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Decolonization as Reconciliation: The Colonial Dilemma of Canada's Residential School Apology and Restitution

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Between the 1870s and the 1980s in Canada, 150,000 indigenous Canadian children were forcibly removed from their homes and sent to residential schools in a government-led policy aimed at assimilating them into Christian Canadians. Many indigenous children were subjected to psychological, physical, and sexual abuse in these institutions. This article examines the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) launched by the Canadian Prime Minister in 2008, and questions its ability to bring about reconciliation. It argues that the structure and nature of the TRC stems from the same colonial structure and context that led to the formation of residential schools in the first place, and argues that for genuine reconciliation, non-indigenous Canadians must engage in a 'decolonizing' process and accept responsibility that the colonial mindset behind the policy of residential schools continues to affect relationships with indigenous people today.

Keywords: Indigenous Canadians, residential schools, reconciliation, colonial, decolonisation, settler, re-storying.

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Introduction

In recent decades the Canadian public have heard a number of apologies from various governments and institutions. The apology to Japanese Canadians (1988) and Italian Canadians (1990) for treatment during World War Two, the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) Statement of Reconciliation (1998) to former residential school occupants, and the apology for the 'Chinese Head Tax' (2006), are just a few examples.

In 2008, the current Prime Minister Stephen Harper, added to the trend with his public acknowledgement and apology concerning the Indian Residential School System (IRS), a government-led policy between 1874 and 1996, that in conjunction with four major church groups, removed indigenous Canadians involuntarily from their homes and sent them to boarding schools where they were forced to learn English and adopt Christianity and Canadian customs. The hope was that residential schools would 'get rid of the Indian problem' by 'killing the Indian in the child' (Ryan, as quoted in Chrisjohn, Young, & Maraun 2006:61). Harper's apology, which also initiated the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), was praised for being a watershed in Canadian relationships with indigenous people. Not only had he helped to 'mark an end of the dark period in our collective history as a nation' (Simon, as quoted in Martin 2009:50), but the apology was also a key factor in the movement 'towards healing, reconciliation and resolution of the sad legacy of Indian Residential Schools' (Harper, as quoted in Martin 2009:49). It finally seemed that non-indigenous Canadians were addressing the legacies and owning up to the injustices of the residential schools.

This article looks more closely at the apology and at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and questions its ability to bring about reconciliation. It argues that the structure and nature of these current reconciliation projects have the potential to be ineffective because they stem from the same structure and context that led to the formation of residential schools in the first place. This context is colonial in nature and simultaneously reinforces the myth of Canada as a tolerant, benevolent state while placing the burden of reconciliation solely on indigenous populations.

As such, I argue that for proper transformation and restitution to occur Canadians must engage in a 'decolonizing' process – a process that requires a more critical, self-reflective, anti-oppressive, and anti-racist approach to relationships with indigenous populations. This process removes unequal power relationships and accepts



responsibility for the way in which the philosophy behind residential schools continues to affect relationships with indigenous people today. At the same time non-indigenous Canadians must work to 're-story' and 're-imagine' history and their relationships with indigenous Canadians, to find new ways of communicating and working together that transcend the current power relations and trends.

The first section of this article addresses terms and definitions, then provides a brief overview of the residential schools and explains their relevance as a colonial project. It then deconstructs how this colonial mindset is present in the current apology and TRC and the potential problems this creates. Following this the argument for 'decolonization' will be made and a new paradigm will be laid out to explore how non-indigenous Canadians might work to break the patterns of violence that continue to define their relationship with indigenous people. Finally, suggestions will be made for what needs to be done and how this 'decolonized' approach can be brought into reconciliation efforts regarding residential schools.

Definitions and Terms

This article does not come from an indigenous perspective and has been conceived in English. This is not to say that it does not have legitimacy, but that it is limited in both its language and its discourse. Recognizing the limits of such a method, 'indigenous' is used in this paper to describe all First Nations, Métis, and Inuit persons in Canada. Although no legal definition exists, the term First Nations refers to Amerindian peoples in Canada, both those who have been registered with the federal government or with a band which signed a Treaty with the Crown (Status Indians) and those who have not (Non-Status Indians). Métis refers to those with mixed European and First Nations parentage, and Inuit refers to culturally similar indigenous peoples inhabiting the Arctic regions of Canada (Shepard, O'Neill, & Guenette 2006). When possible, individual tribes or groups will be referenced.

