

Enacting Reconciliation

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In 2015 the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) concluded its painstaking and pain-filled exposition of the misery inflicted by the Canadian policy of enforced residential schooling of Indian children. The Commission heard the testimony of many who attended the residential schools subcontracted by the state to various Christian denominations and produced the Final Report, the Executive Summary, and the Calls to Action so that all Canadians may know the Truth. They are available in digital form for all who are interested. All should be interested.

Truth and reconciliation may have been in the title of the Commission, but it could not create reconciliation, which really needs to come from those who have either enacted or benefited from the enactment of the abusive policy under consideration, not from those who have endured it. In this article I take up the problematics of truth and reconciliation in the conditions of a colonialism which is not only historic, but contemporary; it is both mythical and structural. I then proceed to the possibility of reconciliation.

Canada is a settler state, conceived over and against Indigenous sovereignties. It was designed for settler populations. And thus, while most Canadians have never personally committed an act of explicit racism against an Indigenous person, they have benefited from the structures and the consequences of colonialism. Finally, Canadians have not taken responsibility for knowing their neighbours, nor for knowing what their governments were doing to their neighbours in our collective democratic name.

Truth is a necessary but insufficient condition for reconciliation; truth is a demanding discipline, and reconciliation requires changes in power relationships, institutions, and specific and continuing actions, not simply the telling of truth. Thus it is important to understand the processes and the implications of truth and reconciliation. I hope to make it clear that decolonization and Indigenization of the state are aspects of the same liberatory process and are essential components of reconciliation. Moreover, decolonization implies the elimination of settler or white privilege, a challenge to capitalism, a privileging of Indigenous epistemologies, a privileging of the integrity of the environment and Indigenous peoples' ancient relationship with the land, and a commitment to a mutual future shaped more by Indigenous cosmologies and polities than by colonial ones.

No doubt it is evident that there needs to be space in this discussion for consideration of the role that universities have played in enacting colonialism – and the possibility that they can remediate their sins in making space for better teaching, better research that attends to colonialism, and to reconciliation. This process is generally referred to as Indigenization of the university (see Kuokkanen

2007, Smith) although that term is also misused by some universities that use it to refer to what is essentially a whitewash of academic responsibility, adopting approaches that elide the continuing power relations of colonialism in favour of essentialized cultural discourses or retrospective historic gazes.

The TRC's evidence is the *truth* part: Canadian democratic governments legitimated genocide and human rights abuses against children<sup>1</sup>. The residential school policy was not for the benefit of "Indians" but for settlers: it was intended to de-Indianize the youngest generations so that there would be "no Indians and no Indian problem", in the crystal-clear words of Duncan Campbell Scott, the deputy superintendent of Indian Affairs from 1913 to 1932 (Titley1986).

Truth-telling in a reconciliatory process is meaningless if the truth is not heard by those who have benefited from or inflicted the damage – by those who enjoy what for shorthand we'll call white settler privilege – and for those who have laid their truths bare, the exercise is unsatisfying unless there is some positive consequence that can produce a measure of change. As Jeremy Patzer notes, there is a problem of "promoting preemptive reconciliation while eliding underlying issues, the greatest of which is colonial dispossession and the struggle for decolonization and self-determination" (Patzner 2014:167). It's the truth of that little land-theft matter that needs recognition and restitution if reconciliation is to be meaningful for Indigenous peoples. As Woolford et al. argue, "Restitution for colonial genocide would thus entail returning stolen territories" (Woolford et al. 2014:9).

The *reconciliation* part is far less clear. Reconciliation is a state of relational peace achieved by processes and practices intended to convey contrition, empathy, and commitment to transformation from a damaged to a better relationship. For the Native Women's Association of Canada, for example, "reconciliation is a relational process meant to restore dignity, respect and equality in the aftermath of human rights violations" (2010:29-30).

