

## Etienne Rutkowski

- colonialism and depression
- perpetuation of colonial issues through the response to consequences of colonialism.
- unknown / thing of the distant past  
↳ cultural forgetfulness
- points about "melancholia"  
↳ only seeing depression on a personal or individual level
- Intersectionality of colonialism and mental health
- Intersectionality between colonialism and mental health
- Intergenerational trauma
- Perpetuation of colonialism through continued labels and perceptions / misunderstandings
- importance of language to understand reality

## Objective Summary

- summary of main points/ideas
- concise description  
↳ boil down the essay to its essentials
  - central issue
  - position
  - most important examples
- represent ideas, not evaluate/critique  
↳ neutral / professional tone
- explain the essay in your own words
- citations for quotes or paraphrases, signal phrases for summary

## A MIND SPREAD OUT ON THE GROUND

300-500 words  
double spaced  
12-point font

He took his glasses off and rubbed the bridge of his nose the way men in movies do whenever they encounter a particularly vexing woman.

"I'm really confused. You need to give me something here. What's making you depressed?"

His reaction made me think briefly of residential schools, though at the time I couldn't understand why. Maybe it was the fact that he operated his therapy sessions out of a church. That certainly didn't help.

I wasn't sure what to say. Can a metaphor or simile capture depression? It was definitely heavy, but could I really compare it

Europe had another way to describe those with mental illness: witches. They were “cured” by being burned at the stake. Sometimes, as part of their trial, suspected witches underwent an ordeal by water. They were tied to a rope and thrown from a boat. If they sank they’d be pulled back to a safety of sorts, their innocence proven, but their illness unchecked. If they floated, like Ophelia, they were considered a witch and summarily executed.

My quite Catholic mother believes demonic possession is a real danger. She pretty much used the 1973 film *The Exorcist* as an instructional video for my siblings and me. It was mostly effective. I played with a Ouija board only once, reluctantly, and though I remained firmly in control of my body, I still try to avoid the game (and pictures of Linda Blair) at all costs. I know demonic possession is impossible, probably, but it still scares me more than I’d like to admit.

So when my mother, now living in an adult care home in Florida, told me she was hearing demonic voices and thought she needed an exorcism, I was legitimately terrified. Not because I thought she was possessed—she didn’t mention anything about floating above her bed, and her voice sounded normal. I was scared for her. She truly believed demons were real and could take control of the spiritually weak. If she believed she was being overtaken by these demons, logic dictated that she was being overtaken by these demons, logic dictated that she was spiritually weak. **As if her depressed mind didn’t have enough to guilt her with.**

She wouldn’t tell me what the voices were saying to her. She just reiterated over and over that she was a sinner, that she had impure thoughts, that she hadn’t been going to church enough.

None of this seemed to me like enough reason to call in an exorcist.

Evidently her priest down in Florida disagreed. He said it did, indeed, sound like she was in the midst of a spiritual battle, that she should contact the church about sending an exorcist right away. Though he himself was part of the Catholic Church, he never offered any assistance with her “spiritual battle,” never offered to bring in an exorcist to slay her inner demon. He just gave her his half-baked opinion like a torch and watched as she caught flame.

**As far as analogies go, comparing depression to a demon is a pretty good one.** Both overtake your faculties, leaving you disconnected and disembodied. Both **change you so abruptly that even your loved ones barely recognize you.** Both whisper evil words and malformed truths. **Both scare most people shitless.**

According to Diane Purkiss’s *The Witch in History: Early Modern and Twentieth-Century Representations*, **European colonists widely considered Indigenous peoples to be devil worshippers.** In fact, during the Salem witch trials, the people of the Sagamore tribe were blamed—described by early Puritan minister and mastermind of the witch trials, Cotton Mather, as “horrid sorcerers, and hellish conjurers . . . [who] conversed with Demons.” One person on trial claimed to have attended a black mass with the Sagamore Indians. Mercy Short, another accused witch, took it one step further: she claimed the Devil himself was an Indian, describing him as “not of a Negro, but of a tawny, or an Indian color.”

Literal demonizing of Indigenous people was a natural extension of early tactics used to move colonization along. In 1452 and 1455 the Catholic Church issued papal bulls calling for

-Indigenous peoples put on trial as devil-worshippers

-believing being 'spiritually weak'



I'd have to stab hard and slash deep just to break the skin. I was crying so hard.

I reread my note. I looked back at the knife. Even though it could hardly peel a potato it scared me more than the void I felt.

I lay back down, disgusted with myself and my lack of resolve. I tried to listen to the radio. I couldn't hear anything.

Though suicide was quite rare for Onkwehon:we pre-contact, after contact and the subsequent effects of colonialism it has ballooned so much that, as of 2013, suicide and self-inflicted injuries are the leading cause of death for Native people under the age of forty-four. Suicide and depression rates for our people are twice the national average. For Native youth between fifteen and twenty-four, the suicide rate is five to seven times the national average. Attempted suicides among Native people are also five to seven times the national average, depending on gender. For LGBTQ2S+ Onkwehon:we, no data exists.

Interestingly, the Centre for Suicide Prevention has found lower rates of depression and suicide among communities that exhibit "cultural continuity." This includes self-government, land control, control over education and cultural activities, and command of police, fire and health services. In other words, the less Canada maintains its historical role as the abusive father, micromanaging and undermining First Nations at every turn, the better off the people are.

Lower instances of suicide were also found in communities where more than 50 percent of the people spoke their Indigenous language. This probably isn't much of a surprise to an Indigenous person. We know our cultures have meaning and worth, that that culture lives and breathes inside our languages.

Canada knew that, too. Which is why they fought so hard to make us forget them.

There are two scientific designations for depression. The drollier, more scientific term for melancholia is "endogenous depression." In contrast to exogenous, or reactive, depression—which stems from a major event such as divorce, job loss or death in the family—melancholic depression has no apparent outside cause. In other words, it comes out of the blue. This is a rather ridiculous way of putting it when you consider that depression itself is sometimes referred to as "the blues." The blues coming out of the blue. Go figure.

I've heard one person translate a Mohawk phrase for depression to, roughly, "his mind fell to the ground." I ask my sister about this. She's been studying Mohawk for the past three years and is practically fluent. She's raising her daughter to be the same. They're the first members of our family to speak the language since our paternal grandfather a handful of decades ago.

"Wake'nikonhra'kwenhtará:'on," she says. "It's not quite 'fell to the ground.' It's more like, 'His mind is . . .'" She pauses. She repeats the word in Mohawk. Slows it down. Considers what English words in her arsenal can best approximate the phrase. "His mind is . . ." She moves her hands around, palms down, as if doing a large, messy finger painting. "Literally stretched or sprawled out on the ground. It's all over." She explains there's another phrase, too. Wake'nikonhrén:ton. It means "the mind is suspended."

Both words indicate an inability to concentrate. That's one of the signs of depression. I know because I've checked it off in the

- suicide post-colonialism

- role of "integration"

copy of *Mind Over Mood* I took out from the library. It says my depression currently scores a 32 out of a possible 57, or 56 percent. Not the worst. At least I'm not considering suicide. Suicidal thoughts is number ten on the checklist.

There is nothing in the book about the importance of culture, nothing about intergenerational trauma, racism, sexism, colonialism, homophobia, transphobia. As if depression doesn't "see" petty things like race or gender or sexual orientation.

"We're all just people, man," melancholia mutters, pushing its white-boy dreads aside as it passes me a joint.

I've heard people say that when you learn a people's language, you learn their culture. It tells you how they think of the world, how they experience it. That's why translation is so difficult—you have to take one way of seeing the world and translate it to another, while still piecing the words together so they make sense.

Lately I've been thinking a lot about why there is no Mohawk word to differentiate between reactive and melancholic depression. No scientific jargon to legitimize and pathologize. Just wake'nikonhrèn:ton and wake'nikonhra'kwenhtará:'on. A mind hanging by a thread, and a mind spread out on the ground. A before and an after—the same way we measure ourselves against colonialism. What does that mean about our culture?

If we had had more terms and definitions backing up our understanding of depression, would we have been better equipped to deal with it when its effects began tearing our communities apart? Would those who wanted to civilize us have been more open to listening to our pain if we'd used their words? How much could "endogenous," "exogenous," "depression" or "melancholia" have helped when they're all essentially

-language  
and  
colonialism

referring to the same thing? How many ways do we need to describe a person in pain that needs help to heal?

Is there a language of depression? I'm not sure. Depression often seems to me like the exact opposite of language. It takes your tongue, your thoughts, your self-worth, and leaves an empty vessel. Not that different from colonialism, actually. In fact, the *Mind Over Mood* Depression Inventory could double as a checklist for the effects of colonialism on our people. Sad or depressed mood? Check. Feelings of guilt? Check. Irritability? Considering how fast my dad's side of the family are to yell, check. Finding it harder than usual to do things? Well, Canada tried to eradicate our entire way of being, then forced us to take on their values and wondered why we couldn't cope. Definite check. Low self-esteem, self-critical thoughts, tiredness or loss of energy, difficulty making decisions, seeing the future as hopeless, recurrent thoughts of death, suicidal thoughts? Check, check, check.

And if colonialism is like depression, and the Onkwehón:we suffering from it are witches, then I guess it shouldn't surprise anyone that our treatment has always been the same: to light us on fire and let us burn.

I now understand why that therapist in that church reminded me of residential schools. When I think of that man sitting across from me, chastising me for not saying the right words, the words that made it easy for him to understand me and cure me, I think of how my great-grandparents felt when priests and nuns did the same to them. The difference is that the therapist was trying to cure me of being depressed; those priests and nuns were trying to cure my ancestors of being Indian. In some ways they succeeded. In many they did not.

most  
important  
paragraph

most  
important  
paragraph



most important paragraph passage

Both depression and colonialism have stolen my language in different ways. I know this. I feel it inside me even as I struggle to explain it. But that does not mean I have to accept it. I struggle against colonialism the same way I struggle against depression—by telling myself that I'm not worthless, that I'm not a failure, that things will get better.

Our Haudenosaunee condolence ceremony was created by Hiawatha to help a person in mourning after a death. Whoever is conducting the condolence recites the Requickening Address as they offer the grieving person three strands of wampum, one at a time.

One: soft, white deer cloth is used to wipe the tears from their eyes so they can see the beauty of creation again.

Two: a soft feather is used to remove the dust from their ears so they can hear the kind words of those around them.

Three: water, the original medicine, is used to wash away the dust settled in their throats that keeps them from speaking, from breathing, from reconnecting with the world outside their grief.

I know this is supposed to be a ceremony for people with reactive depression caused by a death. As far as I know there is no condolence ceremony for those Onkwehon:we suffering from melancholia—those who are, in effect, mourning themselves. There's no collective condolence ceremony for our people, either—those who need help to see our beauty and hear our songs and speak our language. But maybe, one day, there can be.

Things that were stolen once can be stolen back.

## HALF-BREED

*A Racial Biography in Five Parts*

Dental hygiene was a self-directed exercise in my childhood home, which meant it didn't happen. Unused toothbrushes sat stiff-bristled and impeccable in cups beside the sink. I only ever noticed a smell on my father's breath, though: an alcoholic bitterness. The smell usually corresponded with the subwoofer trembling at midnight, spitting out Bonnie Raitt and other smooth-voiced saints of heartbreak.

I separated my father into two entities: the one who played *Resident Evil* with us for hours, laughing when a zombie jumped out and scared him, then sneaking outside to bang on the living room window to scare us in turn, and the one who stared at me