THE SPACE BETWEEN US:

EXPLORING COLONIZATION AND INJUSTICE THROUGH *RED: A HAIDA MANGA*

by

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Abstract

RED: A Haida Manga is an Indigenous comic book based on a traditional Haida narrative, and it was created by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, who is of Haida descent. This major research paper examines *RED* from three different perspectives: 1) how *RED* functions as a comic book in terms of its format and structure; 2) how it challenges contemporary ideas of indigeneity presented in the mainstream media; and 3) how it defies genre and reader expectations. These three analyses demonstrate how Yahgulanaas uses the structure, narrative, and artistic style of *RED* to create a political statement about colonization, as well as a social commentary on injustice faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada. This is mainly done through Yahgulanaas' use of formlines in place of traditional comic book gutters, the inter-tribal storyline, as well as the combination of Manga and Haida art. These elements work together to illustrate a worldview that focuses on the whole, rather than the individual self, while communicating Yahgulanaas' "unwavering belief that, beyond differences in Indigenous and Western ways of thinking, people of all backgrounds can find common ground in shared concerns" (Mauzé, 2018, para. 6). *RED* provides non-Indigenous readers an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the "Indigenous experience in a postcolonial world" (Chavarria, 2009, p. 48), while allowing Indigenous readers to reclaim a sense of identity and autonomy through an authentic representation.

Personal Acknowledgements

Land Acknowledgement

Django Paris was born in San Francisco, California to a Black Jamaican father and White mother (Paris, 2019). As a Black scholar, Paris (2019) states the following:

> A land acknowledgment as a place-naming, as one small part of decolonization, is not an end but should be part of an ongoing respectful relationship with Native peoples and their homelands (LSPIRG, 2018). I am hopeful that the relative prevalence of such land acknowledgments in more academic spaces (academic conferences, universities) shows necessary movement (versus simply more settler performances or logics of 'inclusion,' a type of what Tuck and Yang (2012) call 'settler moves to innocence') – not as an end in and of itself, but as movement toward disrupting and dismantling settler colonialism, toward returning lands. (pp. 220-221)

With this in mind, in addition to Ryerson's direct association with Egerton Ryerson, I feel it is necessary to include Ryerson's land acknowledgement as I present this major research project to Ryerson University. It reads:

> Toronto is in the 'Dish With One Spoon Territory'. The Dish With One Spoon is a treaty between the Anishinaabe, Mississaugas and Haudenosaunee that bound them to share the territory and protect the land. Subsequent Indigenous Nations and peoples, Europeans and all newcomers have been invited into this treaty in the spirit of peace, friendship and respect. ("Land Acknowledgement," n.d.)

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Introduction

RED: A Haida Manga is an Indigenous comic book created by Michael Nicoll

Yahgulanaas. The opening line of *RED* reads, "Once upon a time this was a true story"

(Yahgulanaas, 2014, p. 1), as the plot is inspired by an old Haida narrative (Mauzé, 2018;

Laurence, 2007). Oral storytelling is a traditional practice within Indigenous culture and the story

of the main character, Red, was passed down through generations of the Yahgulanaas family

(Mauzé, 2018). However, while creating this Haida Manga, Yahgulanaas was unaware of the

role his family played within Red's story. Upon the completion of *RED*, Yahgulanaas discovered

that it was his "family that had actually taken Red out in the end [...] Red was killed because he

was found guilty of a whole lot of things [...] And [Yahgulanaas] didn't realize that [his] own

family were the ones that actually delivered the punishment" (Yahgulanaas, 2010). He says that

he might not have written *RED* if he had known this prior to beginning (Yahgulanaas, 2010), but

this comic book offers an opportunity for an Indigenous story to move beyond its traditional oral

origins (Ferreras, 2010).

RED: A Haida Manga is an inter-tribal story that revolves around two Indigenous

communities. The central narrative is a coming-of-age story about a reckless, young boy who is

on a spiritual quest to become a Shaman, and eventually grows into the leader of his community

located near the village of Kiokaathli. However, Red's story revolves around a second narrative

about his sister, Jaada. When they were children, Jaada was kidnapped by a group of "raiders"

from the village of Laanaas. In spite of growing up consumed by the loss of his sister, Red

becomes a strong leader that many want to challenge (Yahgulanaas, 2010). Nonetheless, the

feelings of loss and expectation drive Red to become blinded by revenge and retribution. As he

seeks revenge on Jaada's captors and the people of Laanaas, he leads his community to the brink

of war and destruction when he finds Jaada and kills her husband, who is from the village of Laanaas. Jaada urges Red to return the decapitated head to her marital family as an apology, but the longstanding history between the two tribes is too much for the gesture to overcome. Red decides to put an end to the ongoing feud and violence by sacrificing himself, as he shoots an arrow into the sky and lets it impale him, ultimately leading to his own death.

RED's narrative challenges contemporary ideas of indigeneity that are presented in the mainstream media, as well as the current education system, which often tell Indigenous stories through a colonial gaze. However, the creation and production of *RED* allows non-Indigenous people to view Indigenous culture and knowledge through the perspective of a person of Haida descent. This provides readers with an authentic representation of the Indigenous experience, as they are able to have a look into the life of Indigenous tribes. Ferreras (2010) states, "Overall it's a beautiful work of art and its mainstream appeal ought to break a new path for First Nation stories to get out beyond their oral origins. I certainly hope they can get there because Canada's First Nations have stories to tell that are best told through their own gazes - not the ones that have been foisted upon them" (para. 12).

Comic books, otherwise referred to as graphic novels or Manga in Japan, have the unique ability to communicate a plurality of messages through the defining characteristics of the medium (Hatfield, 2005). For the sake of clarity and consistency, the terms comic book, graphic novel, and Manga will be used interchangeably throughout this MRP. Comic books can communicate concepts, such as the colonial gaze, in a way that is accessible to everyone, as they are known for their combination of text, image, and spatial arrangements. These elements work together and separately to convey multiple meanings that can be more impactful than those of strictly textual literature, as readers are able to see facial expressions, internal and external states

of being, and can understand the characters' experiences more thoroughly. Yahgulanaas uses the narrative, artwork, and formlines (in place of traditional comic book gutters) in *RED* to communicate directly, or metaphorically ideas related to colonialism and injustice. In addition to these elements, the genre and medium of the comic book also play a role in conveying Yahgulanaas' overall message.

This major research paper (MRP) will explore how Yahgulanaas uses the structure, narrative, and artistic style of *RED* to create a political statement about colonization, as well as a social commentary on injustice faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada. Analyzing the depiction of colonization and injustice in *RED* may support the notion that Indigenous comic books can be used as historical resources in the education system, as well as a way to gain a more accurate understanding of indigeneity and Indigenous culture. Although non-Indigenous Canadians will never truly know how it feels, or what it means to be Indigenous in Canada, listening to Canada's Indigenous peoples' insights and perspectives will allow them to learn how to become better allies. Given today's current climate, there is an opportunity and responsibility to shed light on a part of Canada's history that has been kept in the dark for far too long. As a country, Canada is lacking a culture of deliberation and discussion. Although there have been attempts at reconciliation, in order to move forward from Canada's horrific past as it relates to Indigenous peoples, there must be an ongoing discussion about Canada's history, and everyone must be willing to participate in a dialogue about the rights of Indigenous peoples in Canada and the social injustices that they have encountered over many years.

This MRP will begin with a brief introduction and background on the author and artistic style used throughout *RED: A Haida Manga*. The literature review will then provide the foundation for this study by exploring comic book theory, the tactics and strategies used by the

medium, as well as why comic books should be seen as a legitimate art form. It will also look at the current research related to Indigenous comics and how they can be used as educational and cultural tools. The methodology section will outline the analytical approach used to examine *RED*, in addition to explaining the rationale for selecting Yahgulanaas' work as the main text for this MRP. The findings and discussion will analyze *RED* from three different angles: 1) how it functions as a comic book; 2) how it relates to contemporary media approaches of indigeneity; and 3) how it defies expectations of the genre and reader. Together, these three sections will answer the research question by investigating how Yahgulanaas depicts colonization and injustice through an Indigenous lens. Finally, this paper will acknowledge the limitations of this research and provide suggestions on how it can be expanded on in the future, before providing concluding thoughts. Ultimately, the purpose of this study is to participate in the discussion surrounding colonization in Canada, in order to try and alter the mainstream narrative surrounding Indigenous peoples to better represent the Indigenous experience. The goal is to continue to raise awareness about the issues facing Indigenous peoples, while enhancing the understanding of indigeneity, as well as Indigenous knowledge and culture.

Background

The Author

  The author of *RED: A Haida Manga*, Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, was born in Masset, Haida Gwaii ("Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas," 2014), formerly known as Xhaaidlagha Gwaayaai, which means "coming out of concealment" (Yahgulanaas, 2015). Located on the north-west coast of British Columbia, Canada, the village of Masset is on Graham Island and is a part of the archipelago of Haida Gwaii, otherwise known as the "Islands of the People" ("Welcome to the Village of Masset," 2013). Being of Scottish and Haida descent, Yahgulanaas always felt somewhere in the middle growing up, as he was the "only pale-looking Haida in the whole village...the only green-eyed, light-haired kid" (Laurence, 2007, para. 1). He decided to assert his "dual heritage by adopting – alongside the surname inherited from his father – the name of his mother's clan, 'Yahgulanaas,' meaning those from the middle of the village, from the Raven moiety – Haida are divided into two matrilineal descendant groups, the Ravens and the Eagles" (Mauzé, 2018, para. 8). After doing so in his thirties (Mauzé, 2018), he began to explore what he had felt as a child – "the spaces between the two identities that [he] had inherited. [He] took that exploration on and spent the last 60 years of [his] life working in the spaces between nation states and indigeneity" (Yahgulanaas, 2015). From an early age Yahgulanaas recognized the differences between Western and Indigenous cultures, and being of mixed heritage, he personally experienced and witnessed social inequities (Mauzé, 2018; Laurence, 2007). He now strives to "'play the edge between the neighbourhoods' and has clearly positioned himself at the bridge between two communities that are ignorant of, and even hostile toward, each other" (Mauzé, 2018, para. 9).