Enacting reconciliation requires Canadians to explore the path to not a renewed, but rather a new relationship with Indigenous peoples, a path marked by historic

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<sup>1</sup> The Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide defines genocide as "any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical [sic], racial or religious group, as such:

- (a) Killing members of the group;
- (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
- (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group".

and contemporary oppression, but with the potential for a transformed and equitable future. That path must wend its way through the contemporary quagmire of pain, anger, privilege, power, denial and resistance, to transformation and potential for a better relationship in the future. It is a new path because it is in all respects moving in a different direction than the old path, which was a dead end sideshow to the main menu of colonial political and territorial expansion. In the spirit of reconciliation, Canada needs to confront its historic and contemporary colonial practices, and move toward a future that is genuinely post-colonial, is acceptable to and imagined with Indigenous people, and accommodates all of us in an as-yet to be imagined post-colonial framework.

Reconciliation is procedurally akin to the theological conception of repentance, penance, and absolution. The Canadian apology issued by then-Prime Minister Harper on June 8, 2008, in which he asked for forgiveness from Indigenous peoples (Aboriginal and Northern Affairs Canada 2008; Miller 2015), began the process of reconciliation. Thereafter, however, nothing more was said or done by that government to enact reconciliation. It appeared that the state and the settler public assumed that the apology itself produced reconciliation without the intervening steps of reflection, remorse, restitution, and renewed relationship necessary for healing, and really, without most Canadians and our elite political institutions having grappled with the truth.

Colonialism is the process through which the residential school policy was developed and executed. Thus there is limited value in focusing on the residential schools without considering the structuring environment of colonialism. Nor can reconciliation be obtained for the genocidal effects of the residential schools outside of the context of colonialism, which in turn implicates Project Canada and its citizens. Yet most Canadians view colonialism as an historic rather than a contemporary phenomenon – and few appreciate the profound differentials in power and life outcomes depending where one is situated in the colonial relationship. As Taiaiake Alfred writes, “the complete ignorance of Canadian society about the facts of their relationship with Indigenous peoples and the wilful denial of historical reality by Canadians detracts from the possibility of any meaningful discussion on true reconciliation” ((2009:181 cited in Patzer 2014:180).

There is a popular mythical history central in Canadian political culture about the emergence and development of the Canadian state (see for example Thobani 2007, Green 1995, 2014), yet there is little popular or scholarly work on Canada as an exercise of colonialism. Canada has what Tricia Logan calls a “memory block” (2014:149) about its violent assault on and removal and dispossession of

Indigenous people in the course of building the not-so-peaceable dominion. Indeed, former Prime Minister Harper displayed that memory block when, days after making his apology for the residential schools, he volunteered to the media at a meeting of the G20 in Pittsburgh that Canada has “no history of colonialism” (cited in Comack 2014:60).

Canadian colonialism held objectives and relied on practices which can only be described as genocidal. The TRC wrote that “Residential schooling was always more than simply an educational program: it was an integral part of a conscious policy of cultural genocide” (2015:57; see also Logan 2014:151). The language of genocide offends many – as though the language rather than the practice was problematic. As Cynthia Chambers and Narcisse Blood put it, “Epidemic and famine can sound innocuous, as if there were no perpetrator, as if the near decimation of a people is the inevitable result of natural events, perhaps even fated” (2009:257). Yet these consequences to ‘Indian’ policies were known, executed and tolerated by state agents and bureaucracies (Daschuk 2013; Savage 2012; Titley 1986).

And colonialism has been gendered, thus its effects are experienced differently by men and women, and reconciliation itself must be gendered. The Native Women’s Association of Canada (NWAC) writes that “The ongoing violation of Indigenous women through systemic subjugation, marginalization and violence is a legacy of colonialism in Canada” (2010:1). NWAC notes that Indigenous women have also been subjected to intergenerational “gendered injustices of marginalization, dispossession and violence within their own communities as well as in the larger Canadian society” as a consequence of colonialism and the residential school experience (2010:30). A more complete discussion of this may be found in Amnesty International’s *Stolen Sisters* report and in Mary Eberts’ work showing how Indigenous women have always been constructed by colonial mythologies as a population of prey (Eberts 2014).

While all Indigenous nations and communities are affected by colonialism, its effects are not identical for men and women, nor for status and non-status, and rural and urban communities. The truth of this is evident in the numbers of missing and murdered Indigenous women; and in the numbers of Indigenous children and women involved in the sex trade; and in the disproportionate numbers of incarcerated Indigenous men and women; and in the life and health outcomes shaped by colonialism – and in the perpetual indifference to these phenomena by Canada. The Liberal federal government elected in the fall of 2015 has indicated a move from indifference to engagement, a shift yet to be sustained by a track record

of solid diplomacy, policy and budgetary shifts and importantly (Borrows 2016), by enabling legislation.

Let us return to the TRC, which conducted its hearings across the country and documented the consequences of the residential school policy in the suffering of those who survived it, and in the accounts of descendents of survivors who are nonetheless impacted by the policy. In the execution of this policy over about a century, across the country, Indian students were un- and under-educated while being tormented in ways that violate fundamental human rights protected by international law to which Canada is signatory. The effect of the torment meets the definition of genocide at international law. Many students died because of it. The torment for many of those children is not over – will never be over – and its consequences are experienced intergenerationally in families and communities. Many live/d with PTSD and its consequences. Many could not parent well nor maintain close relationships and personal stability. The residential school policy was a toxic gift that keeps on giving.

How does a state reconcile this corpus of practices in a contemporary relationship with those who have survived, though not unscathed, the assaults of state policy over the course of a couple of centuries? We return to this question shortly.

The residential school program actually wasn't much of an education program at all. Through a nation-wide collection of day schools, trade and training schools, and residential schools (only the last were the subject of the TRC's study) Indigenous (primarily status Indian, but also including some non-status and Metis) children were subjected to a hostile process of psycho-social transformation that rendered them psychologically fragile and often unable to competently fit into their home communities or into the dominant settler society. The students were being prepared, not for further education or taking on leadership roles in society nor for beneficial activity in any economy, but for partial absorption into the racist settler society, for erasure as culturally distinct persons. Of course, complete assimilation is not possible in a racially organized society such as Canada, so the unfortunate students of residential schools found themselves nonetheless stigmatized as 'native' in settler society which understood that to infer all kinds of deficiencies, while the education process left many unable to relate to family and community or to maintain cultural connections.

It must be noted that Indigenous education continues to be deeply problematic. Non-Indigenous schools and universities remain primarily bastions of white settler culture and knowledge (Kuokkanen 2007, Smith 1999) despite the presence of Indigenous students. Thus they fail all of their students by presenting racist

curriculum and colonial mythologies as the Truth. On-reserve education is woefully underfunded by the federal government, which spends thousands of dollars less per student in reserve schools than provinces do in the public school system. Again, the Trudeau Liberal government has promised to remedy this, although there is no hard data showing to what degree it will do so.

The residential school policy was part of the toolkit of Canadian colonialism. The purpose of residential schools – the enforced deculturation and then assimilation into the settler state’s preferred social paradigm – was intended to deIndianize the country. Other policies in that toolkit included starvation via elimination of the bison (Daschuk 2013; Savage 2012), treaty making, reserves as holding pens to control the ‘natives’, military and police control of Indians, military control of and dispersal of the Metis, and mechanisms to divest Indigenous communities of their lands. Indigenous peoples – “Indians”, in the nomenclature of the day, as the Supreme Court of Canada ruled in *Daniels* – were considered unfit for citizenship and were “intolerable as impediments to colonial settlement, expansion, and capitalist and agricultural development” (Green and Burton 2015). All of this enabled the execution of the signal National Policy of then-Prime Minister Sir John A. Macdonald’s government, a policy designed to secure an economic framework for the new state while populating its territories with settlers chosen from approved racial and cultural communities (Green 1995).