As stated above, this paper seeks to address colonialism and the colonial mindset within Canada. Colonialism occurs when one people or culture is conquered by another people or culture through destroying and/or weakening the basic social structure in the conquered culture and replacing it with that of the conqueror. The colonial mindset creates the foundation for colonial activity by generating an incommensurable gulf between the dominant group (the colonizers or the settlers) and less powerful group (the colonized or indigenous groups) that simultaneously demonstrates the superior nature of the colonizers while labelling the colonized as 'other' – backwards and inferior. The privileged position of the colonizers relative to 'natives', together with the rationales justifying it, create a divide between the populations (Green 1995). As the dichotomy between the two groups widens, the dominant group comes to represent the 'true subjects' of nationhood and the embodiment of the quintessential characteristics and its values, ethics, and mores. This 'exalted' status must be continuously re-enforced through violent encounters with the 'inferior' group in a manner that appears to bring 'civilization'. Because the dominant group sees itself as superior, these acts of violence are justified as progressive and benevolent because they bring civility and culture to the 'savage'.



Residential Schools: A Brief History

Residential schools were established as a partnership between the federal government and churches in Canada. The government believed it would be easier and more practical to focus on assimilating and moulding indigenous children, rather than adults, into Christian Canadians. As a result, between the 1870s to the 1980s, approximately 150,000 children were forcibly taken away from their homes and shipped to one of more than 130 schools scattered across seven provinces and two territories. The residential school curriculum was based on the assumption that no part of Indigenous culture was worth preserving. As Duncan Campbell Scott, the director of the Indian residential school programme from 1913 to 1932, stated:

I want to get rid of the Indian problem. I do not think as a matter of fact, that this country ought to continuously protect a class of people who are able to stand alone... Our object is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic, and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department, that is the whole object of this Bill (as quoted in Mackenzie 2009:91)

Within the residential school system, students were severely punished if they were caught speaking their first language or practising their traditions. There were countless cases of sexual, emotional, spiritual, and physical abuse. Students lived in substandard conditions and often received a substandard education that made it difficult to function within an eurocentric 'Canadian' setting. In many cases children returned home no longer able to communicate with or relate to their families. They no longer had the skills to help their families and were ashamed of their heritage. Residential schools robbed indigenous children of their language, their beliefs, their self-respect, their culture, and, in some cases, their very existence in a vain attempt to make them more 'Canadian.'

While Canada has not been a traditional colonial nation in that it has not extended its hegemony to other lands and continents, these residential school policies were imbued with the colonial mindset. These practices, which took indigenous populations away from their language, culture, and spirituality in order to assimilate them, can only be described as colonial in nature. Beyond this, many of the children were subjected to psychological, physical, and sexual abuse in institutions that should have had a duty to protect them. When this is added to the many other policies and practices in Canada towards indigenous populations, practices that included the taking away of indigenous land and resources, laws banning spiritual and traditional practises, and the setting up of reserves, the only conclusion to be reached is that Canada, despite its virtues, has been as much a colonizer of its own people as other countries have been in their overseas dependencies.

Colonial Mindset Within Current Reconciliation Attempts

One of the results of the colonial mindset is that history is distorted by the colonizers to a myth-like state where certain contributions are overstated making others invisible. In the case of Canada, the 'official version' of history that has been taught focuses on



European settlement and consciousness, leaving the existence of Aboriginal nations prior to the configuration of the contemporary state romanticized, homogenized, and largely irrelevant. Additionally, contact with the indigenous population and colonial policies have been brushed over, justified, and distorted to fit in the idea of Canada as a peacemaking nation that negotiated treaties with indigenous peoples, made laws and established an Indian policy designed to 'bring to the West the peace, order, and good government that were hallmarks of imperialism and the colonial project of "civilizing savages"' (Regan 2006). As a result, the legacies and paradigms of the colonial mind continue to structure current policies and trends regarding indigenous populations. As Green states, this 'myth-making' [of the colonial mindset] satisfies those 'who do not know, or choose not to know' the fuller historical record, but it does not provide the foundation of information on which to build policy responses to contemporary crises rooted in the colonial past' (2005:85).