His heritage and feelings of marginalization directly influence his professional career as an author, visual artist, and public speaker ("Biography," 2019). While he has artwork on display in public spaces, airports, museums, galleries, as well as private and institutional collections, he is most well-known for his two national bestsellers, *Flight of the Hummingbird* and *RED: A Haida Manga* ("Biography," 2019). His activism for environmental and social issues is seen throughout his publications, which is why he is known as a political artist ("Michael Nicoll artist profile," 2002, para. 1). In all aspects of his work, he "[seeks] solutions to jurisdictional disputes between Colonial and Indigenous governments both here in Canada and internationally" ("Michael Nicoll artist profile," 2002). He is able to do so by pulling from his political experience as a member of the Council of Haida Nation for 20 years throughout the 1980's and 90's ("Biography," 2019; Laurence, 2007). In 2000, when he returned solely to his artistry, his political activism did not end; rather it was communicated in a different way, through an alternative medium. Instead of doing acts of public service while "working with other people in the community on issues related to the land, social justice, offshore oil, and gas transport" (Laurence, 2007), he took those issues to the page and began creating graphic novels that were "informed by that experience [...] the exploration of the edge" (Laurence, 2007, para. 2).

It is notable to mention that there was a "'sudden' emergence of Indigenous graphic novels" (Rheault, 2020, p. 501) in the same year Yahgulanaas returned to art-making full-time (Laurence, 2007). Only a year later, in 2001, Yahgulanaas published his first well-known Haida Manga: *A Tale of Two Shamans*. A similar occurrence happened once again, as 2008 became known as the year Indigenous comic book production really took off (Rheault, 2020) and Yahgulanaas published *Flight of the Hummingbird* in 2008 and *RED* in 2009. For context, 2008 was the year the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC) was established. This,

along with technological advances that allowed for self-publishing, may have been why there was a spike in Indigenous comic books published in this year. Rheault (2019) explains that the "work of the TRC was widely publicised and because many public events were held in conjunction with it, one of the most important and significant impacts was to raise awareness in the general population about the unfair treatment of Indigenous people by the Canadian Government since the treaties and especially since the Indian Act of 1876" (p. 504).

Haida Manga

Known as the "father of Haida Manga" ("Haida Manga artist Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas," 2008, para. 2), Yahgulanaas used his "self-developed art form" (Nigro, 2017, para. 2) to create *RED: A Haida Manga*. Mauzé (2018) states that during a trip to Japan, students recognized characteristics of typical Japanese manga in Yahgulanaas' work, such as the expressive and emotional cartooning (Yahgulanaas, 2014), and suggested he use "manga" as the defining stylistic term. They saw him as a "mangaka, or manga artist" (Mauzé, 2018, para. 14). However, Yahgulanaas felt as though the "classic Haida style remains the singular potent source of design influence in [his artwork]" (Haines, 2009), which is illustrated through the geometric shapes and bold primary colours (Yahgulanaas, 2014). As a result of fusing the two art styles, he coined the term Haida Manga.

Although the invention of Haida Manga classifies him as a self-taught artist, Yahgulanaas is a descendant of Charles Edenshaw (1839-1924), an artist known for his distinctive style that used bold formlines, which is a defining characteristic of traditional Haida art ("Charles Edenshaw," n.d.). This influence is seen throughout Yahgulanaas' work, especially in *RED* as bold, black formlines are used in place of traditional comic book gutters, which are normally white, empty spaces. Yahgulanaas' "early training was under exceptional creators and master

carvers of talented lineage" ("Biography," 2019, para. 2), but he later learned Chinese watercolour, calligraphy, and brush techniques from Cai Ben Kwon, a Chinese painter (Mauzé, 2018). He then began to intentionally incorporate "graphic aspects of Japanese manga" (Laurence, 2007, para. 3) into his artistic style, which allows his approach to grow and expand beyond the barriers of a singular art form. He feels comfortable mixing materials and styles because he does not have "any formal art instruction in terms of a Western or institutional practice" (Seattle Art Museum, 2020); and this combination is a conscious choice as he states:

> In many ways this hybrid approach is informed by the ongoing work I do with biocultural diversity in the Pacific, Asia and Africa. Artists and Art can create playful ways of viewing and engaging with social issues when inviting participation, dialogue, reflection and action. My work relates a world view that while particular to Haida Gwaii is also relevant to a contemporary and internationally engaged audience. (Yahgulanaas, 2018, p. 1)

Yahgulanaas wants his work to resonate with a wide audience, as he feels that art has the ability to bring people together.

Manga are Japanese comic books, and while traditional Haida art is the main source of artistic influence for Yahgulanaas, he was drawn to Manga for multiple reasons. The incorporation of Manga into his style also holds cultural significance for Yahgulanaas, as the "Japanese Manga influence comes from the fact that Yahgulanaas says his relatives went to Japan and weren't subjected to the prejudices and discrimination they felt here in North America" (Loik, 2017, para. 23). Race is a social construct developed in favour of the colonizer (Paris, 2019), and the cultural divides Yahgulanaas experiences exist because institutional forces have created a social hierarchy that views Westernized culture as superior. Yahgulanaas'

combination of art forms not only proposes that two cultures can come together and work in harmony, but also suggests the following:

> From an artistic perspective, Haida manga allows the artist to adapt a traditional style with canonical rules to another pictorial tradition while distancing himself from Western comic traditions through manga. Yahgulanaas believes this dual stylistic reconfiguration opens up a new conceptual space, highlighting affinities between the different cultures of the North Pacific: those of the Pacific Northwest coast and those of East Asia. (Mauzé, 2018, para. 29-30)

The hybrid style of Haida Manga also relates to the hybridity of the comic book, which "collapse[s] the word/image dichotomy" (Hatfield, 2005, p. 133). Although text and image are contrasting elements, they complement each other by working together to create something that would not be possible without the other.

Research Question

  The major research question that guided this project is: How does Yahgulanaas use the structure, narrative, and artistic style of *RED: A Haida Manga* to create a political statement about colonization, as well as a social commentary on injustice faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada?

Literature Review

The following literature review will look at comic books through a theoretical lens by providing a basic understanding of how comic books function, while defining significant structural components. It will also speak to how comic books can be used as educational tools both in and outside the classroom; why comic books are an appropriate medium to express indigeneity and Indigenous autonomy; before wrapping up on why comic books should be seen as a legitimate art form.

Comic Book Theory

In a study conducted at the University of East Anglia, undergraduate students were asked two questions: 1) what is a book, and 2) what is a comic book (Sherwood, 2015)? At first, students were unsure of how to define a book, but settled on "an object, a collection of pages, a container" (Sherwood, 2015, p. 19). Whereas the terms "glossy pages, panels, images, sequence" quickly came to mind when asked about comic books (Sherwood, 2015, p. 19). This indicates that comic books are perceived to have different design and structural components than books, and the definition of comic books "hinges on the arrangement of elements" (McCloud, 1994, p. 67). A comic book page consists of multiple panels that contain text and image, which are enclosed by a border. The spaces between panels, created by these borders, are called gutters (McCloud, 1994), which are "*something* that engages with the reader to come alive" (Harrison, 2016, p. 56). A sequence of panels "fracture both time and space" (McCloud, 1994, p. 67), but readers are able to make sense of these disconnected moments in time because of "closure," which McCloud (1994) defines as a "phenomenon of observing the parts but perceiving the whole" (p. 63). Closure happens within the gutters, as readers use their past experiences and imagination to act as a collaborator in the story making process (McCloud, 1994). As a result,

readers are called upon to participate within the story and help make sense of the narrative. Sherwood (2015) states, "Presented without a specified reading order, the unfolding narrative depends upon the choices the reader makes when approaching the work" (p. 19). The concept of closure is further illustrated in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1

Closure (McCloud, 1994, p. 68).

Hatfield (2005) expands on this idea of closure by stating, "The author's task is to evoke an imagined sequence by creating a visual series (a breakdown [the process of dividing a narrative into such images--a process that necessarily entails omitting as well as including]), whereas the reader's task is to translate the given series into a narrative sequence by achieving closure" (p. 135). A tension exists on the comic book page, as panels are meant to be examined individually, as well as holistically (Hatfield, 2005). A single image represents a moment in time, but a story is only formed once multiple images are laid "together on an unbroken surface" (Hatfield, 2005, p. 140).

Another major tension that comic books grapple with is the simultaneous use of text and image, which Hatfield (2005) refers to as code versus code. Although they are contrasting elements, the definition of comic books depends on the "co-presence and interplay of image and written text" (Hatfield, 2005, p. 133). This idea can be broken down into the idea of "show and tell," or receiving and perceiving (Hatfield, 2005). Images are seen as the element that shows, as readers receive information from them, while words are viewed as the component that tells, as readers have to make sense of their meaning (Hatfield, 2005). However, Hatfield (2005) explains that pictures, just like text, must be decoded as there are multiple layers of meaning that are not clearly defined or written out for the reader.

