research will use a qualitative research approach to analyze the comments under this video. The comments that were selected to be included were organized by picking out the responses that came across as negative and aggressive to the Indigenous communities and defending the Canadian government's actions. These comments were purposely selected in order to give a counter narrative and deconstruct these comments and delegitimize the socio-political imaginaires. There are many positive comments under this video, however they are essentially one-line responses showing their support for Indigenous communities. For the purpose of this sentiment analysis, a few specifically selected negative comments will be analyzed and counter narrated in order to explain the issue regarding the comment.

### **Types of Comments**

When looking through the comments under this video, there were not many direct negative hateful comments, but the comments were giving these communities “advice” on how they should deal with this problem. The common mythologies that are present in the comment section is that Indigenous peoples are *choosing* to live like this, and that they actually do have a choice to move away from their reserves and integrate into a local town or city (mr. T C, 2015). Multiple comments have the same reaction as the commentator, believing that moving off the

reserve will solve all the problems these Indigenous communities are facing. As well as some of the comments believing that the Canadian government is not consciously targeting Indigenous communities (Jayman, 2015). Some of the comments under this media consisted of people criticizing the judgment of individuals who live on the reserves stating that they should move into a city or town. Moving out of reserves and into cities can negatively affect Indigenous cultures, traditions and communities even more. High mobility rates can impact Indigenous sense of security, and by encouraging individuals who live on reserves to integrate into a city denies them a standard of living. There also seems to be a correlation between the increase on suicide rates on reserves and lack of clean water, or mining sites in these areas based off the video (VICE, 2015). The contribution to these negative mythologies is the lack of education and understanding regarding Indigenous culture and the ignorance towards the history of colonization and how that colonial pattern is still evident today.

The positive sentiments under the VICE (2015) video show support for these communities. There seems to be an equal amount of positive and negative sentiments, the positive comments display many individuals realizing how grateful they should be for clean water - something many say they have taken for granted. Many of the positive comments showed anger towards the Canadian government, demanding that something needs to be done to help with the water crisis issue (ColdAsBalls, 2015). There are also a few comments that specifically target the government stating that they can fix this if they wanted to, “spending more money importing bottled water for 20 years than to actually fix the water treatment plant is a clear indicator that it's not a money issue”, (Gebremichael, 2015). The contribution to these positive sentiments come from a place of compassion that these individuals have towards these

communities and wanting to fix the ongoing water crisis issue. For the purpose of this research paper however, the negative comments will be the centre of focus in order to deconstruct it.

### **Counter Narrative to the Socio Political Imaginaries**

Socio political imaginaries are “moralized discourse and embodied practices” that are believed to be true over a specific event, group, experience, and many more (Meissner, 2017). Socio political imaginaries is defined as felt common knowledge that the individual who is basing something towards the specific group, experience, and/or event, believes it to be true knowledge, (Meissner, 2017). An example from the Meissner (2017) text that better defined socio political imaginaries was an observation made from Richard King when investigating residential schools. This example states that on the bus an Indigenous man was sleeping in the back, the teacher views him as a “drunk Indian”, the teacher automatically assumes this not because of ignorance but because it is something that is common knowledge to them, “affectively understood” knowledge that associates Indigenous peoples with drunkenness, (Meissner, 2017). The main socio political imaginaries that will be further analyzed and discussed is the idea that Indigenous communities are *lazy* and *choosing to* live in these conditions which will expand on the issues regarding high mobility rates and how they impact Indigenous peoples sense of security, and the suicide rates on these reserves.

A few specific comments that stood out under this video were the ones that were trying to give “advice” to these communities by telling them to simply abandon their reserve and move to a local town or a city. One comment stated, “I think the Natives in Canada should integrate into the cities or towns closer to urban areas. This way they can get water, security, and then they won’t have a reason to bitch about more things?” (mr. T . 2015). There were many more comments similar to this one that felt that these Indigenous peoples were wanting to be in these

situations because they simply would not move. They were shifting the blame away from the Canadian government and the big corporations and instead blaming these communities. As mentioned in the text by Meissner (2017), these statements are not made due to ignorance, it is because they genuinely believe that a simple solution is to move out and that these individuals choosing to stay are lazy. Another comment stated, “pick a side and stick with it. If you want to live in the middle of nowhere like your ancestry and government flow you money, then do it! But if you want everything cities have (where taxes are high and society runs based on the effort you put towards it) then move to a populated area! These communities are not built on anything except ignorance,” (Shikamoo, 2015). Both of the comments are very aggressive stating that the simple solution to the problems listed in the video would be to integrate into the city and essentially referring to them being lazy for not wanting to put effort into a solution.

