

## **Sentiment Analysis: The Water Crisis**

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**Introduction:**

The First Nations Water Crisis is the issue of long-term water advisories that Indigenous communities have had and are currently still experiencing. Clean drinking water is a basic human necessity and yet there are still people who go without clean drinking water. The youtube video by Vice, titled *Canada's Waterless Communities: Neskantaga* does a good job in depicting the water crisis. This video focuses specifically on one remote Indigenous community, Neskantaga First Nation in Northern Ontario. This community has been under a boil water advisory for over 20 years, some of the residents there have never had clean tap water. Although this community was given a water treatment centre in 1993, it only worked for two years and then the community was back to boiling water or given small amounts of water bottles to drink, bathe and cook with as an alternative to clean water from the tap (Vice, 2015). People in these communities are forced to have water that is dangerous for one's health and also dangerous when used to bathe in as many kids have developed rashes from the contaminated water. The Neskantaga community, as well as other First Nations communities near it, are on a massive area that has a chromite deposit, called the Ring of Fire. A Toronto company bought the rights to the Ring of Fire and was awarded one billion dollars by the government to develop a mining project which in turn, pollutes the land and the water surrounding the area. Canada has the second largest supply of freshwater in the world, yet Indigenous communities are unable to use the fresh water due to how contaminated it is (Vice, 2015). This a very serious issue, yet it is not spoken about enough by the government and sadly, videos like these that address and raise awareness of the issue are showered with negative comments from ignorant people.

**Comments:**

I decided to read through all the comments and split the comments into two groups, negative and positive. I chose to split them into positive and negative sections as I wanted to see how many of each there were and be able to compare them. From those sections, I gathered a couple of each to examine further. The comments more or less had similar things written which is why I just chose a couple comments from each side to represent the positive and negative. Also, I gathered more negative comments to examine as I want to be able to better address the problems/mythologies rooted within them.

### **Analyze:**

One of the first comments that stood out was “i think the Natives in Canada should integrate into the cities or towns closer to urban areas. This way they can get water, security, and then they won't have a reason to bitch about more things?” (Vice, 2015, Appendix A). The person who wrote it clearly lacks knowledge of Indigenous peoples’ culture. The comment is rude and inappropriate and ignores the history between Indigenous peoples and settlers and the fight to end cultural genocide. By leaving these communities and moving to more urban towns and cities, Indigenous traditions and cultures will soon be eradicated which would once again be another form of cultural genocide. This contradicts what the Canadian government is claiming they are trying to fix and the government's movement towards reconciliation. There are many other comments that are similar to this one, it seems the people writing them do not understand how prejudice and contradicting their words truly are.

Another negative connotation that seems to be prevalent in many other comments is that Indigenous peoples do not pay taxes and, thus, should not reap the benefits that tax paying citizens are entitled to. One particular comment that showcases this reads: “first nations want there own land an own laws an to not pay into our taxes but expect to benefit from our tax

dollars. If they wish to be treated like the rest of the population than act like the rest of the population simple as that. When was the last time you seen a tax paying population have a boil advisory for 20 years? ” (Vice, 2015, Appendix B). Indigenous peoples still pay tax and have to follow the same tax rules as all other citizens of Canada (Canada Revenue Agency, n.d.). It is a myth that all Indigenous peoples do not pay taxes in Canada, and this seems to be a common thread that many believe.

There were some positive comments where people spoke with compassion and support for Indigenous communities. Many people brought up the fact that Canada is a first world country but yet Indigenous peoples are forced to live like they are in a third world country given their lack of access to clean drinking water. In the positive comments many people spoke about how the government should be doing more and how the government spends a great deal of money sending water bottles to communities on a boil water advisory, money that could be spent towards fixing and maintaining the water treatment centers. Clearly the government has the money to fix the problem, but seems to not want to (Vice, 2015, Appendix C). The positive comments also brought up the fact that clean water is a basic human necessity and whether or not Indigenous peoples ‘pay taxes’ or have the choice to move to a more urban city does not mean they should be denied access to clean water.

Surprisingly there were more positive comments than negative. I truly did expect to see more negative comments as that tends to be the issue with the topic of the water crisis. Lack of knowledge over the issues is what leads to these mythologies being made in these negative comments. These comments are shaped by colonialism as these people are fine with the Canadian government controlling who gets access to clean water and feel that punishing Indigenous peoples with no access to clean drinking water is acceptable, as sovereignty is what

Indigenous peoples wanted. Comments that tell Indigenous peoples to leave the reserves clearly are not aware of the injustice and hardships Indigenous peoples have faced over the years and the continuous effort to erase their culture. Positive comments are clearly driven by more support and compassion, but also these people have a better understanding of the crisis and the issues faced by Indigenous peoples.

### **Counter Narrative:**

Within the negative comments, people seem to hold this mythology narrative that Indigenous peoples do not pay taxes, but yet want to ‘reap’ the benefits that tax paying citizens get. The sociopolitical imaginaries have tended to think that all Indigenous peoples are lazy, that they want the best of both worlds and want help from the Government without doing anything. Obviously people do not do any research before making these comments, as that is a myth that has been debunked many times and is even highlighted on the Government website that Indigenous peoples have to follow the same tax rules as others. Certain Indigenous peoples who live on reserves, however, are exempt from that depending on the goods and services they purchased, but that does not mean that all Indigenous peoples do not pay taxes (Canada Revenue Agency, n.d.). As well, it is Indigenous peoples land that Canadian citizens live on. The government uses and abuses Indigenous land, they break treaties, take over Indigenous reserves and harm the land. This can be seen through the proposed mining project, the Ring of Fire, which will have many harmful impacts on the Indigenous territories that surround it. Mining pollutes the air, it pollutes drinking water, it harms the wildlife and causes further consequences. As mentioned by Gray (2016), these polluted areas affect people’s health: the toxic contaminants lead to many reproductive issues, women experience more miscarriages, premature births, toxins in breast milk, etc. Indigenous peoples in these areas do not just have to worry about the

contaminated water, but the added health issues that arise from the polluted air. Yet none of these negative comments are focusing on how the Canadian government is breaking treaties and further polluting the water in these Indigenous territories. When Indigenous peoples health is negatively affected, there should not even be a question as to whether or not the government should help build, fix and maintain these water treatment centers.