Comic Books as an Educational Tool

Recent discoveries related to the Residential School system have begun to spark a conversation about what is being learned in the current education system in Canada. Not only is there an apparent lack of curriculum-based education on Indigenous peoples and their past, but the information being taught on this topic is also an inaccurate portrayal of Canada's history. This gap in the curriculum has blinded students to the racist acts that have happened, and

continue to happen, or has led them to unintentionally "disregard the racism [of these acts] entirely" (Henzi, 2016, p. 36), as the material is presented through a colonial gaze and Westernized mindset. In order to challenge and reform the current education system, students must be introduced to "Indigenous knowledges, stories, and ways of knowing that have often been silenced through dominant knowledge organization systems and practices in libraries" (Callison et al., 2019, p. 151). One of the potential ways to do so is to integrate Indigenous comic books into the popular culture and literary canon (Henzi, 2019). Morris (2019) continues to explain:

> Anyone living in America whose families hail from somewhere else are settler-colonizers who can learn by listening, reading, promoting, and valuing Indigenous-created texts, including comics. Settler-colonizers have an ethical responsibility to reverse centuries of purposeful erasure of indigenous peoples, stories, languages, and cultures. The American government, entertainment industries, news media and educational systems have consciously erased real indigenous peoples from our cultural, social, political landscape. Those of us who see and recognize this erasure as the cultural genocide that it continues to be must listen and see differently for any hope of redemption for our contribution to indigenous invisibility. (p. 326)

An overlooked strength of the comic book is its combination of text and image, which allows the genre to extend its reach, as it is "more accessible not only for youth, but for those who may not want to, or cannot, read at length about the history of colonialism" (Henzi, 2019, p. 25). Therefore, the insertion of Indigenous comic books into the curriculum can be done at all levels, whether it be university or grade school (Morris, 2019). Images also directly impact the

reading of the story as they have the ability to elicit a greater emotional response from the reader (Bladow, 2019). Henzi (2019) states the following:

> Through the use of images, the effect that words alone may convey is reinforced, rendering the story of the past as vivid and quasi-immediate as that of the present; facial expressions, landscapes, sound effects, captions, dialogue, points of view, sequences, body language and relationships all contribute to making the narrative more "real," believable, perhaps, even, less fictitious; and secondly, images speak beyond body linguistic, cultural, and generational gaps--an element that is becoming increasingly important given those gaps, caused by shame, lack of education and, more importantly, governmental assimilation policies. As such, comics will attract a wide audience: youth, adults, artists, teachers, and scholars, to name only a few. In this way, they enable a form of transdisciplinarity, for they touch upon the political, the social and the cultural. (p. 36)

Comic Books as an Appropriate Medium to Express Indigeneity

It is thought that comic books are an appropriate medium to express indigeneity for multiple reasons. A connection that may make Indigenous authors and artists gravitate towards using the comic book medium, is the fact that they have both been marginalized in a colonized society because they are regarded as a "primitive presence" (Chavarria, 2009, pg. 47). This inaccurate understanding of comic books and Indigenous peoples allows the genre to become a space where Indigenous peoples can reimagine themselves while questioning and refusing the "imperial imaginary" (King, 2009, p. 215). Bladow (2019) suggests that if "images of Indigenous peoples have been appropriated and deployed by settler colonial logics (from the Boston Tea Party to hipsters in headdresses), then the visual medium of comics are an important form for speaking back to, reclaiming, and decolonizing Indigenous depictions" (p. 38). This

means comic books have the ability to demonstrate what Scott Richard Lyons (2000) termed "rhetorical sovereignty, which 'aim[s] [to] recover the losses from the ravages of colonization,' pursuing 'the inherent right and ability of peoples to determine their own communicative needs and desires . . . to decide for themselves the goals, modes, styles, and languages of public discourse'" (King, 2009, p. 222).

Although Indigenous characters have begun to be introduced into mainstream comics, specifically within Marvel comics, this "seemingly positive development is dulled by the stereotypes to which the characters adhere" (Morris, 2019, p. 327), as Indigenous characters are presented as a "noble or vicious savage" (Morris, 2019, p. 327) that are "ill-defined, uni-dimensional, [and] highly simplified" (Callison et al., 2019, p. 142). They are also often portrayed as "stereotypical sidekicks" (Morris, 2019, p. 326) that act as "foils to non-Indigenous (usually white) heroes" (Callison et al., 2019, p. 142). These degrading roles and misrepresentations align with colonialist perceptions of Indigenous peoples, which further reduces them to a lesser state of being. However, Indigenous creators and independent publishers are "decolonizing the medium" (Morris, 2019, p. 326) by producing comic books that tell the stories of Indigenous peoples as an "antidote to 'sidekickery'" (Morris, 2019, p. 326) and the "conventional history of the Americas" (Henzi, 2019, p. 24). This not only allows others to familiarize themselves with seeing Indigenous peoples in this context, but also allows Indigenous peoples to "see themselves represented in an otherwise Western-dominated art form devoid of Native Peoples" (Tiger, 2019, p. 147). Henzi (2019) believes that comic books centred on Indigenous characters and narratives are "productions—or rather interventions—[that] call for a necessary change in world-view, a reflection on the direct link to a past of colonialism, and the undeniable connection to a contemporaneity of imperialism" (p. 24).

Comic books are also an appropriate medium to express indigeneity because traditional Indigenous narratives transition well into the comic book format. Tiger (2019) points out that these "graphically illustrated stories are a retelling of very important Indigenous lessons and teachings that were once memorialized as petroglyphs and, later, in the pictographs of winter counts, and were encapsulated, moment by moment, in the oral histories" (p. 147). These "moment by moment" sequences can also be seen in comic books, as each panel represents a moment in time. Bladow (2019) expands on Tiger's idea by stating:

> The unique format of comics also affords these artists opportunities to experiment with the longstanding association of Indigenous literature and oral traditions, whether in the use of narrative text boxes, the collaborative practices between artists and storytellers, or the joint efforts of authors and audiences to create meaning. Across the collections, the artists extend Indigenous storytelling traditions while producing innovative modern graphic narratives. (p. 36)

Henzi (2019) views these "modern graphic narratives" as aspects of popular culture, as they are "alternative, subversive forms of storytelling" (p. 24). Henzi (2019) then continues to explain that the involvement of Indigenous creators in popular culture is needed in order to address the ongoing issues of colonialism and imperialism, "for popular culture is just as important to modern storytelling as are traditional art forms" (p. 23-24).

Comic Books as an Art Form

Sherwood (2015) suggests the first step in re-contextualizing comic books is to view them as legitimate books. Comic books are dismissed as "primitive and juvenile" (Chavarria, 2009, p. 47) because they are often associated with children and picture books. This is mainly due to the longstanding history of comic strips and the comic book genre, which were known as

a cheap source of comedy and entertainment that children could afford. However, Sherwood (2015) proposes that comic books can be seen as a sophisticated form of literature if they are viewed as "book art" (p. 17). While novels can be seen as an author's book, comic books can be viewed as an artist's book and "blurring the line between comic books and artists' books, encouraging a space for cross-pollination, can then only benefit the comic book, its creators and readers" (Sherwood, 2015, p. 19). This may also assist in the rethinking of comic books as a legitimate art form because in the "world of fine art, comic books are often viewed as the bottom rung of the artistic ladder" (Mulholland, 2004, p. 42), just as they are viewed as lesser in the literary world. This is because as an art form, "comics are poorly understood, underanalyzed, and underutilized" (Chavarria, 2009, p. 47). In the past, the mass production of comic books meant that they were easily accessible and widely read, but also disposable (Chavarria, 2009). This prevented them from being seen as works of art, as the term "original work of art" often excludes the idea of reproduction (Sherwood, 2015). However, Berger (1971) argues that mass consumption and large audiences is a "sign of intellectual sophistication and cultural maturity" (p. 177). Additionally, Sherwood (2015) states the importance of the interpretation of the word "original":

> How we understand the term "original" must be adapted in the context of books as reproduction has long been an essential part of publishing of any sort including both artists' books and comic books. The art within the pages of a comic is reproduced for publication from "original" paintings or drawings. However the book was always the intended final form, and thus the comic book fulfils the criteria of an original work of art. (p.17)

Comic books can also be seen as a legitimate art form because they can act as a form of art therapy that aids in healing, as "artists and writers began to use events in their lives that had caused them joy, pain, fear, and envy, and in a cathartic process, used their creations to relieve themselves of heavy emotions. [...And as a result, the medium] allow[s] for expression of the self in terms of body image, verbal expression, physical action, and emotion" (Mulholland, 2004, p. 42-43). With large publishing companies such as DC and Marvel dominating the industry, comic books are well-known for their stories about superheroes and "fantastic tales of far-from-realistic beings" (Mulholland, 2004, p. 42). However, when independent publishers began to make their way into the markets, these fantasy-like narratives began to share the spotlight with real-life, personal experiences (Sherwood, 2015; Mulholland, 2004). This, in combination with tackling heavy topics surrounding social and political issues, led to comic books becoming properly acclaimed in the twentieth century (Mulholland, 2004) when "the underground comix movement, [...] saw a proliferation of self-published and socially conscious comics" (Carleton, 2014, p. 155). Here, it is demonstrative that art and comic books share similar aspects. Like art, which "smashed superficial boundaries to become anthropological texts, social commentary, commercial enterprise, and, ultimately, fine art" (Chavarria, 2009, p. 48), comic books have the ability to move beyond stereotypical narratives and preconceived notions about the genre because they truly are "complex and adaptive" (Chavarria, 2009, p. 48).