There are several ways in which the legacies of the colonial mindset are still clearly enforced in current Canadian reconciliation attempts with the residential school system. The first is the lack of indigenous language and concepts within the apology and the TRC. Instead, the language of the apology is dominated by Western terms and ideas. A good example of this is the way time is constructed as linear rather than evoking the indigenous conception of time as circular, wherein the past is alive in the present. This can be seen in Stephen Harper's apology, which acknowledges that wrongs were committed, but contains these within a past exception to the rule. Tied into this linear idea of time is the linking of reconciliation with resolution; a Western term which 'evokes the end of conflict but which is less clear about the extent to which it entails an ongoing relationship or responsibility' (Martin 2009:52). Western conceptions of reconciliation focus on forgetting the past and putting it behind in order to move forward rather than in seeing a past that can be alive and worked out in the present. This limits the way in which residential schools are viewed, and confines them to a past chapter that needs to be closed rather than to policies that are very much part of the present.

Another way in which current reconciliation projects are colonially oriented is in their use of structures that are dominated by the Canadian state's notion of reconciliation rather than indigenous beliefs. In fact, at its core, reconciliation is a Western concept with religious connotations rather than an indigenous concept. Although projects such as the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement and the formation of the TRC are designed to address the devastating legacies of residential schools, their focus is on the level of individual 'survivors' and is constrained by political and legal realities. Much of the reconciliation process started at a legal level and focused on monetary compensation packages. While these initiatives are important, they fail to incorporate a more indigenous-based approach to trauma that would have focused on the reunification and regeneration of families and communities rather than individuals. The Western model also focused on stories of abuse and victimization rather than stories of resistance and resilience. Finally, it ignored the cultural and spiritual dimensions of survivors' experiences (Corntassel et al. 2009). When non-indigenous Canadians ask indigenous populations to embrace these Western concepts and structures within the



TRC and the apology, they are asking them to adopt the culture that oppressed them in the first place rather than moving beyond a colonial structure.

Secondly, the apology continues to reiterate this notion that Canada was (and still is) essentially a peaceful and tolerant nation. This can be seen in the emphasis on 'renewal' in current reconciliation projects concerning residential schools, suggesting there was once a harmonious relationship between indigenous people and non-indigenous Canadians that we must return to. As Henderson & Wakeham noted:

[Western reconciliation] implies that, once upon a time, indigenous peoples and settlers lived in peace and harmony, working collaboratively towards shared long-term goals, only to have residential schooling (which began with only the best of intentions) rear its ugly head and drive a wedge between Canadians and indigenous peoples. The job of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, like that of a good marital therapist... is to mend the rift, heal the split, and make the two conjoin again as one. (2009:14)

As such the current reconciliation is yet another step in the Canadian story of 'helping the Indian to achieve healing and forgiveness' and the burden and agency of reconciliation is on indigenous peoples. This is seen in the wide use of the language of healing and forgiveness, creating a one-sidedness to Canada's attempts to deal with residential schools. Initiatives such as the TRC currently have a more symbolic emphasis on witnessing and healing of indigenous people rather than a justice-based focus that looks at the perpetrators and system that created residential schools. In their reflections on the Forgiveness Summit in 2010, Ray Aldred, Terry LeBlanc, and Adrian Jacobs note this contradiction, stating, 'it amazes us that once again it is First Nations people taking the initiative to [forgive] and seek a spiritual solution to the problem of broken relationships' (4). Rather than focus on reparations and justice, non-Indigenous Canadians have turned reconciliation into the responsibility of Indigenous people to heal, forgive, and "get over it" so that the Canadian nation can move forward and progress.

The current reconciliation project can also be seen as colonial because it refuses to provide significant reforms to the structure of government that would recognize Indigenous people as equal to non-Indigenous Canadians. Instead, despite the rhetoric of the TRC and the apology, Canada still continues to be evasive about its responsibility towards its indigenous population. In the first place, Canada has recently refused to sign the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. In fact, less than one year after the apology Stephen Harper reported to the United Nations that 'Canada has no history of colonialism' (as quoted in Henderson & Wakeham, 2009:1). Additionally, there continues to be a continuous lack of real discourse in mainstream society around the issue of residential schools, leaving it to be referred to as Canada's 'dark secret' and an occluded or repressed form of knowledge amongst the Canadian public. Many Canadians still are unaware that residential schools took place and most would continue to describe relationships with Indigenous populations as peaceful and even overly generous.

Canada has also struggled to recognize the validity of Indigenous methodologies and find ways to incorporate these within the Canadian state. Instead, the framework



and constitutional heritage of Canada still draws its legitimacy from the authority of the sovereign crown that established the framework for the colonization of the country. Eurocentric cultural values that privilege learning discourses steeped in scientific reason, rationality and objectivity continue to dominate our educational and governmental system. Additionally, the government has failed to recognize the legitimacy of Indigenous rights within the nation, ignoring the plethora of problems its colonial history has created, including, to name only a few, problems such as reparations for failed promises to Aboriginal war veterans, the forced relocation of Inuit community member to desolate parts of the High Arctic during the 1950s, appeals for funding for language restoration, and outstanding land claims across the country (Henderson & Wakeham, 2009:13).

Potential Issues

Laying the foundations for reconciliation for residential schools within a continued colonial mindset creates several problems for non-Indigenous and Indigenous Canadians. First, it removes accountability and responsibility from non-Indigenous people. This is clearly seen in the way in which the focus of the TRC and the apology is solely on the story of Indigenous people and avoids the story of the perpetrators and a whole understanding of how residential schools were set up, who helped it function, and why the abuse was tolerated. This approach separates what is unjust from the present, narrowing restitution to ‘forgiving and forgetting’ while brushing aside any deeper discussions of restitution or justice (Islbacher-Fox, as stated in Corntassel & T’lakwadzi, 2009). This discourages non-Indigenous people from engaging in the reconciliation process and maintains the status quo rather than making amends.

Because the process of reconciliation continues to be viewed through the prism of a ‘colonial mindset’ it also continues to create and maintain the dichotomous relationship between the colonizer/colonized which constrains and restricts the potential for reconciliation. As such, non-Indigenous Canadians risk becoming, as Alfred & Corntassel have pointed out, ‘contemporary colonial shape shifters’ who ‘continue to erase Indigenous histories and senses of place, employing new negotiation strategies and methods that are merely subtler forms of violence than those practised by [their] ancestors’ (as quoted in Regan, 2006:6). There is also a risk that within this colonial dichotomy Indigenous people will continue to be ‘othered’ – not recognized fully as equal human beings but rather separated because of their differences and patronized as victims rather than survivors. One potential result of this is that issues or crimes that were committed will become lost in a veil of euphemism, meaning that the crimes of the past will appear to be addressed without any actual acknowledgement (Gonzalez, Breaking the Silence Conference, 2008 must be in biblio).

Moreover, by not questioning the Canadian state’s colonial approach to power, the counterfactual assumptions of cultural superiority latent in colonialism will continue to structure the relationship between the state and Indigenous people. First of all, as Sharp (2005 put in biblio (jean sharp non-violent power) states, ‘any progress made towards justice... will be tolerated by the state only to the extent that it serves, or at least does not oppose, the interest of the state itself’ (267). In this way, Indigenous



beliefs, ideals, and culture will only be considered within reconciliation process if they coincide with a Western paradigm and narrative. Alternatively, Indigenous beliefs have the potential to be romanticized or incorporated into a Western framework in a way that does not fully acknowledge their complexity or spiritual significance.

The assumptions made by a colonial approach also fail to recognize how more complex issues such as second-generation survivors, the complexities of abuse meted out by residential children to each other, or even how other issues like land rights and dispossession fit into the narrative of residential schools. Instead it limits the entire narrative of Indigenous relationships to one chapter and suggests that the relationship can be mended if there is an apology for that chapter. As a result current reconciliation initiatives become a political tool for moving on and wiping clean the slate within the non-Indigenous mind, disempowering current Indigenous pursuits of justice. . If the focus of reconciliation is isolated to individual ‘perpetrators’ and ‘victims’ of residential schools, then reconciliation is easier to achieve. However, if non-Indigenous Canadians recognize themselves as ‘beneficiaries’ of a system created and perpetrated by inequality, it becomes impossible for reconciliation to occur by just addressing residential schools (Regan, 2006). In this way the colonial approach misses significant aspects of the history of residential schools and ignores the responsibility of non-Indigenous Canadians who have benefited and continue to benefit from this colonial system.

