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**CANADA'S TRUTH AND RECONCILIATION COMMISSION**

**FOR INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS:**

**WHOSE TRUTH? WHOSE RECONCILIATION?**

Presented at the Annual Meeting of the  
Canadian Political Science Association (CPSA)  
May 2009

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**for Indian Residential Schools:**  
**Whose Truth? Whose Reconciliation?**

Contemporary critical theory teaches that identity is created through borders and oppositions. The outside constructs the inside and then hides this work of fabrication in an entity that appears to give birth to itself.

–Wendy Brown, “At The Edge”

Reconciliation has increasingly entered the vocabulary and political terrain of social justice in the last three decades.<sup>1</sup> The number of truth commissions is growing; there have been 22 around the world, including in Argentina, Chile, Guatemala, and ongoing commissions in Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Rwanda, and Canada. There has been significant study of the work of these commissions asking how states and individuals might rectify the violent past in question through commissions, and what has happened during the process of reconciliation, as well as whether reconciliation has been effective.<sup>2</sup> I want to explore the assumptions and effects in a political process of public reconciliation that is fraught with optimism, cynicism, hope, and uncertainty. In particular, I will focus on the dynamics of exchange that are mostly implicit in public reconciliation and the expectations surrounding what the exchange “purchases.”

As currently deployed, reconciliation requires an overcoming on the part of injured individuals and/or groups to heal themselves, accept the past, forgive their perpetrators, create a new bond with their perpetrators to begin a new chapter of shared history, and integrate themselves into a narrative of overcoming, healing, accepting, forgiving, and creating. Specifically, in terms of citizenship, there is the work of restoring dignity to victims, integrating victims into the polity as healed and more fully recognized citizens, and having perpetrators disclose their unjust deeds sometimes with genuine and voluntary remorse and apology. This progression of events currently circulates with influence in discussion of redress where there have been state sanctioned atrocities. Yet, a lesson from Karl Marx in “On the Jewish Question,” is that political identities produced by the state are systemically limited by the very power that produced the injury or wrongdoing in the first place (1978). Marx anticipates the lived experience of self-identified victims will change little since subjugating power remains unaltered. Thus, the promise of reconciliation, following this insight, will produce the opposite: continued suffering from the trauma of the past; incomplete forgiveness or refusal of forgiveness; re-integration in name only; and growing resentment.<sup>3</sup> In light of the limitations, I do not suggest that such public reconciliation should be abandoned or dismissed with cynicism, but rather that it, at the very least, requires examination for its impact on the individuals involved, especially the victims, and what might be needed in terms of a more considered process of reconciliation. A complete closure, healing, or reintegration of victims into a democracy capable or intent on moving past the violent history in question cannot be expected to occur without serious attention to the limitations that are being produced through such reconciliation processes. This begs the question of the conditions required to address such limitations involving the state and ongoing policies additional to those surrounding a specific

settlement or commission that could render a fuller and/or more fulsome process. In this paper, reconciliation deployed in the Government of Canada's 2008 statements of apology and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission for Indian Residential Schools, established in 2006, will serve as illustration in relation to assumptions foundational to reconciliation, particularly within a liberal framework of the subject and history.

The first part of this paper will outline the assumptions of history underwriting public reconciliation processes and the anticipated positive changes predicted to follow from such processes. In fall 2008 the Commission Chair and early 2009 the co-Commissioners resigned and there is now a search underway for a new Chair and co-Commissioners of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Commission). While the Commission is in the process of getting back on track with the selection of new Commissioners, there is a sense of urgency growing as the number of survivors of residential schools decrease daily. The second part of the paper will examine an aspect of the economy of public reconciliation: the exchange of official apology for forgiveness and a renewed sense of history and relationship between the federal government and aboriginal peoples. This economy has coercive features. Finally, social and political theorists such as Julie Kristeva, Jacques Derrida, Hannah Arendt have commented that forgiveness is a private matter that does not transfer smoothly into the public sphere. Thus, when the state makes efforts to seek forgiveness, the state fails and reinforces existing power relations that maintain violence.

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I look at reconciliation located within a liberal democratic context. Within this context, a specific conception of history and its relationship to politics underwrites liberal doctrine and practice.<sup>4</sup> While there is no singular and pristine conception of history informing liberalism, there are some key characteristics that can be presented here. Within western history, there is a belief, often implied, that history has reason, purpose, and direction with an orientation toward progress and improvement of human capacity and the human condition. These characteristics tend to culminate in a linear narrative of history, particularly where progress is an important teleological aspect of historical narratives of the human condition and its prospects, usually beginning from a dark and primitive period moving toward an enlightened and more civilized present and future. The dynamic of this linear narrative is associated with a view that human nature has within itself an imperfection and capacity for extreme violence and ugliness, but also has the capacity for redemption and a perfecting disposition that can be actualized, if not completely, then partially; the hope of a completed perfection beckons a general will of the western human condition to labor toward this promise. A recent example of this narrative where western leaders appear to have come to their moral senses and willing to become more self-critical of their respective nation-states' crimes is as follows:

The new international emphasis on morality has been characterized not only by accusing other countries of human rights abuses but also by self-examination. The leaders of the policies of a new internationalism—Clinton, Blair, Chirac, and Schröder—all have previously apologized and repented for gross historical crimes in their own countries and for policies that ignored human rights. These actions did not wipe the slate clean, nor as the story told in the book makes clear, were they a total novelty or unprecedented. Yet the dramatic shift produced a new scale: Moral issues came to dominate public attention and political issues and displayed the willingness of nations to embrace their own guilt. This national self-reflexivity is the new guilt of nations. (Barkan 2000, p. xvii)

This story implicitly refers to an unenlightened period during which human suffering occurred, often owing to the very unenlightened disposition of those involved, but now leaders can recognize the injustices of the period and apologize, thus demonstrating a development in their own capacities for culpability and moral self-judgment. Additionally, the western inflection is significant for its embedded Eurocentrism. Wendy Brown succinctly explains this as follows:

Modernity itself is imagined to have emerged from a more primitive, religious, caste- and kin-bound, inegalitarian, unemancipated, bloody, unenlightened, and stateless time. And it has a corresponding geographic and demographic dimension: Europe is presumed to be at the heart of this emergence, with other parts of the globe (to various degrees) lagging behind. Modernity is incoherent without both of these dimensions, as is liberalism, the signal political formation that operationalizes each dimension as a foundational political truth. (2001, p. 6)<sup>5</sup>

At the same time, Brown argues that liberalism's reliance on a forward, progressive movement in history has been troubled since 1989 and the fall of communist regimes. Where universal rights of 'man' and the relationship of these rights to a freedom duly entitled to all human beings have been foundational tenets for liberalism, Brown notes that critiques of universal rights and freedom have revealed a much more limited, indeed, exclusionary access. The putatively progressive widening of rights has lost credibility among social movements whose political identities are not accommodated by the discourse of universalism.

This predominant liberal-inflected narrative of history continues to grapple with the disjuncture between a vision of universal human rights and the problem of exclusions that cannot be upheld on moral grounds. While liberalism recognizes the need to empower and integrate the voices of victims into a reconciliation forum, the problems associated with the very assumptions of history tacitly holding up the direction of reconciliation cannot be addressed, precisely because the assumptions themselves are largely accepted as given and the assumptions are required for the coherence of the meaning of reconciliation as it is deployed. While potentially liberating and cathartic, the consequences hold great risks for victims in becoming isolated and forgotten by the reconstituted shared history, the new political order, and their future generations' participation within society remains unsecured and can be forgotten as having a history warranting state action. The way in which a new social and political order is presented in relation to reconciliation will be examined below.

A public process of reconciliation anticipates three positive changes that a collective understanding of events, according to the discourse, will bring about. First, there will be a fuller account of the past. Through commissions of inquiry or truth commissions, historical accounts can be gathered for the national record, accounts otherwise impossible or difficult to collect. The result, according to Nagy, using a weaving metaphor, is that a collective public memory is created as a fabric into which personal accounts might be woven (2002, p. 342). Second, critical reflection will result. The historical record will become part of the polity's sense of self-understanding as a nation and thereby increase critical self-reflection, presumably of those accounts, and the conditions that made the events possible. Implicit in the creation of the collective memory is that this will be followed by apology and political discussion for improving the democratic values held by citizens at both the individual level and as an aggregate (Nagy 2002, p. 342). The polity will be edified on past misrecognition and injustices. Finally, creating a shared history through truth inquiries culminates in the construction of "a common set of ethical

values, the starting point of which is acknowledging responsibility for the past” (Nagy 2002, p. 343). Subsequent reparation and sanctions against repetition of similar actions in the future, Nagy asserts, “lead[s] to redistribution and to active partnership in efforts to abate social conflict” (2002, p. 343). This involves financial compensation to materially symbolize the wrongdoing of the past and as well as commemoration memorials and stated good intentions to build a better society. The desired sequence of events becomes as follows: apology, financial compensation, forgiveness, renewed and active partnership, although not always neatly in this order.<sup>6</sup>

Key to this sequence of events is the assumption of equality at the outset of the victim and perpetrator. The paradox of equality rights is at play within such a framework. Equality of participants is at once a necessary underlying premise for redress and acknowledgement of wrongdoing, and at the same time, it also rings false in the framing of the process. A catch-22 emerges: for people to participate, the state recognizes their victimization and suffering as persons who have had the right to better treatment and protection under the law. Yet, this equality remains highly equivocal and circumscribed to the public proceedings involving reconciliation. These proceedings can include announcements of financial settlement, statements of apology, and a truth and reconciliation commission. At the conclusion of a formal reconciliation process, this space for recognition disappears as does the equality offered by the recognition during such a commission. What remains is formal liberal equality that presumes or promises equality between victims and beneficiaries of the injustice versus actualizing it. This formal equality maintains social and economic inequalities of victims because the equality remains transcendent, that is, outside history, and the power that produced those inequalities continues largely unchanged.