Finally, it is notable to mention the direct ties comic books have to other forms of Indigenous art, as Bladow (2019) states the following:

> McCloud himself points out how his definition puts modern print comics at the end of a long continuum of sequential art. As an early example of comics, he cites a Mayan codex, which he calls a 'picture manuscript" (10). Expanding beyond Mayan codices, other

forms of Indigenous symbolic and visual art could also qualify as sequential art (e.g.,

rock paintings, birchbark scrolls, winter counts, or ledger art). Although McCloud's is far

from the only definition of comics, it nevertheless evokes the potential cultural legacies

of contemporary Indigenous comics and offers one example of comics scholarship

gesturing, however incidentally, to traditions of Indigenous art. (p. 37)

Methodology

  This section will outline the analytical approach used to examine *RED: A Haida Manga*, in addition to explaining the rationale for selecting Yahgulanaas' work as the main text for this MRP.

Rationale

  When beginning this project, I knew I wanted my paper to be centred around social justice and change. After exploring topics surrounding equity for women and People(s) of Colour (POC), I decided to narrow my focus to Indigenous peoples. With the Black Lives Matter movement beginning in 2015, and resurfacing again in 2020, there was a lot of attention drawn to police brutality in the United States. While this is an important issue that needs to be properly addressed, there is also a horrific amount of injustice happening in Canada concerning the BIPOC (Black, Indigenous and People of Colour) community. Now, as hundreds of deceased bodies of Aboriginal children have been discovered and linked to the Residential School system, it seems a very fitting and necessary topic to discuss.

  In the early stages of development, my paper was going to focus on Canada's digital divide and the lack of information and communications technologies (ICTs) in Indigenous communities. However, after working through the issues and literature on this topic, I realized that the main aspect I was interested in was how the digital divide can be rethought of in order to better represent the needs and wants of Indigenous peoples. I was also engrossed by the idea of reframing the digital divide to eliminate the colonial gaze, as well as the Westernized view that looks at limited access to the internet and technology as something that is "lacking" from Indigenous communities (Chen, 2015). I wanted to explore ways in which the digital divide dialogue should be reversed to place importance on connecting the rest of Canada to Indigenous

communities and highlight how this will benefit the rest of Canada (Winter & Boudreau, 2018). As opposed to the rescuer/victim narrative (Ferguson, 2011), where the "advanced" (Westernized Canadians) help the "primitive" (Indigenous communities) "better" their lives by providing them with access to ICTs (Winter & Boudreau, 2018). Therefore, I decided to take this reframed idea of equity and justice and apply it to *RED: A Haida Manga* by Michael Nicoll Yahgulanaas, who is known for his commentary on Indigenous autonomy. Henzi (2016) explains that institutional forces should provide us with "tools to not only respond to such [racist and discriminatory] acts, but to change ideas and transform perspectives to ensure that such acts no longer take place (Justice)" (p. 36). In order to create social change, we must first alter our mindset and reframe our perspectives on colonialism, indigeneity, and the Indigenous experience. In order to achieve the type of social justice presented by Winter and Boudreau (2018), as well as Henzi (2016), it is not merely about creating an equitable world where everyone has access to the same tools and opportunities. It is also about changing our actions to ensure discriminatory acts no longer occur, as well as addressing and abolishing the forms of systemic racism and prejudice that still exist.

I felt it was necessary to explore the topics of colonization and indigeneity from the perspective of an Indigenous author, as we are often presented with narratives about Indigenous peoples from non-Indigenous critics and writers. Although I am a non-Indigenous person, and my observations are also coming from an outsider's perspective, I am thankful that I was able to find sources where Yahgulanaas shared insights on his work, which bettered my understanding of *RED* and his idea of the Indigenous experience. With that being said, when performing a close reading on work written by an Indigenous author, I am aware that my analysis may be influenced by my upbringing, past education, and life experiences as a non-Indigenous person, as well as

my purpose for this MRP (to answer my research question). However, this is part of the comic book reading process, as "each comic book is open to a variety of different readings based on individual experience, context, and prior knowledge" (Carleton, 2014, p. 165). Therefore, my social position impacts my worldview and particular reading of *RED*. Although I am by no means an expert on the topic of indigeneity, this project has broadened my perspective and knowledge of Indigenous peoples' lifestyle and culture, and I will be forever grateful for that.

Furthermore, I also chose to examine *RED* because Yahgulanaas focuses on more than the Indigenous experience. While there are other Indigenous comic books that tell stories of language revival, traditional knowledge, pre-contact history, political resistance, Residential Schools, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women, Girls, and Two-Spirit People, etc. (Callison et. al, 2019), Yahgulanaas also holds up a mirror to humankind and society as a whole, while cleverly illustrating how all of our lives are connected through his use of Haida Manga artwork. Levell (2013) states, "[Haida Manga] messages therefore resonate not only with the Haida Nation but also with broader publics at regional, national, and global levels" (p. 115).

Finally, although the presence of Indigenous graphic novels began to rise in 2000, and with production increasing in 2008 (Rheault, 2020), the study of Indigenous comics remains a fairly new concept. Therefore, it is my hope that this paper will contribute to the literature that is available on Indigenous comics.

Analytical Approach

Comic books are a longstanding art form that "predate graphic genres such as Film and television, studies of comics remain historical or informational (content-centered)" (Duncan, 1990, p. 1). However, I made a conscious decision not to limit my analysis of *RED* to a strictly content-centred one. Although it takes on the format of a comic book, *RED* is about much more

than the medium, which Yahgulanaas makes clear when he invites his readers to deconstruct the book by tearing out the pages and arranging them to recreate his original work of art - a five metre Haida-inspired mural (see Figure 2). Although research topics are traditionally tightly focused, it is my hope that this MRP will offer more insight into Indigenous peoples' lifestyle and culture by analyzing *RED* from various viewpoints. In addition to performing a close reading, I also addressed how Yahgulanaas' work defies expectations of the genre and reader. Since comic books require active participation from the reader to help make sense of the narrative, I thought it would be useful to look at reader reviews in order to understand how people were perceiving and responding to *RED*. Furthermore, I examined how *RED* is relative to contemporary media approaches. Here, I explored mainstream narratives about Indigenous peoples and how Yahgulanaas' commentary on colonization and injustice differs from that presented in the media. Finally, it is important to note that throughout this analysis, I will be building off of a paper that I wrote during my undergraduate degree, which strictly focused on the formal elements of *RED*. Therefore, this MRP will offer new insights and approaches, while critically reviewing discourse in this field and synthesizing multiple perspectives on *RED*.

When analyzing how *RED* functions as a comic book, I adhered to the specific reading process required by comic books. The specific reading process of comic books differs from that of strictly textual literature. While the written word is read from left to right in North America, creating a "Z-path" reading pattern, the page layout and spatial elements of comic books force readers to stray from their typical reading practices (Cohn & Campbell, 2014). Cohn and Campbell (2014) continue to explain, "The more layouts deviated from a grid, the less likely participants were to use the Z-path" (p. 193). Although the words are read left to right, Yahgulanaas is still able to push his readers away from the Z-path because *RED* does not have a

grid-like structure due to the use of formlines in place of gutters. For example, the formline on page 61 of *RED* (see Figure 3) splits the page in half horizontally. The bottom panel contains four speech bubbles, and naturally, the reader wants to read them in the following order: top left, top right, bottom left, bottom right--creating a Z-shape. However, the totem pole in the middle of the panel encourages readers to stray from the Z-path pattern, while reading the two speech bubbles stacked on top of each other on the left first, before moving across to the speech bubbles on the right side of the panel.

Text-based literature is also read linearly and does not require the multi-step process that comic books do, as comics are a "fully functioning language" (Groensteen, 2016, p. 89), where the medium is taken into consideration and included in the reading process. The page of a comic book is viewed as a whole before the individual panels are examined. The reader must detect the text and images within each panel and then look at them separately and simultaneously. Once the textual, visual, and spatial components have been analyzed, the reader is required to interpret their meaning and create connections between the panels. This is where the reader is asked to participate in the formation of the story. Finally, Yahgulanaas asks his readers to perform an extra step, as he invites them to destroy the comic book by ripping out the pages and arranging them to reconstruct the mural that is *RED* (Yahgulanaas, 2014). Although this extra step is not mandatory, it is highly encouraged as it helps the reader make greater sense of Yahgulanaas' overall message, which will be discussed in the next section of this MRP.

Figure 2

RED: A Haida Manga (Mural Form) (Yahgulanaas, 2014, p. 110-111)

Figure 3

Page 61 of RED: A Haida Manga (Yahgulanaas, 2014, p. 61)

Findings and Discussion

The following section will examine *RED* from three different perspectives: 1) how *RED* functions as a comic book in terms of its format and structure; 2) how it challenges contemporary ideas of indigeneity presented in the mainstream media; and 3) how it defies genre and reader expectations. Together, these three sections will aim to answer the proposed research question: How does Yahgulanaas use the structure, narrative, and artistic style of *RED: A Haida Manga* to create a political statement about colonization, as well as a social commentary on injustice faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada?