Finally, a failure to address the legacy of colonialism and its influence on current attempts of reconciliation means ‘every new Indian policy risks echoing the one that governed the residential school system itself: the goal of finally ‘get[ting] rid of the Indian problem’ (58). By not changing the current power structure, non-Indigenous Canadians continue to believe they know what is best for Indigenous people, framing policies such as those in the TRC in the language of consultation, negotiation and partnership when the resulting programs speak the opposite. In this way reconciliation is being offered while harm is still being perpetrated. As Cherokee scholar Ward Churchill (2008) said:

Don’t talk to me about ‘reconciling’ with someone who’s stuck a knife in my guts and is still twisting it. ‘Heal?’ Forgive and forget? Under *those* circumstances? Get real. The only way that’s going to happen is if you remove your knife from my belly, accept responsibility for the effects of what you’ve done – or what you’ve allowed to be done in your name – and start making consequential, meaningful amends. (Churchill, 2008)

As a result the ineffective refrain of reconciliation and the cycles of repentance that it brings with it will continue, acquiring meaninglessness, further breaking down trust and the potential for change.

What is decolonization?

Paulette Regan describes the process of decolonization as ‘unsettling the settler within’ (2006). It requires non-Indigenous people to take a more critical, self reflective, anti-oppressive and anti-racist approach to transforming relationships to address



violence, not simply resolving disputes within existing colonial structures. Much of the theory behind decolonization comes from the social constructivist paradigm, a holistic, systemic world view which sees all knowledge and social meaning as derived from social interactions (Shepard et al., 2006). This paradigm encourages the deconstruction of commonly-held assumptions and 'truths', prevents the meaning of concepts becoming fixed, self-evident, and singular, and allows space for multiple sites of contestation and re-imagining (Henderson & Wakeham, 2009). It is becoming an ally with the colonized, treating them with dignity, and seeing them as equals.

A significant step in decolonization is being honest and coming to terms with the past, and in naming colonial violence. As Chrisjohn et al. (2006) state, 'a major requirement for undoing what has been done is full recognition of what has been done. Any commitment to 'undo' which leaves the 'what' unspecified is an empty gesture, and as such is not commitment at all' (68). This means that there needs to be a switch in thinking, a rejection of the dominant narrative and a relinquishing of power. It also means opening up to a new paradigm that sees the past within the present. As Trouillot (1995) notes, the authenticity of history lies in its ability to reside in the 'struggles of the present' and to engage people as actors, narrators, witnesses, actors, and commentators. If historical injustices are alive in the present it increases responsibility and makes history personal and subjective within alternative stories.

How does decolonization *work in practice*? First of all, decolonization recognizes that it is not an easy process but is latent with paradoxes because the colonial mindset is too complex to fully dismantle. As such, any attempt to decolonize will include paradoxes and mistakes because the structures that settlers or colonizers work in will inevitably work 'to reinforce cycles of violence between colonizer and colonized' (Regan, 2006, 276). There are also many risks involved because decolonization is uncomfortable and unsettling and it is easier to keep things the way they are. Part of the challenge, then, is to 'stay the course' and work with these inconsistencies and these risks.

Probably the most important part of personal decolonization is that it needs to be accomplished in the context of human relationships. Decolonization is not a prescriptive set of skills that can be learned, but involves embedding our thoughts and actions in authentic enquiry and respect for the dignity and humanity of others. In other words, decolonization starts at the personal level, through interpersonal relationships with those who have been colonized. As Lederach (2005) states,

Focus on people and their experience. Seek a genuine and committed relationship rather than results... Be leery of quick fixes. Respect complexity but do not be paralyzed by it. Think comprehensively about the voices you hear that seem contradictory, both within a person, between people, and across a whole community... no matter how small, create spaces of connection between them. Never assume you know better or more than those you are with that are struggling with the process. You don't. Do not fear the feeling of being lost.. Give it time (53).

Within this respect and recognition of the dignity of others lies respect for the holistic nature and culture of others as well as working to provide space where that dignity



and culture can be restored. In this, however, it is important that there is listening and humility. As stated above, relationships within a post-colonial construct can only work if there is an equal sharing of power. This means being open to learn to listen and do things differently.

