

# What's in a Name?

## Canadian Lexicons, White Nationalism and the Erasure of Canada's Indigenous Peoples

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### Abstract

- This project examines headwords and citations in three dictionaries and addresses their portrayal of Canada's Indigenous peoples. The analysis includes the *Dictionary of Canadianisms on Historical Principles Online* (DCHPO) and the *Canadian Oxford Dictionary*, (COD) and the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). The three keywords "Indigenous," "Aboriginal," and "Native" were chosen because of their usage in designating Canada's Indigenous peoples. Based off the initial findings, the project argues that the absence of the keywords in Canadian lexicons represents an erasure of Indigenous identity. Secondly, using Alan Lawson's work on the settler subject, the project argues that this erasure is strategic as it creates an un-settled land for the taking, which the dictionary "populates" with other, non-Indigenous groups, such as English-Canadians and French-Canadians.

### Research Objectives

- Through a post-colonial lens, this project aims to analyze the various ways that Canadian Indigenous groups are named in Canadian and English dictionaries.
- It also seeks to address how lexicons partake in nationalist discourse and in indigenizing white-settler-invaders.

### Key Findings

- Throughout, the keyword "Indigenous" is used to describe flora and fauna, but not peoples.
- The COD engages in a less damaging depiction of indigeneity than in the DCHPO (older source).
- Within Canadian sources, words to denote Indigenous peoples are a) often overlooked as in the DCHPO or b) often containing offensive language as in the COD.
- The OED's citations are the least steeped in settler mentality and enter into a critical discussion of naming/labeling and identity that the Canadian lexicons do not seem to care to engage in.
- The keywords "French-Canadian" and "English-Canadian" are included in all three dictionaries and fill in that "blank space" created by the erasure of Indigenous peoples in the lexicon.
- White nationalism, through the lexicons, attempts to mimic indigeneity and create a "white native" with an inherent claim to the land.
- However, in the lexicons as in reality, attempts at complete erasure of Indigenous peoples are futile and demonstrate the inherent ambivalence and destructiveness of the white-settler-invader project.

### Methodology

- For the first part of this project, I used three dictionaries as primary sources and I searched for the keywords "Indigenous," "Aboriginal," and "Native". I analyzed my findings (headwords and citations) in order to assess the representation of Canada's Indigenous populations within the lexicons.
- Secondly, I searched for the keywords "French-Canadian" and "English-Canadian" and similarly incorporated these findings into the project.
- My argument is based on the headwords and citations found in all three lexicons and supported by post-colonial theory.



### Implications

- Dictionaries are an important tool in nation building and reflect nationalist discourse.
- Further research could be done to include more keywords related to indigenous identity in Canada.
- Canadian lexicons should decolonize entries related to indigeneity.