The Format and Structure of RED

The comic book format makes Yahgulanaas' work accessible for multiple reasons. Firstly, it is accessible in terms of readability, as it allows for a wide range of readers--from youth to adults to the less academically apt (Henzi, 2019). Although the combination of image and text makes it easier to understand for more people, it does not mean it is a lesser form of literature. Since comic books are able to reach a larger audience, it can be argued that they are in fact more difficult to navigate than strictly text-based literature. As stated in the literature review, the author keeps the final format and layout of the comic book in mind throughout the entire creation process (Sherwood, 2015). If the goal of a narrative is to resonate with multiple people, then considerations must be made in order for everyone to understand it. The creator must also intentionally leave space for interpretation and knowledge-making, which is why the comic book format is a fitting medium. Therefore, the combination of image with text does not make it an easier read, it makes it more interactive.

Secondly, the comic book format also makes Yahgulanaas' work accessible in terms of affordability. Although comic books were previously seen as a cheap form of entertainment, they

are now praised for their artwork. Although not as inexpensive as they once were, they are still not overly priced. *RED* is a deconstructed work of art, as Yahgulanaas states, "I welcome you to destroy this book. I welcome you to rip the pages out of their bindings. Following the layout provided overleaf and using the pages from two copies of this book, you can reconstruct this work of art" (Yahgulanaas, 2014, p. 109). After this statement, there is a two-page spread of the six-foot mural that the comic book is able to transform into. In its watercolour mural form, *RED* would be considered fine art. Therefore, if *RED* was not available in a comic book format, people would only be able to see it in an art gallery or museum, as when it was on display at the Seattle Art Museum (Gray, 2016). Also, if the *RED* mural was ever up for sale, it would most likely be listed with a hefty price tag, rather than the $19.95 CAD it goes for as a comic book. Furthermore, if the mural was bought, only one household could enjoy it. Rather than separating the rich from the poor, educated from the uneducated, elite from the dregs, the readability and affordability of *RED* allows Yahgulanaas' work to be widely distributed and read, and his message is able to reach more people, which is the artists' intention when working within the comic book medium (Sherwood, 2015). Yahgulanaas (2018) states, "My work relates a world view that while particular to Haida Gwaii is also relevant to a contemporary and internationally engaged audience" (p. 1). Yahgulanaas felt it was important to invite the reader to destroy the comic book in order to recreate the mural because art has the ability to bring people together and provoke a conversation.

Yahgulanaas wanted *RED* to be an "act of disruption" (Gray, 2016, p. 7) in as many ways as possible, and the main way he accomplished this is through *RED*'s structure. The main structural difference that separates *RED* from traditional comic books is Yahgulanaas' use of formline in place of gutters. The incorporation of black formline is influenced by Manga and

Haida art, as some Manga comics use black "inter-panel space" (Harrison, 2016, p. 54) or no gutters at all, while a common feature of Haida art is bold formlines. Yahgulanaas intentionally avoided traditional comic book gutters, as they create a grid-like effect that entices a "Z-path" reading pattern, which is how North American literature is typically read. Gutters also leave blank, white spaces between panels, which is why they are seen as negative space, while the art inside the panels is known as positive space. Yahgulanaas views this negative space (traditional comic book gutters) as a metaphor for the "commonly accepted narrative that the land colonized by Europeans was empty space – *terra nullius* – when it was in fact inhabited by autonomous peoples governed by their own laws" (Mauzé, 2018, para. 38), as well as an extension of the Westernized view that separates people into defined categories that are socially constructed and often filled with misconceptions. To further explain this metaphor, imagine a conventional comic book page that has multiple panels with empty gutters in between them. Now, picture each individual panel as a separate group of people, or a particular race. As a result of the panels' borders and the isolating spaces between them, each group is confined to a single space and are unable to escape their cultural "box" and the stereotypes placed within. This is because institutionally constructed borders and ideas of race have caused individuals to become hesitant in stepping outside their "box" and entering the unknown where one is not "expected to be" (Minh-Ha, 1991; Eileraas, 2003). However, Yahgulanaas did not want his "gutters" to be seen as "negative space" because he believes this is a place of opportunity. This space acts as a common meeting ground, where conversations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people can happen, and relationships can begin to form. Here, there is potential to "witness 'the other'" (Loik, 2017, para. 29) in a way that will provide an authentic representation and accurate understanding. It also suggests that the space between cultural groups is not isolating, but merely

unfamiliar. Therefore, Yahgulanaas' formlines are symbolic of an "attempt to soften, shift, or maybe erase the lines of separation that artificially exist between people and groups of people" (Loik, 2017, para. 25).

Harrison (2016) expands on this idea by stating the following:

Whatever is going on within the panels, whatever we imagine is the relationship between them, the gutter here is a third party that does more than both divide and join; it participates in the story. All along, we realize, this gutter has worked in this graphic novel like a bloodstream, [a representation of the lifeline of the Haida people (Gray, 2016, p. 8)], right down to the capillaries that are the black lines within the panels: it is a visual representation of a worldview for which individual action is always an extension of the greater forces that join all things together. That relationship between individual and whole established as we read through Red the book is then discovered to be something more again in Red the mural. (p. 54-56)

Yahgulanaas did not want his formlines to be a place of vacancy because the space between the panels is where the reader is called upon to make sense of what is happening in gaps of time. Therefore, he wanted his gutters to participate in the story-making process as well. An example of this is illustrated on page 101 of *RED* (see Figure 4), as the characters are interacting with the formline. Here, the elders of Red's community are seen stitching the formline back together. On page 101, as well as on page 54 (see Figure 5), it is clear that the formline represents the lifeline of Red and his community. The formlines became "cracked" during Red's journey to seek revenge, as he led his community to the brink of war and destruction. Red turned away from his community and their traditional practices in order to try to fulfill his individual needs, which ultimately led him to succumb to colonial power. Rather than Red's community abandoning him

because of his actions, just as the carpenter's people did, they accept his personal shortcomings and the mistakes he has made, and in turn, assist in the rebuilding of the damages he has caused to their community. The cracks in the formline also represent the collectivist worldview that Harrison (2016) mentions in the previously quoted statement, as they illustrate that individuals are not separate entities, rather they are parts of a whole. Harrison (2016) continues to explain:

> For the European side, mapped along the grid of content-displaying panels divided by empty gutters, the identity of the whole is assembled by the mind that views its individually discrete parts; for the Indigenous worldview, the whole is everything and everywhere: it extends to each individual its identity as a fraction of itself. These views contest across not just our reading of comics, but our reading, too, of history. (p. 53)

Therefore, a person's actions not only affect their own life, but others as well, which is demonstrated when Red's actions impacted the lives of those within his tribe. Furthermore, on the bottom right-hand-side of page 101 (see Figure 4), the carpenter (wearing the red hat) is shown carrying his own building materials, rather than interacting with the formline as the elders are. He is also placed in front of the formline, while the elders are situated within. This is a subtle visual representation of the dominance colonial settlers asserted over Indigenous peoples, as they took over their land and claimed it as their own, while confining Indigenous peoples to institutionally designated areas.

Furthermore, although the formlines work individually on separate pages, they also link the pages together as they simultaneously act as a "fraction" of the Haida-inspired mural that the pages create when laid out side-by-side. Therefore, although *RED* is sold as a comic book, it can also be classified as a work of art. Yahgulanaas communicates two messages through this dual format of *RED*: 1) comic book creation should not be confined by conventional comic book

standards and practices, which creates a larger commentary on how Indigenous peoples should not be defined or constrained by authoritative and institutional forces; and 2) it suggests that another way to experience comics aesthetically is to "pull back and consider the composition all at once" (Chute & DeKoven, 2006, p. 776), which can be seen as a metaphor for the ability to gain a more fruitful understanding of an unfamiliar culture's values and practices by viewing them from an alternative perspective. Finally, this collectivist worldview that takes a step back to look at everything as a whole, can be seen as complementary to the "step in" that readers are asked to take in Manga and oral storytelling, as they are asked to participate within the story-making process. Spiers (2014) points out that *RED* relies on "manga's ability to amplify 'the sense of reader participation in manga, a feeling of being part of the story, rather than simply observing the story from afar'" (p. 50). Referring back to the panel/gutter metaphor, rather than remaining in our own culturally confined boxes and observing others from afar, Yahgulanaas encourages his readers to explore and engage with the unknown and become a part of each other's stories.

Finally, "Indigenous writers are frequently asked how their work engages or relates to oral storytelling" (Bladow, 2019, p. 39), which is a question *RED* investigates as it is based on a traditional oral Haida narrative. A comic book appears to be an appropriate medium to communicate an oral story because the style represents how stories are told and memories are formed. Oral stories, which are often based on memories, are not always linear, as you begin to remember parts of the story as you continue sharing it. You only reveal the defining moments and allow your audience to fill in the surrounding details, just as comic books urge readers to participate in creating the story through closure (as mentioned in the literature review). Furthermore, gaps in memories are not blank spaces in time, rather they are blacked out

moments that the brain has chosen not to remember, which is why Yahgulanaas' black formlines feel like a fitting choice. Comic book creators also consciously choose what to and not to include in their panels, which is often what we do when telling a story.
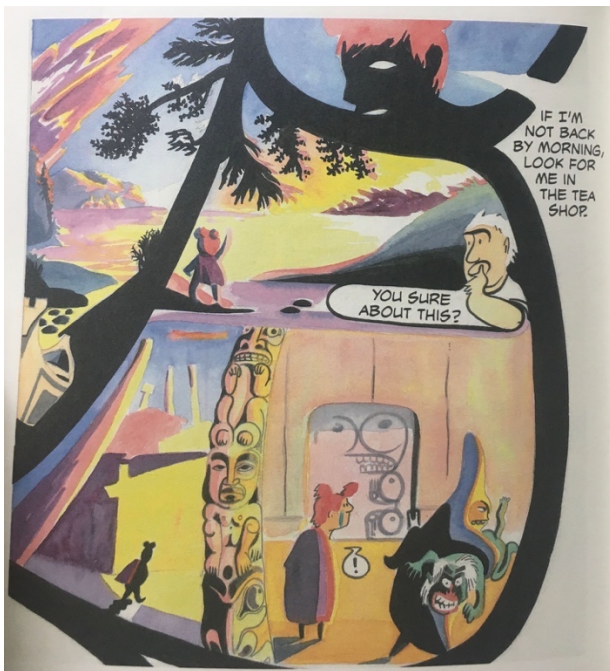
Figure 4