Personal decolonization also requires creativity and imagination that moves beyond rigid dichotomies in order to open new possibilities for the future. This is accomplished when language and history are recognized as culturally mediated and created. In other words, the definitions of words such as 'reconciliation' or 'justice' are not fixed or self-evident, but can be conceptualized in ways that bring in multiple worldviews. This task is not easy and requires a complex and often uneasy contestation between different ways of seeing that seem in conflict with each other. The power of creativity and imagination, however, lies in its movement beyond hierarchies and dichotomies, creating space for an enlarged worldview that moves away from rigidly fixed terms and ideas to a more fluid and multicultural way of seeing the world.

As the above points out, the road to reconciliation based on decolonization is difficult as it is filled with contradictions and paradoxes. As such, decolonization also requires critical hope. Critical hope is not naive idealism or moral indifference disguised as neutrality, but rather hope grounded in the grittiness of authentic relationship. It is largely accepting personal responsibility and starting at the individual level and finding ways to think and act differently, thereby creating strategies and a critical hope that something different is possible. Imagination and hope makes this job easier, for, as J. Edward Chamberlain states, 'the business of living in the real world depends on living in our imagination.' (as quoted in Regan, 2006:276). In this way transformation, although slow and long, is possible.

Applying Decolonization in the Canadian context

When looking at how to apply decolonization in the context of reconciliation to Indigenous populations we first have to address how to engage non-Indigenous Canadians in this process. As seen above, decolonization means losing power, something that the non-Indigenous population do not want to dismantle. Decolonization is a daunting and dangerous task. How to begin to undo 300 years of being in power, the blatant stealing of land and culture and begin to treat Indigenous populations as equals rather than 'uncivilized' and 'lesser' citizens? The moral imperative for restorative justice that is created out of decolonization – justice that will include such things as land restoration and reparation - invokes tremendous fear within settler societies. Beyond this, the long and unending process of decolonization does not fit within Western concepts of progress and the Western desire for closure.

Despite these many challenges, decolonization is crucial if Canada wishes to move forward as a nation. Although it may alleviate guilt and continue to give privilege and power to non-Indigenous Canadians, the current framework of reconciliation is failing at the most basic level to help those who have been unjustly treated and is preventing a much richer, multi-dimensional version of Canada. As Regan (2006) points out, 'our persistence in clinging to old colonial myths... keeps us in a state of denial, fear, and guilt... and inhibits our ability to imagine something different... It is a living



testament to the ongoing dysfunction, violence, denial and unequal power relations that characterize Indigenous-Settler relations' (30, 145). Eventually, the disconnect between the language and the promises of the TRC and the apology and the reality of the colonial system in Canada will make it more and more difficult to maintain the myth of Canada as tolerant and caring. This is already seen in the fact that, despite the promises of a 'new relationship' between Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations in Canada, Indigenous populations face third-world conditions of poverty, crime, and poor health and housing more than any other group in Canada.

Beyond this, if Canada continues down its current path reconciliation will not only absolve Colonial injustices but will itself be a further injustice. If we do not shift away from the pacifying discourse of reconciliation and begin to reframe people's perceptions of the problem, we will be advancing colonialism, not decolonization. What was stolen must be given back, and amends must be made for the crimes that were committed from which all non-Indigenous Canadians, old families, and recent immigrants alike, have gained their existence as people on this land and citizens of Canada.

Engaging the unengaged will not happen immediately. Instead, it starts at the personal level with *non-indigenous allies* who are committed to decolonization in their own lives. As those engaged in the struggle to dismantle colonial myths, non-Indigenous allies have the duty and responsibility to bring decolonization into the mainstream of Canada through social action. Although this may seem daunting, this can be simple as using privilege to allow Indigenous voices to be heard. Paulette Regan (2006) further expands how this can be done:

How do we build these decolonizing principles and practices into our lives more generally at all levels of society? Create transformative learning and teaching possibilities in a variety of formal and informal settings: classrooms, negotiating tables, policy forums, community halls and public history spaces. We can shift our historical consciousness by gaining a deeper understanding of how myth, ritual and history matter in the work that we do, the classes we teach, the law and policy we make, and the real history of Indigenous-Settler relations that we have denied. We can begin the practical everyday work that will move Settler society from a culture of denial to an ethics of recognition towards a culture of justice and peace. We can link critical reflection and action to vision and hope (271)

As Regan shows, decolonization starts at the personal and moves beyond critical reflection to action in ways that continue to deconstruct Settler-colonial identities and action at various levels of society.