Colonies become settler states precisely through these processes. Settler states emerge from colonial enterprises that establish permanent settlements, which are intended to become both the focus and the enactment of a politico-cultural project of the founding colonial entity. To execute this project, Indigenous populations must be contained or eliminated. After all, it is not their labour but their land that is necessary for the settler state (Green 1995; Veracini 2010:9). And this is a continuing project (Snelgrove et. al 2014:21) which is, in the words of Glen Coulthard, “*territorially acquisitive in perpetuity*” (italics in original) (Coulthard 2014:125).

The impulse to eliminate or assimilate is common to settler states confronting the inconvenient fact of Indigenous nations. Colonialism is predicated on profitability – it is, after all, an economic and political venture. Profitability increases with the amount of land and resources stolen. The political value of the colonized territory corresponds to its place in the economic and political universe of the colonizer. The foundational myths of settlement inevitably frame *progress* as a process emerging from the settlement of wildness; the imposition of order over disorder; the virtues of the colonial civilizations against the uncivilized state of Indigenous peoples; and the religious justifications inherent in a muscular and xenophobic

conception of Christianity. Several of these myths have been theorized and disseminated by prominent intellectuals, further implicating the academy in colonialism. These are the key elements of the process of colonialism in Canada and its concurrent justification, now celebrated in cultural and political myths that unify settler populations while alienating Indigenous ones.

As an example of mythmaking concretized in power relations, consider my home community, Cranbrook, named by one Colonel Baker after his English home; or ʔa·kiskaqʔit in Ktunaxa, meaning “where two creeks meet” – where the ‘locals’ celebrate Sam Steele Days every summer, named after one of the earliest military oppressors of the Ktunaxa. The practice of naming is also imbued with the politics of domination. I look out my window at ʔakinmi – a mountain with an ancient Ktunaxa story explaining its origins – yet the settler community calls it “Mount Baker”, after the transplanted Englishman who obtained thousands of hectares of unceded Ktunaxa territory and who has been venerated ever after, with streets and businesses, and a high school (attended by Ktunaxa students as well as ‘locals’) named after him in Cranbrook and Nelson, also in Ktunaxa territory. And in this way we all come to know who counts, and who is in control. Every settler community in the country can provide similar examples, for all are squatted on Indigenous territory, yet were created by and for anybody but Indigenous people.

“Erasure is an elegant method of revising history”, writes Logan, and adds that “Omissions in national history become omissions in national identity” (2014:149). At their core, these settler myths celebrate an unbroken practice of genocide and oppression which today is manifest in the continued corporate predation on Indigenous lands and resources, the denial of the incidents of fundamental human rights in Canada to Indigenous people, and the unrelenting obsession of the state and its elites with absorbing Indigenous particularity into the dominant body politic and obtaining “certainty” for capitalist activity on Indigenous lands.

The governments of Canada and several provinces are participating in land claim and treaty implementation processes, but negotiations, particularly in British Columbia, are not going well. Despite 25 years-worth of negotiations, B.C. has signed only 4 treaties, all of which are problematic on measures of retention of traditional territory and self-determination. This is because present day negotiations for land claims are functionally land surrenders, according to Coulthard, as their objective is to make Indigenous territories available for capitalist development (2014:125).

As an example of this from my home territory, consider the case of Jumbo Glacier/municipality/future year-round ski hill<sup>2</sup> on the glacier – or, Qat?Muk, the sacred home of the Grizzly Bear Spirit, on unceded Ktunaxa territory. The particulars of this case make for fascinating reading. There is no municipality at the glacier, yet the government of BC has created the municipality of Jumbo<sup>3</sup>, has appointed a few stooges as mayor and council, who represent no citizens as no one is there – and funded them to do nothing more than show the flag for BC’s occupation of the land, in the process of working with the developer to create the ski resort. The Ktunaxa Nation opposes the development and wishes Qat ?Muk to remain as it is, for the Grizzly Bear Spirit<sup>4</sup>. Many ‘locals’ support the Ktunaxa on this. Bumper stickers can be seen everywhere in the area reading “Keep Jumbo Wild” – but also – “Pave Jumbo”, and “I’m Going to Ski The Shit Out of Jumbo”.

The matter is now en route to the Supreme Court of Canada (CBC 2016). Given that the Trudeau government promised the United Nations in 2016 that it would remove the Harper government’s “permanent objection” to the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples<sup>5</sup> filed with the United Nations (Galloway 2016); and given that the UNDRIP recognizes the right of Indigenous peoples to “free, prior and informed consent” to uses of their territories, the case should be significant to and determinative of Indigenous – settler land conflicts in the future. The facts of the case, however, demonstrates a failure of the conditions for reconciliation of British Columbia and the Ktunaxa Nation.

With all of this history, the matter of reconciliation is at least challenging. Cynthia Chambers and Narcisse Blood argue that while reconciliation is premised on past relational evils, it must be oriented toward a reconciled future: “While the past must be taught, remembered and understood, the direction being faced is the future (Chambers and Blood 2009:266). While the TRC specifically addresses the legacy of the residential schools, the entire project of the colonial settler state has been genocidal and Canada is in need of both truth telling and the transformative changes that would enable reconciliation if there is to be a better future.

There is danger of an assumption by Canadians that the TRC effectively reconciled us all; that by virtue of the residential school survivors having *told* their truths, reconciliation is attained as we all just ‘get over it’ ‘going forward’. But between truth and reconciliation there must be *recognition* of what happened *in our collective name*; recognition of the damage done by the democratic state to those

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<sup>2</sup> <http://jumboglacierresort.com/about/>

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.jgmrm.ca/>

<sup>4</sup> The Ktunaxa Nation declaration may be read in full at <http://www.ktunaxa.org/who-we-are/qatmuk-declaration/>

<sup>5</sup> The text of the UNDRIP may be read at [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)

who have been oppressed by definition since occupation by the state and its chosen people; recognition of the illegal and immoral nature of this continuing state of affairs, and recognition of the requirement for remediation of all of these things by those who have obtained all the goodies the state has to offer, at the expense of those who have been stripped of virtually all of their: sovereignty, autonomy, cultural corpus, children, elders, health, wealth and opportunities.

In other words, recognition entails some thoughtful engagement with history and with public policy. It requires empathy, for without empathy one cannot recognize the awful consequences borne by colonized people. It requires humility, as we begin to learn that we don't know what we don't know; and that our civil and political order is less meritocratic than it is a system of white male privilege. It requires commitment, as we determine to learn the often uncomfortable facts of our fraught relationship and the especially discomfoting facts of the maintenance of white privilege. It requires political resolution to transform this unhappy state of affairs, which also entails a will on the part of beneficiaries of this system to back away from their privilege in the interests of justice. It requires a commitment to reconciliation, a state of future peace. And it requires confronting that land theft matter with "massive restitution, including land, financial transfers, and other forms of assistance to compensate for past and continuing injustices" against Indigenous people (Taiaiake Alfred, cited in Coulthard 2014:122). Unless and until the colonial state returns at least some of the land, negotiates shared jurisdiction over resources and tax room and makes other amends, there will be no reconciliation.