Page 101 of RED: A Haida Manga (Yahgulanaas, 2014, p. 101)

Figure 5

Page 54 of RED: A Haida Manga (Yahgulanaas, 2014, p. 54)

Challenging Contemporary Ideas of Indigeneity Presented in Mainstream Media

The topic of this MRP is timely, as the recent discovery of hundreds of deceased bodies of Indigenous children have been circulating in the news and on social media. In May, it was announced that the remains of 215 Indigenous children were found at a site near Kamloops, British Columbia, which was once the largest Residential School in Canada ("More than 200 bodies found at Indigenous school in Canada," 2021). A month later, near Regina, Saskatchewan, Chief Cadmus Delorme of the Cowessess told the press that their "ground-penetrating radar resulted in 751 "hits," indicating that at least 600 bodies were buried in the area" (" Report: More Than 600 Bodies Found at Indigenous School in Canada," 2021). He followed up with, "We want to make sure when we tell our story that we're not trying to make numbers sound bigger than they are. I like to say over 600, just to be assured" (" Report: More Than 600 Bodies Found at Indigenous School in Canada," 2021, para. 4). The Cowessess First Nation is now located here, but it was once the site of the Marieval Indian Residential School from 1899-1997 (" Report: More Than 600 Bodies Found at Indigenous School in Canada," 2021), which means these horrific events were still happening just under 25 years ago.

Although there have been attempts at reconciliation, there is still a divide that exists between "us" and "them" which is largely due to the legacies of colonial ideologies. Colonialism erases "any signs of modernity and reduces Indigenous lives to a simplistic, one-dimensional commodity that could be easily consumed by the colonial gaze […] Indigenous knowledge [has become placed] at the bottom of an imagined hierarchy" (Winter & Boudreau, 2018, p. 38-40). This complete misunderstanding of Indigenous culture is seen throughout discourse that discusses Indigenous peoples, and it has led to false conceptualizations of what it means to be Indigenous. Callison et al. (2019) states:

After a few weeks, I became acutely aware of the difference between settler stories about

Indigenous peoples and Indigenous stories about Indigenous peoples. Settlers, it

appeared, were interested in decontextualized trauma and relegating Indigenous strength

to the past. Indigenous authors, however, were more likely to write stories about

recovering from trauma, or stories more specifically about the ways that we are strong

now. Indigenous authors avoided stereotypes, while building a canon of their own voices.

(p. 152)

Mainstream messaging turns Indigenous culture into something that is eye-catching rather than

accurate. And since journalists are often seen as "experts" in their field, people often believe

what they read in the media. It is not only important for there to be accurate representations for a

better understanding, but also so Indigenous peoples can see themselves positively and

authentically portrayed in the media in order to reclaim a sense of identity and autonomy.

Yahgulanaas counters politicized narratives that often paint Indigenous peoples in a "hippie"

light--always harmonized and at peace. The following passage from "Warfare In Pre-Columbian

North America" (2018) describes how Indigenous tribes function:

Despite the myth that Aboriginals lived in happy harmony before the arrival of

Europeans, war was central to the way of life of many First Nation cultures. Indeed, war

was a persistent reality in all regions though [...] the causes were complex and often

interrelated, springing from both individual and collective motivations and needs [...]

Among west coast societies, the material goods and slaves acquired through raiding were

important avenues to build up sufficient wealth to host potlatches and other give-away

ceremonies. At a community level, warfare played a multifaceted role, and was waged for

different reasons. Some conflicts were waged for economic and political goals, such as

gaining access to resources or territory, exacting tribute from another nation or

controlling trade routes. Revenge was a consistent motivating factor across North

America, a factor that could lead to recurrent cycles of violence, often low intensity,

which could last generations. (para. 5)

Since *RED* is an inter-tribal story, a more authentic depiction of Indigenous culture can be seen

in two key parts of the narrative. Red's community refers to the people of Laanaas as "raiders,"

which is a reference to raids between Indigenous tribes. During one of the raids in *RED*, Red's

sister is kidnapped, and this is the event that Red's life revolves around. This raid also begins a

feud between Red's community and the people of Laanaas. Another instance that refers to the

politicized narrative of Indigenous peoples in the media, is when one of the traders (a colonizer)

says, "Can't sell fear gear to happy people" (Yahgulanaas, 2014, p. 18). This not only refers to

Indigenous peoples as a singular, collectivized group, but it also assumes that Indigenous peoples

are peaceful and do not commit any acts of violence. However, this misconception is overruled

when Red kills Jaada's husband, who is a person of Indigenous descent from another tribe.

Another misconception presented in the media is that Canada will be able to create a

more equitable and just society by giving Indigenous communities greater access to ICTs. While

Indigenous youth may be onboard with increasing ICT access in their communities, Indigenous

elders feel apprehensive towards the advancements. Elders view technology and the internet as a

"tool of assimilation," as well as a form of cultural appropriation and invasion (Smillie-

Adjarkwa, 2005). Elders are worried that this technological shift will result in a loss of cultural

identity (Smillie-Adjarkwa, 2005), as there are concerns regarding the replacement of cultural

traditions with their digital counterpart. For example, there is a fear that the standard practice of

oral storytelling will be replaced by digital storytelling. Finally, there are also social concerns

surrounding "increased surveillance, content filtering, and infiltration" (Salinas, 2005, p. 97), as well as online racism, child pornography, and trafficking (Smillie-Adjarkwa, 2005). Although the Government of Canada is pushing for equitable online connectivity, through programs such as the Connecting Families Initiative and Canada's Connectivity Strategy: High-Speed Access for All, Indigenous elders are worried about being reliant on external services and technical support (Smillie-Adjarkwa, 2005).

These concerns about technological advancements are also illustrated in two instances in *RED*. The first is when "traders" arrive at the village of Kiokaathli and try to sell "home security" to Red's community, and the elders voice the question: "But what do we need weapons for?" (Yahgulanaas, 2014, p. 18). The second is when Red meets an abandoned carpenter who invents tools "for hunting--for killing" (Yahgulanaas, 2014, p. 35). He was shunned by his people because his creations raised concerns for their community's well-being. However, Red decides to form an alliance with the carpenter in order to seek revenge on Jaada's captors. Red and the carpenter set out to build a submarine that takes on the shape of a great whale and is made from sea lion hides. The elders of Red's community feel distressed about the amount of sea lions they are killing because they are the natural prey of actual great whales. They also feel afflicted by the amount of weapons they are buying from the traders, as all of their goods are being traded for weapons and as a result, they no longer have any resources to trade with other tribes. Therefore, the carpenter's influence "decimates the natural world and inter-tribal relationships upon which the community relies; the community becomes dependent and indebted instead to traders from outside" (Gray, 2016, p. 8).

This demonstrates that the elders of Red's community have similar feelings towards technological advancements as real-life Indigenous elders. Berger (1971) mentions that the

topics of science and technology are commonly referred to in comic books, and "the triumph of the heroes reflect an awareness of the potentialities for good and evil in machines and a faith in man's ability to control them; that is, a realism and an awareness of the moral dilemma posed by science and technology" (p. 175). The main moral dilemma that Red faces is whether or not to inflict revenge upon the people of Laanaas, putting his personal wants before the needs of his community. Red decides to seek retribution, and in the process, he loses control of the traders' influence and their impact on his community, ultimately sacrificing the well-being of his tribe. Red's story is not a triumphant one, as his quest for revenge eventually leads to his own demise and his tribe is left to restore their resources and relationships after the passing of their leader. However, Red's decision to take his own life demonstrates another moral decision where Red sacrifices himself in order to end the ongoing feud and violence between the two tribes. Gray (2016) comments on *RED*'s narrative by stating the following:

> The message throughout the comic is that to turn away from the community and its traditional practices is to bring tragedy to the community: that the force of destruction takes the form of the carpenter suggests a connection to Christian missionaries; that the destruction is weaponized and technological suggests the material impact of colonization and its inherent violence. (p. 8)

Gray's comment also connects to the recent Residential School discoveries, as they are not only telling of the physical violence that happened within this system, but also the emotional agony that occurred as a result of the destruction of communities as children were taken from their families. Although the carpenter's influence takes the physical form of weapons in *RED*, it leads to a larger commentary on colonization. When the elders question why they are buying so many weapons, the traders respond by saying, "Ha! Why are we extending you so much credit?"

(Yahgulanaas, 2014, p. 43). This implies that the traders, who represent colonizers, are "helping" Red's community by providing them with tools that act as technological advancements, which can connect to ideas represented in digital divide discourse. The traders think they are doing Red's tribe a favour by extending them credit, while the Government of Canada believes they are doing Indigenous communities a "favour" by giving them internet access.