One step that will be crucial in bringing decolonization into reconciliation projects such as the TRC will be making the colonial story of Canada more prominent in mainstream Canadian society. Without facing the true history of non-Indigenous Canadians as perpetrators of violence, there can be no genuine 'transformative' new relationship with Indigenous people. As such the TRC would do well to spend time initiating a detailed exploration and study of the Settler – the form and functions of the institutions and people who created and sustained the residential school system as



well as their current complicity in maintaining the colonial status quo. As Corntassel & T'lakwadzi state, 'Settler violence against Indigenous peoples is woven into the fabric of Canadian history in an unbroken thread from past to present that we must now unravel, unsettling our comfortable assumptions about the past' (2009). *Getting* the stories of the teachers and church leaders is just as important as getting the stories of the survivors because it allows non-Indigenous Canadians to turn inward. This also means that initiatives such as the TRC will have to look at the wider colonial history of Canada, including the stories of broken promises, language and cultural loss, and the continuing struggles of Indigenous communities in Canada.

Introducing the colonial history of Canada into the dominant discourse can be done in many ways, but it requires creativity and perseverance from non-Indigenous allies. In many ways, the story of residential schools is a good place to start because it is a particularly brutal, oppressive, and encompassing chapter in the story of Canada's mistreatment of indigenous peoples. Non-indigenous allies need to push for truth-telling efforts in schools, in churches, and in the government.

This can be done in two ways. The first is by providing space for Indigenous voices to be heard in a way that demonstrates dignity and respect for the equality of their voice. The most obvious way to accomplish this is through a closer look at how various Indigenous groups approach reconciliation and work to enable this to define projects such as the TRC. Another way this could be done is lobbying for classes to be held on Indigenous perspectives and knowledge for all Government officials, teachers, church leaders, and within universities. Another way could be supporting Indigenous arts and advocating for funding and space within Canadian society for it to become more prominent. Finally, non-Indigenous allies can work creatively with Indigenous populations to imagine different realities. When hierarchy is not threatened and cultures are treated as equals there is much to be gained and to learn. This is not to say that there will not be contradictory narratives, but, as Dorell (2009) states, 'allowing contradictory narratives to co-exist without rushing toward forgiveness or a unifying re-narration could encourage national subjects to reconsider their past and present relation to Indigenous peoples, to reflect on the past abuses carried out in their names, and to consider their current complicity in the oppression of Indigenous peoples' (40). At the same time these counter-narratives also continue to increase decolonization through non-Indigenous learning, awareness, and recognition.

The second way *non-Indigenous allies* can push for truth-telling and decolonization comes through engaging others in their own process of decolonization. This can be done through something as simple as discussions on social networking sites to creating a workshop or a conference. Creative endeavours such as art, theatre, literature, and dance is another relatively untapped area for non-Indigenous allies to encourage decolonization. A lot of research has gone into how Indigenous communities can use the arts to create counter-narratives of Canadian history, but not much emphasis has been placed on the importance of non-Indigenous populations to do this as well. When non-Indigenous populations open up the myths of Canadian history and confess their part within that history it provides space for others to do contemplate their own part in colonialism and do the same.



Conclusion

The overarching goal of these initiatives is that, eventually, no one can say in Canada that ‘they did not know’ and hope to be believed. Once settler societies acknowledge injustices and demonstrate contrition, they will begin to create a moral imperative for restorative justice. They can begin to address Indigenous populations with equality and open up to creatively find ways in which dignity and freedom can be restored and enough land and power can be returned in order for Indigenous populations to be self-sufficient. If the goals of decolonization are justice and peace, then the process to achieve these goals must reflect a basic covenant on the part of both Indigenous peoples and settlers to honour each other’s existence. This honouring cannot happen when one partner in the relationship is asked to sacrifice their heritage and identity in exchange for peace. As this paper shows, decolonization is one way in which non-Indigenous Canadians can work to ensure that this unequal form of reconciliation is no longer required. Instead, non-Indigenous populations can be engaged as allies and move past colonial roles and imperial mindsets that keep current reconciliation projects inadequate and ineffective. It is a formidable task, but, as this article outlines, it is an important and necessary one with which to struggle.



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