Other common mythologies within the negative comments was that Indigenous peoples should just pick up and leave the reserves, that they have options to live in urban cities and they choose to live in areas with no clean water. Indigenous peoples cannot simply just move to urban cities, there are repercussions to these actions. As Wolfe (2006) puts it, “where they are is who they are” (p. 2). These reserves allow the Indigenous culture to exist, it celebrates and embraces Indigenous traditions and by having Indigenous peoples leave their reserves to settle in areas mainly consisting of non-Indigenous people, may mean a loss of this culture and traditions. This aligns with what settler colonialism wanted all along, to slowly eradicate the Indigenous culture. What people fail to realize is that this is another form of cultural genocide. It is clear the government can afford to help lift these boil water advisories but chooses not to do so, instead the government puts their money into other projects that harm the environment. Simply leaving the reserves, as many of the comments suggested, is not that simple and this is not the clear answer for Indigenous peoples.

### **Conclusion:**

Clean water should be accessible to everyone. Videos like these are important as they help to raise awareness of the water crisis Indigenous peoples are facing, as sadly it is not spoken about enough by media outlets and non-Indigenous people. It is sad to see such negative comments on these posts that contain prejudiced lies and myths. Colonialism has played a major role in influencing such negative connotations about Indigenous peoples. Indigenous peoples are

not lazy, they are not making ridiculously lavish requests, all they are asking is to have access to clean water which is a basic human necessity in life. As some of the positive comments mentioned, if this was a non-Indigenous community, the water would have been fixed right away and that community would never have to go two decades without clean drinking water. It is clear the government has the money to pay for water treatment plants, but instead is using stall tactics and simply handing out insufficient amounts of water bottles. The government awards one billion dollars to a development project that harms Indigenous territories, instead of using this money towards putting an end to all boil water advisories in Canada. It is hard to read these comments and see such ignorance, people need to become more educated on these matters to see how wrong and hurtful their comments can be. As one of the comments mentioned, non-Indigenous people who are skeptical should try boiling water for a whole year anytime they want to use it (Vice, 2015, Appendix, D). If people were forced to live in these conditions, they would quickly change their opinions. As well, non-Indigenous people need to be educated on cultural genocide to be able to understand how leaving the reserves is not a solution, but rather a stepping stone to a whole culture being eradicated. The Canadian government claims they want to focus on reconciliation with Indigenous peoples, well a major step that needs to be taken in order to reconcile is to end these boil water advisories. As Daigle (2019) explains, these actions of ending the violence on Indigenous waters, bodies and lands as well as land restitution “threatens the very foundation of colonial hegemony” (p. 12-13) which is why the government continues to put it off. As long as the boil water advisory continues, reconciliation between the Canadian government and Indigenous peoples will continue to be a facade/spectacle.

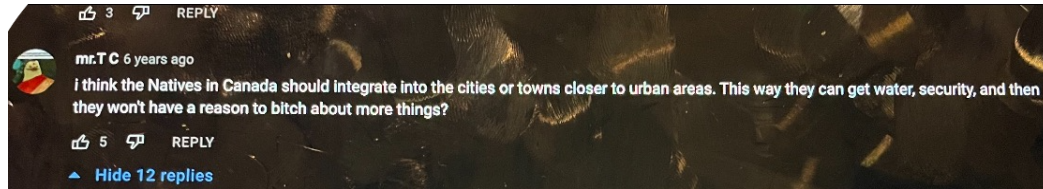
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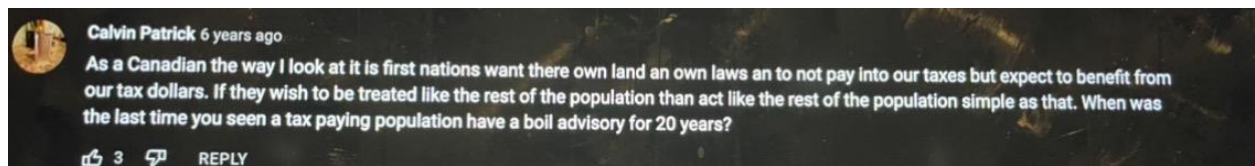


## Appendix

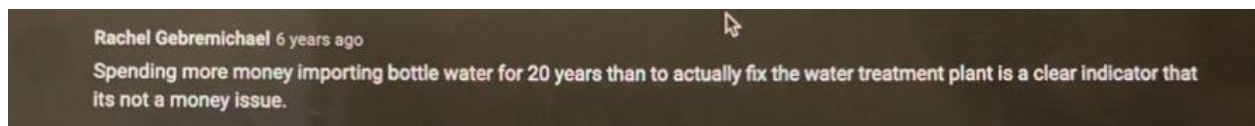
### Appendix A:



### Appendix B:



### Appendix C:



### Appendix D:

