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The people are the police: Building trust with Aboriginal communities in contemporary Canadian society

Abstract: Policing is an important element in the spectrum of services that impact living conditions, quality of life and social justice for Aboriginal communities. The ultimate policing goal should be to contribute to the realization of societies with safe living conditions and equal access to opportunities, health and happiness. In Canada, Aboriginal peoples were marginalized by colonization, becoming victims of social injustice whose significant effects on communities are felt to this day. This article explores how trust can be regained through improved communication, community engagement and empowerment. Trust building is critical for police and communities to move forward together. Truth telling, transparency and restorative justice may allow police agencies to align with the values of Aboriginal communities, support citizen empowerment, and better carry out the public will.

Sommaire : Le maintien de l'ordre est un élément important de la gamme de services qui ont une incidence sur les conditions de vie, la qualité de vie et la justice sociale pour les collectivités autochtones. Le but ultime du maintien de l'ordre devrait consister à aider les sociétés à offrir des conditions de vie sécuritaires, un accès à l'égalité, à la santé et au bonheur. Au Canada, les peuples autochtones ont été marginalisés par la colonisation et sont devenus victimes de l'injustice sociale dont les importantes répercussions sur les collectivités sont ressenties jusqu'à ce jour. Cet article étudie comment la confiance peut être reconquise grâce à une meilleure communication, à l'engagement communautaire et à la responsabilisation. L'établissement de liens de confiance est essentiel pour que la police et les collectivités puissent progresser ensemble. La divulgation des faits, la transparence et la justice réparatrice pourraient permettre aux services de police de s'aligner sur les valeurs des collectivités autochtones, d'appuyer la responsabilisation des citoyens, et de mieux réaliser la volonté du public.

Introduction

Colonization left an indelible legacy on Canadian Indigenous peoples (hereafter referred to as Aboriginal). Creation of the reserve system,

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residential schools and mass adoption policies, while intended to assimilate Aboriginal peoples with settler society, only compounded the effects of racial segregation. Aboriginal communities now suffer high crime rates, low employment, inadequate education and relatively poor economic prosperity in comparison with privileged settlers' descendants (Hallett, Thornton and Stewart 2006). Much of the responsibility for mitigating these negative effects falls on police agencies, which are responsible, at least in part, for keeping the peace and contributing to the creation of safe communities.

The police's role in Canada's colonization led to distrust that lingers to this day. Indeed, police participation in assimilationist policies was arguably adverse to the principles set out by Sir Robert Peel, which have long informed best practices in policing (Lentz and Chaires 2007). The legacies of colonization in Aboriginal communities have led to distrust of government agencies, including the police, and need to be corrected. This will require improved engagement, positive transformation and empowerment of the police in contributing to improved social justice. While change at the policy level is critical, the real progress will be made at ground level by police officers working collaboratively with partner agencies and individual citizens for the common good.

A social justice perspective suggests that Canadians have a duty to work with displaced peoples to restore what was damaged by colonization. There is also a need to reduce the economic costs of Canada's medical, child welfare, social welfare and justice systems, which have been partially ineffective in addressing many of the lingering symptoms of colonization among the Aboriginal population (Donohue 2007). While the primary justification for change should be that all human beings have equal value, the economic argument alone points to sweeping changes and improved engagement of oppressed peoples to correct these historic inequities that have such high human and economic cost among Canada's Aboriginal peoples.

This article explores the pre-conditions and strategies that may allow Aboriginal communities and Canada's police services to work together toward a common goal of improved social justice. Recent interest in furthering and supporting Aboriginal self-governance has sparked debate over the benefits of developing multiple nation-states within one country's borders (Galloway 2011). It also raises questions about how policing is best incorporated in a changing society. Canada's success in these new realms of governance will be conditioned by Santayana's reflection in 1905 that "those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it" (p. 284). While it is important not to repeat past mistakes, it is equally important to build upon past policies that have proven effective and to acknowledge where progress has been made by police services engaged with Aboriginal communities.

This article maintains that the principles set out by Sir Robert Peel when establishing London's Metropolitan Police Force in 1829, which became the ideal model for policing in Canada and most British colonies (Lentz and Chaires 2007), have the potential to guide how police agencies transform their relationship with Aboriginal communities. Invoking Peel's Principles while acknowledging the truth about colonial treatment of Aboriginal peoples, adopting traditional Aboriginal restorative justice models over European-style adversarial justice paradigms, and employing effective change management techniques can lead to a more positive and promising dynamic between police and Aboriginal communities. This article acknowledges recent developments in liaising and policing in Aboriginal communities, but also notes how difficult it can be to sustain such change. It begins by reminding readers of how the wrenching effects of colonization continue to play out in contemporary Canada.

Colonization and the state of Aboriginal communities

While Aboriginal peoples were integral to European trade networks that exploited exportable goods, they were also politically, economically and socially marginalized during Canada's settlement. As the English and French fought for control of Canadian trade routes, Aboriginal peoples suffered the introduction of new illnesses and political realities arising from European contact. That Canada is still struggling to settle treaty agreements points to significant lingering misunderstandings.

The only global trading agency at the time of Canada's colonization, other than the Dutch East India Company (key in the settlement of South Africa), was the Hudson's Bay Company (HBC), which secured rights to Canada's natural bounties. It is no surprise that Canada's first laws authorized control by the HBC over beaver pelt exports to Europe (Duhaime 2008). Thus began the marginalization of Aboriginal Canadians, who, prior to first European contact, lived traditionally as hunters and gatherers.

The 1876 Indian Act sought to integrate Canada's Aboriginal peoples with European-based culture (Younging 2009). The reserve system and aggressive assimilation policies implemented through mandatory residential schooling led to structural violence with profound effects that still surface and affect individuals and communities to this day. Canada's residential school era ran from the early 1880s until 1969, though the last school was not closed until 1996 (Barlow 2003; CBC News 2008, 2011). The church-managed, government-funded schools were designed to separate Aboriginal peoples from their languages and cultures and integrate them into European style society (Galley 2009). History has demonstrated that

resettlement programs, such as Canada's reserves and South Africa's townships, were failures with significant human costs to Indigenous peoples.¹ Many of Canada's reserves have become ghettos whose poor living conditions have prompted international condemnation (Goar 2006).

In many parts of Canada, Aboriginal youth are committing suicide and engaging in extreme violence in higher proportions than any other ethnic group, a tragic trend expected to double over the next decade if not interrupted (Totten 2009). After the tragic suicides of nine young people, aged ten to 17, between March 2008 and May 2009 on the isolated Ontario reserve of Pikangikum, Ontario's deputy coroner found that the residents were living in third-world conditions with no running water, outhouses that often infected drinking water, minimal electricity from diesel generators and extreme substance abuse rates among several generations of residents (Lauwers 2012). Poor living conditions, substance abuse problems and tragic suicides are common on many reserves and among Aboriginal populations across Canada. In June 2012 Manitoba's Aboriginal community mourned the suicide of five youths, which occurred over a period of six weeks (Paul 2012). While the precipitating causes of suicide and other events can be analysed in greater detail, they occur against the backdrop of an overall perceived lack of prospects for young people on reserves.²

Aboriginal populations have increased rapidly over the past twenty years, with higher birthrates than other ethnic groups (Hallet, Thornton and Stewart 2006). The average Aboriginal person's age in 1996 was ten years younger than the average non-Aboriginal Canadian, and that trend continues (2006). Income is significantly lower among Aboriginal people than the non-Aboriginal population (Collin and Jensen 2009). In 2006, Aboriginal people were four times more likely than non-Aboriginal Canadians to live in crowded residences (Statistics Canada 2008).

Between 1950 and 2000, the percentage of Aboriginal prisoners in Manitoba jails increased from 10 to 60 per cent; over 70 per cent of all incarcerated youth in 1997–98 were Aboriginal (Hallet, Thornton and Stewart 2006), a trend that has played out, with some regional variances, in many parts of Canada. Excessive conflict with the law may be, at least in part, a symptom of Aboriginal peoples' socio-economic challenges. Sheldon (2001) described the American justice system as targeting people in lower socio-economic strata, perpetuating existing hierarchies of class, gender and race. The same is occurring in Canada, with Aboriginal peoples grossly overrepresented in the justice system relative to their population size. Many Aboriginal prison inmates and large numbers in the Aboriginal population in general suffer from fetal alcohol spectrum disorder, a brain injury caused by maternal consumption of alcohol during pregnancy. This epidemic can be attributed to the high concentration of

substance abuse problems in the Aboriginal community (Sanders and Welch 2011).

A prison system that warehouses people with deeply rooted, systemic behaviour problems passed down through the generations, rather than seeking to eliminate those root causes, amounts to structural violence against a class of people. Programs that perpetuate high prison recidivism are a poor investment for three reasons: 1) they are ineffective in improving community safety; 2) they do a disservice both to victims and perpetrators; and 3) they offer a poor return on a massive financial investment.

In highlighting the general ineffectiveness of modern justice systems, no malicious intent is inferred or assigned to either their creators or curators. A more insidious force seems to be at play: general societal indifference. The allegation here is not against the dedicated people who work in many corners of the justice system: policing, prosecutions, the courts, the prison system, academe, non-government organizations or against dedicated community leaders. Rather, the responsibility for indifference rests with society at large and the democratic processes that have allowed structural violence to continue.

Colonization and the residential school program disrupted connections between many Aboriginal peoples and their cultures, with lingering inter-generational effects including widespread substance abuse and diminished parenting skills (Hallet, Thornton and Stewart 2006; Canada, Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996; Comack et al 2009). Aboriginal peoples simultaneously face the barriers of low income and racism (McCracken and Michell 2006). Volkan (1997) described how trauma is perpetuated across generations. Canada's growing Aboriginal street gang problems are one example. Many Aboriginal youth have watched their parents reel from the impacts of living on reserves, attending residential schools and experiencing government seizure and adoption of Aboriginal babies in the 1960s (Andres 1981). This heritage, coupled with the personal trauma of abuse or neglect that often happens at home, contributes to increased gang involvement (Comack et al 2009). Indeed, gangs often provide the identity and structure that children need and cannot find elsewhere (Comack et al 2009; Totten 2009).

Citizens should all have equal prospects for happiness, dignity, safety and the opportunity to thrive under the protection of competent, trustworthy and fair government agencies, including the police. Improved social justice requires structural change and engagement of Aboriginal peoples to overcome the mantle of oppression resulting from colonization. The impacts persist in contemporary Canadian society as Aboriginal people continue migrating in increasing numbers from poor rural reserves into equally poor urban cores of Canadian cities (Norris, Kerr and Nault 1995; Norris et al 2000).³

Legacy of distrust: colonization and policing

Aboriginal peoples make up less than ten per cent of Canada's population, which may partially explain why conditions are so slow to improve for them. There is chronic indifference among a large portion of mainstream Canadian society to the suffering of marginalized Aboriginal peoples living in third-world conditions on many reserves and low socio-economic urban neighbourhoods. The discourse about social justice in Canada is much about what is not said; unsettled treaty claims are often viewed by privileged (non-Aboriginal) Canadians as a challenge for government bureaucrats and, thus, beyond their personal responsibility.

Armed stand-offs, land occupations and protests have occasionally attracted public attention, but often with little effect on public policy. Orchestrated conflicts aiming to raise public awareness can also have negative effects, polarizing ethnocentric views that are held by many. Non-Aboriginal Canadians often argue that they were not responsible for the original injustice and that today's Aboriginal peoples are not the ones who were oppressed. These positions illustrate the need for improved understanding among many Canadians of the connections between modern social problems and Canada's troubled past, as well as the intergenerational trauma carried forward in post-conflict societies (Volkan 1997). The costs to all Canadian taxpayers have continued to increase in light of mounting justice, court, policing, and health expenditures for Aboriginal peoples.

Policing can contribute to safe living conditions, positive peace and social justice in a society that provides equal access to education, health and opportunities for happiness

In 2008, the government of Canada formally apologized for the residential school system that left such deep scars in Aboriginal communities (Menziés 2009). While the apology acknowledged unsettled treaty rights to redistribution of wealth, little has occurred since (Chrisjohn and Wasacase 2009). Peace is a noble goal. However, peace in the social justice context extends beyond the mere absence of war. Jeong (1995, 2005) has maintained that sustainable peace extends beyond holding elections or maintaining ceasefires. Rather, it means addressing deeper post-conflict social problems including group power imbalances, socio-economic cleavages and regional animosities (in Borer 2006). Galtung (1996) distinguished between negative peace, which is defined by the absence of war, and positive peace, which includes the elimination of poverty, improved education and social welfare.

The goal of policing should not simply be crime reduction or sustaining negative peace, as defined by Galtung. Policing can contribute to safe living conditions, positive peace and social justice in a society that provides equal access to education, health and opportunities for happiness. However, police agencies cannot be solely responsible for addressing these complex social issues; they are a small but significant part of a system that includes social and child welfare, medical and educational institutions, and the largest and most significant element – the Canadian public.

The police cannot improve their own legitimacy until they are perceived to be fair and equitable in their use of authority

While they cannot act alone, the police are highly visible and often influential leaders and arbitrators on social issues. Yet, many Aboriginal people, either as a result of personal experiences or of what they have seen in their communities, still do not trust the police. The police cannot improve their own legitimacy until they are perceived to be fair and equitable in their use of authority. While police authority is derived from law, trust in them is essential to public consent. Research has confirmed that people will not trust the police unless they are perceived as enforcing laws in ways that are aligned with community values (Hohl, Bradford and Stanko 2010). Impoverished people are not likely to trust the justice system if they perceive the police as protecting elites' interests and not their own.

The principles that Sir Robert Peel set out in the early 1800s to guide the development of professional policing in London resonate with potential for Canada's current challenges. Peel's Principles are not published in an original document but were recorded, as follows, from public presentations that he gave (Lentz and Chaires 2007; Gayder 2008):

1. The police exist to prevent crime and disorder.
2. Police ability to perform their duties depends upon public approval of police actions.
3. Police must secure willing cooperation of the public in voluntary observation of the law to be able to secure and maintain the respect of the public.
4. The degree of cooperation of the public that can be secured diminishes proportionately to the necessity of the use of physical force.
5. Police seek and preserve public favour not by catering to public opinion, but by constantly demonstrating absolute impartial service to the law.

6. Police use physical force to the extent necessary to secure observance of the law or to restore order only when persuasion, advice and warnings are found to be insufficient.
7. Police, at all times, should maintain a relationship with the public that gives reality to the historic tradition that the police are the public and the public are the police; the police being only members of the public who are paid to give full-time attention to duties which are incumbent upon every citizen in the interests of community welfare and existence.
8. Police should always direct their action strictly towards their functions, and never appear to usurp the powers of the judiciary.
9. The test of police efficiency is the absence of crime and disorder, not the visible evidence of police action in dealing with it.

The second principle is key to effective partnership; without public approval and legitimacy, the police can accomplish very little. Trust is critical for public approval and, therefore, to police effectiveness. Principle seven, which states that “people are the police and the police are the people,” is also highly relevant to this discussion. A justice system perceived to be of the people and for the protection of society at large, and not just for protecting elites, contributes to public trust and confidence. Creating this legitimacy, however, requires police officials and citizens to agree upon which values are important and how they should be supported with regulatory authority.

The challenge: trust building and engagement

Trust is earned. People need to feel that they are on a level playing field, that justice is fair and unbiased, and that they have control over their choice to adhere to laws and avoid conflict with the system. Jackson and Bradford (2010) found that trust is improved when the police are seen as competent and fair guardians of generally accepted values. In order to trust the justice system and its agents, Aboriginal peoples and all citizens must feel that they protect all parties’ rights equally. If people perceive that they can be arbitrarily detained, searched and arrested, regardless of whether laws and the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms define these rights or not, they may deem it futile to base their lives on adherence to laws and cooperation with civil authorities who do not, in their opinion, represent their interests. People must believe that the laws are current and applicable.

Many Canadian Aboriginal peoples are caught in the middle, between perceived widespread mismanagement and squabbling within Aboriginal governance structures and federal government programs that are widely

viewed as paternalistic and ineffective (Welch and Rabson 2011). A study in 16 different European countries found that perceived government corruption correlated with decreased public trust in the police (Kaariainen 2007). In 2010, \$300 million in federal funds were co-managed on Canadian First Nations reserves by government-contracted accountants (Welch and Rabson 2011). Auditor General Sheila Fraser reported in 2011 that, despite increased financial support to Aboriginal peoples and the appointment of government co-managers to oversee spending, the living conditions for many Aboriginal people had worsened (Fraser 2011). Police in rural and urban settings are seen by many Aboriginal people as the enforcement arm of mainstream government, which has invested huge amounts of money while not always significantly improving their quality of life.

Westmarland (2010) studied the effects of community-based approaches that engage the public on police–community trust. Her research in England found that citizens generally want more input into police priorities and decisions. The police, in contrast, were cautious about some people’s motives and uncomfortable with sharing unless the citizens involved were competent and able to make valuable and informed contributions. Police officers were more concerned about consumers (the criminals) than customers (citizens) wanting input. Obviously, the police do not want criminals directing their operations.

The police and the public need to work together to earn each other’s trust. Difficult balances exist; police agencies can lose trust through attempts to manipulate the people with whom they work, and they can lose credibility and effectiveness by attempting to work with people who lack credibility in their own communities. Government resources should, therefore, be directed to assisting marginalized groups with bridge-building opportunities and developing grass roots leaders’ skills to better represent their communities. Sensitivity development must also occur within police services, so that officers can be trusted by the people with whom they seek to work. Research confirms that, when police are perceived as fair, citizens will voluntarily cooperate with them (Tyler 2005; Waddington 2010). This is also consistent with Peel’s Principles, as the public must consent to be policed.

Communication is critical in police trust building. Hohl, Bradford and Stanko (2010) found that public confidence rises when people feel that the police understand their issues. Public information sharing must be central to police trust building strategies; they must communicate their goals, values and vision, and demonstrate that their goals and policies are aligned with community needs. They also must reassure the public that police indiscretions and allegations of misconduct and corruption will be taken seriously.

Goldsmith (2005) studied police trust in developing and post-authoritarian countries, and found that, without public trust, policing by consent was difficult and community safety suffered. In addition,

Goldsmith found that non-government organizations (NGOs) play important roles as intermediaries. Individual citizens are often intimidated or ill-equipped to raise issues or complaints about the police or to advocate for their own or others' rights. NGOs can monitor and challenge police activities, educate the police and the public, and improve communication that is crucial for trust building.

The actions of one police officer can positively or negatively ripple through a community

Peel's second principle (the police must meet public approval) and seventh principle (the people are the police and the police are the people) resonate for police–community trust building, and highlight the significance of the police being perceived as fair and impartial. A study of Chicago youth found that perceptions and trust of the police were most often affected by personal experiences (Flexon, Lurigio and Greenleaf 2009). Youth reported that, if they saw a friend being badly treated or disrespected (in their view) by the police, their trust declined proportionally. This revelation brings the responsibility for trust building from the policy and organizational level down to the actions of individual officers carrying out daily duties. The actions of one police officer can positively or negatively ripple through a community. Police executives must balance community trust with the need to support their officers in difficult, high-risk work. Police agencies must investigate allegations of misconduct decisively and apply swift consequences, with community safety as the priority, when complaints are found to be valid. This responsiveness to community concerns can separate police agencies from “bad apples” in the eyes of the public.

Improved trust in policing requires fair, impartial and consistent application of the law, guided by the principle of equal protection of all members of society, as articulated by Sir Robert Peel. Accomplishing this objective requires aligning police goals with community values, and this cannot occur if community needs have not been understood and acknowledged. Police agencies with goals that Aboriginal people do not appreciate or understand are likely to fail in the eyes of those communities.

Truth and reconciliation

If police agencies are to align their work with the values and needs of Aboriginal communities, the truth must be known about current issues and the services that police are able and willing to provide. Needs, perceptions and expectations can vary greatly within groups, and among police and

citizens alike. Even within police ranks, there may be significantly varied opinions about police roles, from more enforcement-oriented paradigms to community-based preventative approaches.

Clear communication and truth telling are critical in order to separate myths from reality, grounding people in a clear understanding of police capabilities and resources so that realistic expectations can be established. If public expectations are realistic then police agencies may be able to meet them. If people's expectations are based on rumours and fear, then the police may have little chance of overcoming them.

Weschler observed that truth is often more important than justice to victims of oppression (in Borer 2006). Piet Meiring has noted that many people who testified about atrocities committed under the South African apartheid regime were more interested in public acknowledgement than justice or compensation.⁴ Archivists at the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) head office in Winnipeg have advised that many people who came forward to tell their stories of victimization had never previously shared their childhood experiences.⁵ Many chose to break their silence so that new generations could learn from the past. The Canadian TRC was established in 1998 with a mandate that emphasizes the importance of truth telling and acknowledgement in forming shared understandings for the future (Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2011).

LeBeuf (2011) notes that, while there is no mention of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP)'s role in the residential school system in existing literature or history books, many Aboriginal peoples hold the RCMP accountable for assisting Indian agents with the enforcement of the Indian Act, the Family Allowance Act, the pass system that controlled their movements on and off reserves, and government bans prohibiting Aboriginal people from consuming liquor or holding ceremonial dances and gatherings. While the literature denouncing the government's role in oppressing Aboriginal peoples during the residential school era does not mention the police, they are commonly perceived as a significant part of the system of control (LeBeuf 2011). Therefore, it is important for police agencies to acknowledge perceived historical wrongs.

Borer (2006) has underlined the importance of determining what type of truth is sought by mechanisms such as truth commissions, underlining that the act of truth telling should not be assumed to be restorative and positive. In her journalistic coverage of the South African TRC, Krog (2000) chronicled some peoples' questioning of whether public truth telling was simply re-opening old wounds. Nonetheless, the potentially personally humiliating descriptions of victimization, exposing corrupt or ineffective government or police practices may allow perceived injustices to be recognized and corrected, and could be seen as a public service. Garton Ash defines success in truth telling as meeting any of the following criteria:

truth, justice, reconciliation, closure, healing, national unity or prevention of future abuses (in Borer 2006).

Careful thought also needs to be given to the goals of post-conflict reconciliation mechanisms. Borer (2006) has observed that no single, accepted definition of the term "reconciliation" exists. In 2004, the RCMP officially apologized for its involvement in the "Indian Residential School legacy" (RCMP 2004). Moving forward requires that policing organizations learn from the past, correcting practices and addressing new issues as they arise. Otherwise, further inaction may lead to even greater loss of trust. Reconciliation should have a goal of creating a common understanding to get the police and community all rowing in the same direction.

Many Canadian Aboriginal residential school survivors, their ancestors and descendants have long distrusted police. This distrust, particularly among Aboriginal youth, has been exacerbated by intergenerational trauma, high substance abuse rates and poverty. Today's increasing gang violence problems can be linked, at least in part, to this legacy of distrust (Comack et al 2009). The Canadian government, its Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development, police services and other involved agencies could probably do more at public forums, such as the TRC, to clear the air about historical events and develop shared visions for the future. Meiring noted that the South African TRC asked tough questions of officials representing the agencies involved in apartheid (see note 4). Such truth telling increased transparency, improved communication and forced agencies to acknowledge their shortcomings and set a course for improvement.

Only when Aboriginal realities are acknowledged can agencies like the police be created and supported by the people and for the people both within Aboriginal communities and among the rest of Canada's population. Failure to do so may present the police as reactionary and isolated, existing primarily to protect some more than others. There is strong support for public policing across Canada. The police must use that credibility and strong public support to take up leadership roles in multidisciplinary collaborative approaches designed to enforce laws well, and improve social justice. Government services, NGOs and groups representing all Canadians, including Aboriginal peoples, must work together if today's complex social challenges are to be overcome. Increased collaboration, however, calls for acknowledging where systems can be improved and a willingness to change.

Embracing restorative justice

The most effective model for building police trust in Aboriginal communities may involve traditional restorative justice principles and mechanisms (Hamilton and Sinclair 1991). Restorative justice is based first on the

principle that both offenders and victims live in the community and, second, that both need to be involved along with society at large in resolving conflicts and restoring harmony. Scholars have described how restorative justice processes can empower the community by involving many people (Griffin 2001; Linden, Clairmont and Murphy 2001). Since Aboriginal cultures value family, and many are matriarchal, effective conflict resolution and justice processes must involve key community members such as grandmothers, elders, political leaders, medicine men and the families of perpetrators and victims. This inclusiveness could bring greater credibility to the process and any sanctions imposed.

Roach (2000) cautions that, while restorative justice improves community involvement, it risks becoming professionalized. A true restorative justice process should not be imposed paternalistically by mainstream government, but rather should be supported so that it can evolve in the community. Increased use of restorative justice processes holds promise to potentially reduce Aboriginal prison populations by expanding accountability of offenders, and reducing reliance on policing and corrections processes through deeper community involvement. The challenge lies in embracing a vision and finding the front-end resources to implement restorative justice models that may reduce the long-term impacts and costs of criminalization and recidivism (Taylor-Butts 2000).

Transforming police and communities: progress and risks

Many Canadian police agencies have taken positive steps over the past two decades to improve relationships with Aboriginal peoples. Most major police services now have diversity liaison officers who are able to build relationships with Aboriginal leaders and act as contact points between the police and the community when politically charged or sensitive events occur. Following the 1997 inquiry into Dudley George's death at Ipperwash Park, the Ontario Provincial Police (OPP) created a provincial liaison team, comprised of officers sensitive to Aboriginal issues. The team becomes involved in any incident involving Aboriginal communities that may be political or contentious. The Sûreté du Québec has similar provincial liaison teams, which they believe have been effective.⁶

Many First Nations have their own police forces, funded through tripartite agreements between the Government of Canada, the provinces and Aboriginal communities. Currently such policing is supported by 168 service agreements for 408 First Nations communities (Canada, Public Safety Canada 2012). Many Aboriginal reserves, however, lack sufficient policing resources. OPP Commissioner Chris Lewis stated that poor

conditions and a lack of police resources are endemic in reserves across Canada and that this problem needs to be addressed (Lewis 2012). For example, Pikangikum has seven police officers in a stand-alone agency, supported by the OPP. A workload analysis determined that, if the OPP took over policing in that community, they would deploy a detachment of thirty officers. Superintendent Susanne Decock, commander of the OPP Aboriginal Policing Bureau, noted that even experienced OPP officers often feel traumatized after short assignments in impoverished places like Pikangikum (Decock 2012).

Aboriginal issues are too large and complex for any one agency to manage alone

Some police services working primarily within Aboriginal communities have instituted “peacekeepers” in support of regular constables. The Manitoulin Anishinabek police in Ontario, for example, has peacekeepers for diverse services, including prisoner escorts and guard duties. The innovation in this tiered policing model lies in its connection to traditional Aboriginal culture. United Chiefs and Council Manitoulin Anishnaabe Police Chief Rodney Nahwegahbow has described how the peacekeepers in Manitoulin are heavily involved in almost all cultural events, fostering a stronger connection between the police and the community (Nahwegahbow 2012).

Greater Aboriginal engagement in policing and justice issues would likely improve trust, operationalizing Peel’s principle, “the police are the people and the people are the police,” creating a virtuous circle. Police agencies have encountered many challenges in hiring Aboriginal candidates and maintaining public confidence and community relationships (Hamilton and Sinclair 1991; Police Sector Council 2006). Like a marriage, these relationships take ongoing effort and a willingness to adapt and change.

Despite this progress, the challenges of relationship and trust building can be exacerbated by difficulties associated with organizational change. Trice and Beyer (1993) found that as many as 90 per cent of corporate strategy and organizational changes in American companies fail because little thought is given to the external factors over which administrators have little control and the impact that they will have on people, including increased anxiety (Bridges 2003; Cameron and Green 2004). Lewin (1947) suggested that leaders must prepare people psychologically, helping them to understand the need for change in order to improve the effectiveness of and anchor change.

In the case of police agencies, natural organizational resistance to change is compounded by their need to work with numerous other systems such

as health care, child welfare and the courts. Understanding the need for change can be improved through education, cultural diversity and sensitivity training, and leadership that inspires police officers to strive for a vision to improve and maintain public trust. Much of this is underway in Canada, but it needs to be intensified, particularly in relation to Aboriginal communities.

Trust is a two-way relationship between police agencies and the communities that they serve

Improved communication and engagement fosters trust between police agencies and the communities that they serve. Communities and police agencies need to develop shared narratives to guide their work in reducing crime and improving quality of life (Lederach 1996; Byrne et al 2009; Byrne and Senehi 2012). Increased citizen engagement and participation in solving social problems requires a willingness among the police to accept input and share power, which represents a fundamental change for many police agencies that, historically, have been highly reactive.