How RED Defies Genre and Reader Expectations

Yahgulanaas' work defies expectations in many ways, one being its unusual style due to Yahgulanaas' self-taught art form: Haida Manga. While the discourse speaking to the complexity of comic books is expanding, opinions of whether RED is classified as a comic book is still up for debate. This is demonstrated in the following online review as Thomas Amaria (2018) states:

> Red looks lovely, but that's about it - if it was just a big painting all would be well, but making claims that it's a "graphic novel" does give you expectations of a plot, or characterisation, or any of the things that are missing here. I must admit I do get a bit annoyed when I read this sort of book, where someone who clearly has no idea about the form of comics thinks they can just waltz in and do one, and get it published too. I wouldn't expect to get a gallery show just because I remember going to a few, and it feels like a dismissal of the art form when people with no idea what they're doing think they can just knock out a graphic novel. Grr! (p. 2)

This review brings attention to how Yahgulanaas' work defies expectations of the genre. By labelling *RED* as a comic book, readers automatically have certain assumptions about what it will entail before they even open the book. Then, when their pre-formed ideas about the genre are challenged or go unseen, they become frustrated with the unknown. This response is not uncommon, as people often struggle when having to adapt to change. As humans, we find

comfort in the known, and it is not until we are willing to be open to change and new

perspectives that we are able to accept them. Therefore, when comic book fans and critics are

used to, and enjoy a particular style, Haida Manga artistry seems unfitting because it is not

commonly seen in the comic book world. Unless someone is familiar with Yahgulanaas' work, it

is a style that is most likely foreign to the average comic book reader. While this may frustrate

some readers, the choice of using an unfamiliar artistic style is intentional, as Yahgulanaas is

"explicit about his desire to disrupt traditional modes of comic book creation in a Canadian

context. He notes that traditional Canadian or North American forms are, by definition, part of a

larger legacy of European colonialism" (Gray, 2016, p. 7).

Yahgulanaas continues to explain, "I was drawn to comics as a way of talking about

complex things such as relationships between indigenous peoples and settler society. I found

manga attractive because it is not part of the settler tradition of North America (like Archie or

Marvel comics, for example) … [plus it] has roots in the North Pacific, as does Haida art"

(Levell, 2013, p. 97). Although *RED* is categorized as a graphic novel and analyzed in comic

book classes and seminars, Haida Manga almost functions as a "new graphic genre" (Mauzé,

2018, para. 3) that is a unique graphic medium for storytelling, which is part of the reason why it

defies expectations of the genre and reader. Therefore, Yahgulanaas intentionally chose to call

RED a Haida Manga, rather than a Haida Comic. Rather than an aesthetic choice, Mauzé (2018)

states, "The blending of the two styles is also a political statement, relegating European-

American visual influences to the background, with their associations of colonialism and

domination of Indigenous cultures" (para. 31). Manga is used in place of the term "comic" to

illustrate that Yahgulanaas did not want *RED* to merely become another North American comic

book. He did not want *RED* to be overlooked or go unnoticed, ultimately slipping through the

cracks and falling into the background of the North American literary canon. As previously mentioned, some still think the comic book genre lacks sophistication, which is why they often fall under the category of graphic novel. Therefore, Yahgulanaas may have also avoided putting "comic" in the title in order to further demonstrate that the issues examined in *RED* should be taken seriously and properly discussed. Yahgulanaas uses Manga and Haida art as his main sources of artistic influence in order to bring their characteristics and practices to the forefront of the conversation.

Furthermore, although Manga is known as a style of Japanese comic books, the literal meaning of "manga" is "whimsical pictures" ("Graphic Novels and Manga: Manga," 2021). Now, according to the Merriam-Webster dictionary (n.d.), whimsical can be defined as, "subject to erratic behavior or unpredictable change," while erratic is defined as, "having no fixed course," "characterized by lack of consistency, regularity, or uniformity," and "deviating from what is ordinary or standard." These last two definitions of erratic can also be used to describe *RED* as it is not a conventional comic book, while the first definition of erratic can be seen as a metaphor for Yahgulanaas' use of fluid formlines that do not confine characters to panels. Characters can interact with the formline and are, metaphorically, able to move around the page, rather than being "fixed" within a box.

Furthermore, when creating his self-developed art form, Yahgulanaas also made a conscious decision to incorporate aspects that would properly represent his culture. He did not want his work to conform to conventional comic book standards, as this would be another form of cultural confinement enforced by colonialism. Consequently, "[his] practice seeks out the edges where the familiar becomes strange, and the strange becomes familiar" (Yahgulanaas, 2018, p. 1). Initially, *RED* is expected to possess a sense of familiarity because it is classified as

a comic book. However, as readers begin to flip through the pages, it feels "strange" to read because of its unique format and structure due to the Haida Manga art. It is Yahgulanaas' hope that as the "strangeness" of his artwork begins to become familiar, readers will also begin to familiarize and educate themselves on Haida culture and the Indigenous experience.

How the comic book genre is perceived can be thought of as a metaphor for how Indigenous peoples are seen. Paris (2019) states, "Terms like 'non-White' and, in ways perhaps more subtly, 'minority' and 'diverse' are always filtered through the White gaze in that they are explicitly and implicitly set against whiteness as the norm. 'Non-White' is a personal favorite as it names people of color in the negative, in absence of that which all else aspires to" (p. 218). The term "graphic novel" can be seen in a similar light as Paris' explanation of "Non-White," as the word "graphic" (i.e. the adjective) merely describes the word "novel" (i.e. the subject or noun) (Tiemens, 2019). Therefore, a "graphic novel" is simply a novel that incorporates a graphic element. This not only undermines the artistry of comic books, but also the genre as a whole. By classifying comic books as graphic novels, it implies that all books should strive to be like novels because they are seen as the superior form of literature. Consequently, "the issue of discrediting comic books begins with the name of the genre itself" (Tiemens, 2019, p. 1). This idea that the comic book genre is discredited because it is categorized under the overarching and oversimplifying term of "graphic novel," can also be seen as a metaphor for how Indigenous peoples are referred to in the mainstream media. Paris (2019) states the following:

> After reading some tweets about education that employed common deficit based terms for students of color, I tweeted this reply: "And by 'minority,' 'diverse,' 'at-risk,' 'underserved,' 'achievement gapped,' 'struggling,' 'free & reduced,' you mean us?" (Paris, 2015). Indeed, educational research often calls us out by our names, meaning that

educational researchers often name people and communities not as they are but as the academy needs them to be along damaging logics of erasure and deficiency. As a scholar of color [...] I work with the understanding that our cultural ways of being as people of color are not deficient (while educational research and practice often works within the opposite understanding). (p. 217)

Indigenous peoples are often misunderstood, and frankly, undermined because these terms of deficiency are commonly used to describe them. Therefore, just as comic books are perceived as a lesser form of literature, Indigenous peoples are seen as "lesser" because journalists often create storylines that imply Indigenous communities are primitive and need help to become more advanced, which reinforces White supremacy and imposes a Westernized gaze on Indigenous culture. Just as Thomas Amaria (2018) had expectations of the graphic novel genre based on previously conceived notions of what a comic book "is," people also form preconceived notions of Indigenous peoples based on generalizations and falsely portrayed narratives presented in the media.

These preconceived notions may also contribute to the reading of *RED*, meaning readers may draw conclusions about the narrative based on their understanding of Indigenous culture and their peoples' history within Canada. Bladow (2019) explains, "Acts of closure, ["the act of making a story out of a sequence of pictures divided by gutters" (Harrison, 2016, p. 60)], rely in part on readers' own biases; readers may feel intensely "at home" with their own subjective act of closure and less attentive to the ways in which their expectations and assumptions are partially conditioned by the creators' formal choices" (p. 40). Therefore, external factors such as upbringing, education, and exposure to certain resources, may impact how the reader interprets Yahgulanaas' overall message. The themes of revenge and retribution are easily identifiable in

RED, as the central narrative focuses on a character seeking revenge on his sister's captors. It is apparent that some reviewers picked up on this, as they said this was a story about "revenge and war" (Laura, 2016), "the danger of rage and revenge" (Froese, 2018), as well as "external threats and dangers are heightened by external forces, traders and grief and anger into a tale of fantastical forces, innovation and violence" (Malcolm, 2019). These insights, as well as other contemporary visualizations of indigeneity, may be impacted by politicized narratives of Indigenous peoples and culture. Often, Indigenous peoples are referred to as a whole, rather than individual tribes. Therefore, Red's quest for revenge on the people of Laanaas may be seen as a metaphor for Indigenous peoples wanting revenge on colonizers. An individual who is motivated by revenge for colonialism might seek out this particular narrative. For someone who is motivated by this however, the overall message may surprise them, as this is truly an inter-tribal story that demonstrates the dangers of abandoning your community and culture, rather than a story about seeking revenge for colonialism and cultural genocide. Therefore, a reader's knowledge and mindset affect how they interpret the story. In other words, *RED* is a product in relation to what people expect about the narrative, but Yahgulanaas' true message confounds the expectations of the potential reader.