Recognition can be manifested by Canadians, but it was surely withheld by the former Conservative government of Stephen Harper, which refused to adopt and implement the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and filed a permanent objection to it with the United Nations. Moreover, that same government acted in ways that *prima facie* violated the UNDRIP and the Constitutional law of Canada by, for example, making resource development the Prime Directive despite the lack of meaningful consultation and absolute lack of consent by Aboriginal nations whose territories and communities are affected by that development. And the Harper government refused to recognize the intergenerational damage consequent to colonialism in the suffering demonstrated by outrageous levels of incarceration of Indigenous peoples; disintegration of Indigenous families marked by the loss of children into the largely incompetent and indifferent child welfare systems; the under- and un-employment of Indigenous peoples in their own communities and elsewhere; the lack of access to basic incidents of human rights and citizenship such as education, health care, potable water and housing; and the rising barometer of pathology in the Missing

and Murdered Indigenous Women body count. It will take much political effort to remedy the Harper government's damage to the already fraught relationship between the Canadian state and Indigenous peoples. The Harper regime exemplified the ideological commitment to contemporary colonialism in its disdain for Indigenous peoples and issues.

Recognition is a necessary though insufficient condition for reconciliation. This recognition is not the liberal theoretical concept of seeing and tolerating others, but understanding the relationship between self and others who are radically different because of political processes in which we are all situated. Recognition must be accompanied by restitution. Reconciliation, according to the TRC, requires "awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change the behaviour" (2015:6) and requires "real social, political, and economic change" (2015:238). Further, the TRC recommends the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) as a "framework for reconciliation in Canada" in which "Canada's political and legal systems, educational and religious institutions, the corporate sector and civil society [could] function in ways that are consistent with the [UNDRIP principles]" (2015:20). And the Native Women's Association of Canada reminds us to gender the reconciliatory project thusly: "Truth telling and reconciliation must represent a reparative process that promotes restoration of Indigenous women's dignity, safety, authority and agency" (NWAC 2010:1).

Glen Coulthard points to the release of the Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples in 1996 as the beginning of the federal government's turn to the term 'reconciliation' (2014:108). But he is critical of that approach, and warns that "in settler-colonial contexts – where there is no period marking a clear or formal transition from an authoritarian past to a democratic present – state-sanctioned approaches to reconciliation must ideologically manufacture such a transition by allocating the abuses of settler colonization to the dustbins of history, and/or purposely disentangle processes of reconciliation from questions of settler-coloniality" (2014:108). In other words, Coulthard reminds us that language can be co-opted to legitimate new forms of oppression or incorporation into the settler state, and we have to be cautious about the rhetoric which may not mean the same thing to the colonized and the state. Further, we must correct the prevalent view of colonialism and Indigenous rights abuses as only historical. Still, Canadians' awareness of our colonial relationship is beginning. Politically and economically significant acknowledgment must follow if Coulthard's fear is not to be realized. Atonement and remediating action, however, are far from certain at this juncture.

Nor can the variety of “self-government” initiatives be considered sufficient for reconciliation. Self-government, a perennial and restrictive policy variously framed by past Liberal and Progressive Conservative federal governments is generally a formula for Indigenous self-administration of policies and programs established, funded and evaluated by the bureaucratic wing for Indigenous pacification: the Department of Aboriginal (now Indigenous) and Northern Affairs. *Indian Act* band councils are only the most ubiquitous form of that genre. Sovereignty and self-determination, far more robust form of political autonomy, are claimed by many Indigenous leaders, scholars and organizations. Their enactment requires the co-operation of the occupying settler state, including by making jurisdictional and other space for another order of government. Self-determination is animated theoretically by what both Taiaiake Alfred and Leanne Simpson call “resurgence”, “an intellectual, social, political, and artistic movement geared toward the self-reflective revitalization” of Indigenous traditional values, principles, and cultural practices that enable a “contemporary political and economic reality” (cited in Coulthard 2014:156-157). The 1996 Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP) proposed self-determination as the foundation for a new relationship between Indigenous peoples and Canada. The UNDRIP lists self-determination as a fundamental right of Indigenous peoples. The TRC cites the UN Special Rapporteur on Indigenous Peoples, James Anaya, who called self-determination an “animating force” for reconciliation (TRC 2015:241).