In order to analyze these comments under the video, first, the effects of Indigenous people integrating into cities will be discussed in order to discredit the claim that Indigenous people are lazy and don't want to help their situation because they do not move, (Shikamoo, 2015). However, there is actually a mobility pattern amongst Indigenous peoples, (Manmohan & Quinless, 2016). Mobility rates are high amongst these communities due to the colonial pattern that is still evident within the Canadian government which represents itself through lack of employment opportunities, health services, housing, education, and many more key factors that have forced Indigenous families to constantly need to move, (Manmohan & Quinless, 2016). “shortage of housing, discrimination by landlords, lack of information on housing availability, inadequate/substandard housing, and unaffordable costs then contribute to increased mobility patterns for Aboriginal people even after they have arrived in the city,” (Manmohan & Quinless, 2016). Even though they may move to the city in order to find better opportunities, they still are

faced with discrimination that leads them into poor living conditions, (Manmohan & Quinless, 2016). Comparing the information gathered from the text by Manmohan & Quinless, (2016), and examining the comments under VICE (2015) video, Indigenous peoples are not “lazy” and can move into cities or towns to access clean water, yet they will still live in poor conditions and experience unjust treatment, and discrimination.

The colonial pattern is still evident in Canada towards Indigenous communities. Residential schools in the past forced Indigenous children to forget their culture and traditions by isolating them away from their community and family. Although the abuse and colonization taking place within residential schools is not happening currently, the colonial pattern is still evident with the neglect of these communities and the abuse on their land and water, (VICE, 2015). Forcing them to integrate into cities is encouraging the loss of their culture and tradition. Within Indigenous language, gender is not as significant, the grammar is non-gendered or they make space for third, fourth, and fifth gender states, (Meissner & Whyte, 2018). Integrating into cities may force them to suppress their use of language and grammar, similarly to what residential schools did, revoke their right to practice communication and use of grammar without gender having a dominant role, (Meissner & Whyte, 2018). On reserves, it is easier for these communities to form relationships with each other, create art to empower, and practice their language while also respecting the identity of Two-Spirited and LGBTQ, (Meissner & Whyte, 2018). Forcing them into cities and forcing them out of their communities denies Indigenous people their standard of living and encouraging the loss of traditions and culture.

The water crisis issue on these reserves not only affects the physical health of these community members, but also the mental health as well (VICE, 2015). As mentioned in the video, suicide rates within their community have increased since the extractions of their

resources and lack of clean water started becoming an issue, (VICE, 2015). One comment under the video states, “A lack of reason and accountability; stop being victims; drill a well; stupidity should not be your number one industry!” (Huff, 2017). This comment under the video demonstrates aggression toward the community members of Neskantaga, it puts the blame completely on the community instead of confronting who and what the real problem is, the Canadian government. The lack of clean water on these reserves has left a lot of the young adults feeling hopeless for their future, many of the young community members have never been introduced to clean water, (VICE, 2015). According to Women’s Earth Alliance and Native Youth Sexual Health Network, young Indigenous peoples are more likely to experience trauma, and specifically in Canada about 21 young people from the ages of 9-23 years old committed suicide within a month due to the contamination of water on their reserve, (2016). There is a positive correlation between the lack of access to clean water and the suicide rates within these communities, the lack of water and mining sites bring more male workers onto reserves which leads into increase cases of assault against Indigenous women which plays a role in carrying trauma affecting their view on life (Women’s Earth Alliance, Native Youth Sexual Health Network, 2016). The water advisories on the Neskantaga community and limitation of their water use based on how many bottles they get access to has an impact on their view of life, the effects it has on their physical health corresponds with their mental health making it difficult for them to see hope for the future increasing suicide rates within the community (VICE, 2015). As well as being close to these mining sites that consist of dominantly white men, they increase exposure to discrimination, assault, and sexual assault amongst the community members, especially Indigenous women, adversely impacting their mental health (Women’s Earth Alliance, Native Youth Sexual Health Network, 2016). These comments are blaming these communities as

being lazy and pointing at them as the source of the problem for the water crisis on reserves, however, as deconstructed above the issues regarding the polluted water on the reserves go beyond just contaminating their water. It encourages the modern colonization of Indigenous communities by denying their standard of living.

### **Conclusion**

My experience reading the comments under the VICE (2015) video, “Canada's Waterless Communities: Neskantaga,” left me in disbelief because of the many negative comments blaming the water crisis issue on the Indigenous communities. It was upsetting to see such comments that I would define as ignorant, the lack of research these commentators have done not only the water crisis, but as well as the colonization of Indigenous peoples and the continuation of this colonial pattern that is evident in how they are treated within society and how the land they live on is disregarded. What needs to happen in order for non-Indigenous peoples to better understand the lives, and challenges of First Nations people by doing research on topics through an Indigenous perspective. The information that is displayed on news outlets and within media is generally written through a white settler gaze, although it may discuss reconciliation and residential schools majority of them ignore the colonization that is still present. Engaging in art, readings, poems, songs, and any form of outlet that allows one to express themselves, written from an Indigenous person's perspective and lived experience will allow non-Indigenous peoples to grasp knowledge on *why* these communities choose not to integrate into cities, and the issues they are facing by the Canadian government. Educating oneself with discourse written by Indigenous people and their experience is the best way to understand the external effects of the water crisis on these reserves.

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