Gladwell (2002) described how change can occur once sufficient critical mass has been reached. Crime in New York City dropped once police began dealing with mischief, such as painting graffiti (Walsh 2001). Intervening early with youth who are committing petty crimes was found to prevent them from escalating to more serious crimes. Trust building is similar: it develops incrementally over time. How police agencies respond to allegations of misconduct is critical because hard-earned progress can be set back significantly by perceived breaches of trust.

Consent from the public to be policed requires trust (Goldsmith 2005). When police agencies and the communities that they serve better understand each other the people become the police and the police become the people. Police agencies can become the professional arm of the people by managing highly trained force options, resources and authority to support the collective will. This evolution brings the police in line with the community as a trusted resource that is fully supported, rather than resisted, by Aboriginal communities.

Conclusion

This article has presented a case for the immediate need to encourage acknowledgement and trust building in Canadian society, particularly between police services and Canada's Aboriginal population, while recognizing that Aboriginal issues are too large and complex for any one agency to manage alone. True community engagement and empowerment can

only occur when trust exists. This takes honesty, courage, leadership and vision in police agencies and communities, to empower the police as an arm of the people and the community in support of the police. Through trust and engagement, people may work with and support the police and allow the police to support their goals. By engaging Canada's marginalized Aboriginal peoples, police services may contribute to more inclusion and safety in their communities, and people may be free to pursue improved quality of life and social justice.

Prothrow-Stith and Spivak (2004) describe how the community of Boston pulled together to reduce youth violence dramatically in the 1990s. They observed that success was achieved through cooperation over a long period of time, and by tapping the talents, skills and understanding in the community. This model of community engagement holds great potential for Canada.

Professor Robert Vosloo has reflected on how the church, as well as faculty at his South African university, first justified apartheid and later condemned it. He emphasized that history is constantly recreated and differently understood as new information comes to light (Vosloo 2011). By being open to understanding and acknowledging past mistakes, as Vosloo observed, people will be better prepared not to repeat them.

An opportunity exists in Canada to set the course for a better future. There is a path for improved police–community trust and cooperation, with less prescription, more listening and more dialogue. Trust is a two-way relationship between police agencies and the communities that they serve. It is earned, and needs to be nurtured with effective change management principles, allowing agencies to transform and evolve to meet changing community needs. Through truth telling and transparency, police agencies that are willing to change can better align with community values and become an instrument of the people. By doing so, the police can become the people and the people will become the police.

Notes

- 1 South Africa's Townships became massive impoverished compounds with some of the poorest living conditions in the world, and almost impossible to rectify (Noor 2011).
- 2 While beyond the scope of this article, education and prospects for better jobs seem key in interrupting these disturbing trends of suicide, substance abuse and violence. There has been slow but steady improvement in recent years. Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada (2012) reports, based on the census data of 1996, 2001 and 2006, that the gap in unemployment between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Canadians dropped from 14 per cent in 1996 to seven per cent in 2006. However, more research is needed on the validity of some of these measures. Twenty-eight years of law enforcement experience has taught me that many homeless and indigent people live under the radar of government systems seeking to account for them.

- 3 Kiera Ladner (University of Manitoba) stated in a presentation for the Institute of Public Administration Canada at the Manitoba Legislature that, if the provinces do not address the economic disparity between mainstream Canada and the Aboriginal communities through settlement of the seven treaties in the next 20 years, "it will not be pretty, Oka was nothing." She was referring to the protracted siege by the Mohawk tribe near the Quebec town of Oka in summer 1990 (Ladner and Simpson 2010).
- 4 Personal conversation with the author on 26 June 2011. Piet Meiring sat with Desmond Tutu as one of South Africa's original Truth and Reconciliation commissioners.
- 5 Personal conversations with archivists during a visit to TRC headquarters in Winnipeg (9 May 2011).
- 6 From presentations by OPP Superintendent Susanne Decock and Deputy Commissioner Marcel Savard of the Sûreté du Québec (SQ) for the First Nations Managers and Practitioners conference in Montreal, Quebec (24 April 2012).

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