Is Canada at an historic juncture where reconciliation can be contemplated? Few settler Canadians have heard the truth of the residential school survivors, much less embraced its implications. Moreover, the residential school phenomenon was only one of a number of colonial violations of Indigenous peoples’ fundamental rights, and thus it can point to processes of recognition and responsibility, but cannot function to include all of these other injuries sustained at the behest of colonial power. Will the state take responsibility for educating its citizens about the truth of the colonial relationship? Will Canadians take responsibility for knowing the truth, and turning away from the colonial relationship? Are they prepared to trust an Indigenized state for their futures?

Indigenous self-determination will unsettle the settler. It “requires a dismantling of other, related forms of domination” according to Cory Snelgrove (Snelgrove et al. 2014:21). Coulthard lists these as including “capitalism, patriarchy, white supremacy, and the totalizing character of state power ... to form the constellation of power relations that sustain colonial patterns of behavior [sic], structures, and relationships” (2014:14). The symbiotic relationship between the state and the

elite corporate class implies that corporate ambitions and expectations of profitability will be affected by practices of reconciliation. Take, for example, the requirement on governments and corporate agents to ‘consult’ with Indigenous peoples prior to enacting ‘developments’ on the territory of the latter. This is more robustly framed as the “free, prior and informed consent’ (FPIC) requirement articulated in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (Joffe 2014). Consultation and consent include the possibility of denial, of the withholding of consent.

The TRC suggests that reconciliation requires “Aboriginal peoples’ right to self-determination within, and in partnership with, a viable Canadian sovereignty” (2015:238). That certainly is a pragmatic objective, but not all are willing to accept that Canada is the necessary framework for the exercise of Indigenous sovereignties – indeed, it may be the other way around. Canada needs to be legitimated by Indigenous reconciliation, political protocols, treaties, Indigenization of state institutions, and right relationships enacted into the future.

Decolonization is possible if reconciliation is enacted well. All important political projects emerge from imagination, take shape from collaboration and struggle, and are animated by action over time and against the status quo. Decolonization requires imagination, collaboration and inclusion, and replacement of the inequitable status quo with a concrete set of acceptable liberatory alternatives.

And only then can we anticipate the possibility of Right Relationship – a state of being that is constantly negotiated, beneficial to all, and is the manifestation of reconciliation. Reconciliation, according to the TRC, “is not a one-time event [but]... a multi-generational journey that involves all Canadians” (TRC 2015:262). The model exists in treaty frameworks which contemplated ongoing adaptable relationships with the capacity to carry us all into a positive future. The model has never yet been animated by Canada.

Reconciliation may well lead to Indigenization of Canadian forms of governance and economic practices. It implies “a restructuring of the fundamental relationship between Indigenous nations and Canada” (Coulthard 2014:168). As Justice Minister Jody Wilson-Raybould said, “beyond the important and necessary work of truth-telling and of healing, reconciliation actually requires laws to change and policies to be rewritten — where the legitimate political institutions of Aboriginal peoples are recognized and empowered, and the laws they make [are] enforceable” (Mandel:2015). In this she concurs with the TRC, which wrote that “Reconciliation will be difficult to achieve until Indigenous peoples’ own traditions for uncovering truth and enhancing reconciliation are embraced as an

essential part of the ongoing process of truth determination, dispute resolution, and reconciliation” (TRC 2015:256). The need for state legislation lies in the higher level of commitment generally associated with legislation as opposed to more tentative and limited policy commitments; historically Canada has preferred policy over legislation on Indigenous matters (Borrows 2016:485). Thus Wilson-Raybould’s government will need to move past policy change to legislative enactment if it is serious about reconciliation.

The status quo is patently divorced from Canada’s putative political values and our economic practices are ushering in climate change hell. Reconciliation with those who have endured the practice of colonialism will produce systemic change to remediate the systemic evils produced by colonialism. Canadians should embrace the opportunity. We can all do better than the settler state status quo. And until we have the preconditions for reconciliation, the truth will not make us free of the reality of colonialism – not only historically, but right now, across Canada, in Indigenous communities and everywhere else as well.

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