While some may read this as a story about rage, revenge, violence, and anger, this MRP's examination of *RED* proposes that there is a deeper message that Yahgulanaas is trying to communicate with his readers. *RED* is a super-cautionary tale about someone so driven by revenge that they end up losing themselves throughout the process of trying to achieve retributive justice, which demonstrates how justice can slip into revenge based on one's attitudes. Therefore, Yahgulanaas is suggesting that we are at a point in time when divisiveness can be counterproductive. The mainstream messaging that comes from the government and media has

created a further divisiveness, as it often blames settler colonialism and victimizes Indigenous peoples. Laurence (2007) states, "Yahgulanaas says he's not interested in passing judgment about past wrongs, but in bringing them into the light. 'If we can define the problem, we can get it out of the way,' he says simply. 'The solution will present itself'" (para. 9). It is well-known that the first step in recovery is acceptance and admitting the problem exists. In order to attempt to move towards reconciliation, we must acknowledge that there are in fact forms of oppression and injustice faced by Indigenous peoples both in the present and past. Yahgulanaas advocates that Indigenous peoples do not want revenge for colonialism, rather they want the problem to be addressed. Yahgulanaas suggests that the approach moving forward is to encourage conversation between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples, so Indigenous peoples' voices can be heard and their needs and wants can be properly expressed--a vision where "everybody has a veto, everybody is included, everybody counts, and nobody is left behind" (Yahgulanaas, 2015). Tiger (2019) states, "In Indigenous speculative futurisms, the future is not a break from the present or the past, but a reconnection to who they once were and can be again, all the way back to when their world and all their relatives were formed" (p. 147-148). Yahgulanaas demonstrates that Indigenous peoples do not want to create further division, as everyone's lives play a role in creating someone else's story. Therefore, Yahgulanaas' main message is about the individual self and the whole. While Red's life is his own story, it is impacted by his sister's story, which in turn impacts the lives of those in Red's tribe. Therefore, the intertwining of Red's and Jaada's stories is what Yahgulanaas is trying to communicate.

Furthermore, Sherwood's (2015) observation: "The importance of this comic-ness cannot be underestimated and should be taken into consideration when creating or analysing the comic. However, the importance of these standardizations does not prevent artists from experimenting.

Rather, they provide a structure from which the comic book artist can expand, build upon and break free" (p. 18), explains what Yahgulanaas has done with *RED*. *RED* is classified as a comic book because of its use of text, image and spatial arrangements. However, Yahgulanaas did not let traditional comic book practices confine his artistry. He took these universal comic book elements and intertwined his own cultural aspects in order to "break free" from conventional standards set forth by traditional North American culture. This decision not only elicited frustration from readers, but also confusion. Online reviews described it as "difficult to follow" (Macklem, 2021), "disjointed" (Dhaumya, 2014), and "disorienting" (Schmimmerock, 2021). Schmimmerock (2021) continues to say:

> It loses its effectiveness once you get to the point that you're rereading multiple times trying to make sense of things. I think if I hadn't already known some of what the story was about, I never would've understood it explicitly through initial reading. Maybe it was just me, and it just went over my head? Then again, a lot of people seem to be saying the same. (p. 1)

RED comes across as a difficult read because readers are not used to Yahgulanaas' untraditional style both as an art form and a comic book. The combination of limited textual narration and Haida Manga art makes the storyline harder to comprehend because typically readers are not familiar with this artistic style and do not have much text to help make sense of the art. Cultural limitations and unfamiliarity with the history of Indigenous peoples will also make this story difficult to understand. Furthermore, the comic book format and replacement of traditional gutters with formlines forces readers to "stray from their habitual reading practices," (Tiemens, 2019, p. 3) as Yahgulanaas' work defies expectations of traditional comic books and North American literature; and like "every variation or change of form, Yahgulanaas' paneling forces

us to pay attention to it, and thus it slows down the pace at which we take in the art" (Harrison, 2016, p. 59). Ideally, readers are meant to slow down their reading process, spend time with the book, and read it multiple times in order to familiarize themselves with the Haida art. *RED*'s narrative is also meant to elicit curiosity through a lack of understanding, as readers become motivated to read more about Yahgulanaas himself and his work, and as a result, will learn more about Haida culture. The more time and effort individuals put into understanding "the other," the less cultural divides will exist. As I mentioned in my previous study of *RED* in 2019, its "narrative is not clear at first glance, just as an individual or culture should not be judged based on appearances, which are often linked to stereotypes. By Yahgulanaas challenging his readers to alter their expectations and reading practices, he also challenges them to change their perceptions of the Haida culture, and dismiss the colonizer view" (p. 3-4). Comic books are viewed as simplistic and inferior to novels because image is believed to be inferior to text--much like Indigenous culture is seen as inferior to Westernized culture. However, comic books actually require a deeper analysis because there is much unwritten, just as there is much left unsaid about Indigenous peoples and their culture. Indigenous culture is not inferior to Westernized culture, it is merely falsely portrayed in the media. If non-Indigenous Canadians are able to gain a better understanding of Indigenous knowledge, then we will begin to see the value in how they live.

Limitations and Future Research

A major limitation to this project was the time frame. With the MPC being a one-year program, the writing of our MRP takes place over a single term. Additionally, I switched my topic late into the semester, which created an even greater time constraint. If this research could be completed over a longer period, this study could be furthered by either narrowing or expanding the scope. Narrowing the scope could be achieved by looking at *RED* from one perspective, rather than three, in order to provide a more in-depth analysis. This may take the form of a strict content-centered analysis, or perhaps only examining how it is relative to contemporary media approaches and examining sources from news outlets. Whereas the scope could be expanded in two ways: 1) analyze additional publications from Yahgulanaas; and 2) look at comic books from other Indigenous authors, including non-Canadian authors. Examining other pieces of work by Yahgulanaas, such as *Flight of the Hummingbird* and *War of the Blink* (the follow-up to *RED*), could help gain a more thorough understanding of Yahgulanaas' idea of Indigenous autonomy. Furthermore, expanding the sample size by exploring other Indigenous comics from a wide range of authors would offer a more diverse perspective of the Indigenous experience and how it relates or differs globally. *RED* could also be contextualized in movements presented by other Indigenous authors, such as Joshua Whitehead, Alicia Elliot, and Leanne Simpson, who have all started sharing their stories. Additionally, different Indigenous comics portray various aspects of Indigenous culture and history.

Finally, if given approval by the Research Ethics Board, it would also be interesting to compose a focus group of individuals ranging in age, gender, and race. This would allow a future study to gain insights from an array of individuals that may have different perspectives and interpretations of *RED*. The discussion of indigeneity and Indigenous autonomy could also be

taken further by interviewing individuals of Indigenous descent in order to gain a more authentic understanding of Indigenous culture.

Although this was a useful and insightful study that began to examine a deeper understanding of indigeneity, it is only a small step in working towards a just-society for all ethnicities. There is still a lot of research that needs to be performed in this area that includes the thoughts and perspectives of Indigenous peoples, and the more resources that are available on this topic, the more informed people can become.

Conclusion

Yahgulanaas uses the structure, narrative, and artistic style of *RED: A Haida Manga* to create a political statement about colonization, as well as a social commentary on injustice faced by Indigenous peoples in Canada. The main structural component that makes *RED* different from a traditional comic book is the use of formlines in place of gutters. They act as a space that provokes conversation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in order to discover affinities. They encourage people to explore the unknown in an attempt to understand the unfamiliar, rejecting the institutional forces that have filled these spaces with reluctance and untested assumptions (Yahgulanaas, 2015). Ultimately, the formlines portray a worldview that focuses on the whole, rather than the individual self. They suggest that we should all be able to share a collective space, as we are all connected, and one person's actions affect someone else's story. Zwack (2007) explains how *RED* acts as a "meeting place between the observer, generally a Canadian non-indigenous community, and the indigenous community—an ideal that likely stems from his experience and resultant belief that 'there are not many safe places that we get to meet'" (Levell, 2013, p. 122). *RED* provides non-Indigenous readers an opportunity to familiarize themselves with the "Indigenous experience in a postcolonial world" (Chavarria, 2009, p. 48), while allowing Indigenous readers to reclaim a sense of identity and autonomy through an authentic representation.

More often than not, Indigenous peoples do not see themselves positively or accurately portrayed in the media, as Indigenous knowledge and ways of living are told from a Westernized perspective. However, *RED*'s narrative challenges contemporary ideas of indigeneity through its inter-tribal storyline and expressions of apprehension towards external influences. Mainstream messaging discussing Indigenous peoples is often filled with myths and generalizations, which

acts as another form of cultural sensory and oppression, and further highlights the domination of colonized culture over Indigenous culture. In order to create social change, we must be aware of where we are getting our information, properly educate ourselves, and be willing to engage in meaningful dialogue with others. As a collective group, we must be able to address tough topics and be open to alternative perspectives and ways of knowing. Only then will the narrative begin to transform into a more authentic representation.

Furthermore, Morris (2019) states, "Clearly, the comics and comics scholarship landscape are changing alongside the industry and reader expectations" (p. 328), as comic books are a "great way to show the dynamic nature and diversity of Indigenous peoples" (Callison et al., 2019, p. 141). *RED* defies traditional genre and reader expectations through its particular artistic style: Haida Manga. Yahgulanaas intentionally created his own art form in order to further emphasize his political statement on colonization and injustice. Indigenous culture has been suppressed through forms of systematic racism, and Yahgulanaas feels this is depicted through traditional North American comic books. Yahgulanaas did not want his work to conform to conventional comic book standards and practices because he saw this and another form of cultural confinement. He also chose to incorporate Manga to illustrate his "unwavering belief that, beyond differences in Indigenous and Western ways of thinking, people of all backgrounds can find common ground in shared concerns" (Mauzé, 2018, para. 6). The combination of artistic styles further suggests the collectivist worldview that Yahgulanaas communicates through his use of formlines--that despite our history and differences, there is an intimacy that exists between us as we find commonalities through shared experiences. We have the ability to come together and create a realm where everyone's voices are heard, and decisions are made on the basis of consensus (Yahgulanaas, 2015).

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