In Canada, the first appointment of Justice Harry LaForme, and subsequently Claudette Dumont-Smith and Jane Morley by summer 2008 as Commissioners for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was a welcome start to the five-year process. The Commission, however, got derailed quickly with LaForme’s resignation (four months into a five year term), citing disagreement with the co-Commissioners and frustration with the relationship of the Commission to the Federal Department of Indian and Northern Affairs Canada.<sup>7</sup> Once the Commission begins for a second time, the Commission will solicit, collect and archive, personal statements from survivors of Indian Residential Schools, as well as those involved with the Schools who would like to submit their own personal statement, establish a National Research Centre, hold commemoration ceremonies, facilitate healing among survivors, educate the public of the Schools and their attendees’ experiences, and officially close the Commission by ceremony.

Notably troubling for this delay is the timeliness regarding the mandate of the Commission to collect personal statements from Residential School Survivors. About 80,000 of the approximate 150,000 aboriginal children who attended residential schools are still alive and it is estimated that five or six die every day. Among aboriginal peoples, there is a sense of urgency and sadness over the loss of as complete a record as possible with each death (“Chairman quits,” 2008). Yet, media coverage of the Commission and the Indian Residential Schools has dwindled since it has been inactive

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That there is a fair exchange that can produce or purchase reconciliation between perpetrators and victims is another key assumption of reconciliation I want to examine. Key to

the process of public reconciliation is forgiveness on the part of victims. What instigates or calls forth forgiveness is a statement of apology. Forgiveness is exchanged for a perceived genuine apology whereby apology is the currency that purchases forgiveness.

Apology is an important symbolic act in securing reconciliation (Torpey 2006, Olick and Coughlin 2003, **look at Tavuchis re: “politics of apology”**). According to Rodney Roberts, a leading advocate for U.S. Black slavery reparations:

Rectification calls for an apology. Since restoration and compensation can address only unjust losses, an apology is necessary in order to effect rectification, because it is the apology that addresses the matter of righting the wrong of an injustice. What makes an injustice *wrong* is the lack of respect shown when one’s rights are violated. Hence the righting of the wrong is accomplished by way of an apology, that is, an acknowledgement of wrongdoing, which includes the reaffirmation that those who suffered the injustice have moral standing. (Roberts 2001, p. 358)<sup>8</sup>

The rationale for apology given here is for recognition of the wrong of an injustice where rights have been violated. Apology in and of itself in the formulation here assumes it can do the work, or affect the process of forgiveness both completely and without hesitation, or under conditions that would not inhibit the process of forgiveness for those who have suffered. Apology risks imputing a universality whereby it can right the wrong to whom it is offered.

Another dimension of reconciliation is forgiveness on the part of victims. Martha Minow presents forgiveness as a desirable response to injury on a large societal scale. Institutional instruments of forgiveness, whether they be commissions of inquiry, commissions aimed at reconciliation, or public monuments, have in common the need to act and not do nothing (1998, p. 4). Her goal is to develop “a vocabulary for assessing the goals and limitations of each kind of response to societal level atrocities” (1998, p. 4.). This goal points to an imagined solution that directly resolves the issue in the future. Minow soberly acknowledges that, based on personal narratives of victims, such a completed reconciliation at a national level has the resonance of impossibility: “there is in these stories a lack of closure, and the impossibility of balance and satisfaction, in the face of incomprehensible human violence” (1998, p. 24). Yet, the ideal resolution, which is also imagined, remains a tacit referent of a completed reconciliation against which attempts can be measured. It is in how this ideal is framed that the consequences and results of the instrument of forgiveness can be better understood.

An aspect of the action, action that occurs as part of the instruments themselves and the intended goals and outcomes, becomes politically significant when the discourse tacitly assumes the desire to produce the subject of closure or a completed reconciliation. The key tenets of forgiveness, while not explicitly constituting a normative program, implicitly take on a forcefully normative character. Minow writes:

The victim should not seek revenge and become a new victimizer but instead should forgive the offender and end the cycle of offense. When we have been injured by another’s offense, we should seek to reconnect and recognize the common humanity of the other, and grant forgiveness to underscore and strengthen our commonality. Through forgiveness, we can renounce resentment, and avoid the self-destructive effects of holding on to pain, grudges, and victimhood. The act of forgiving can reconnect the offender and the victim and establish or renew a relationship; it can heal grief; forge new, constructive alliances; and break cycles of violence. (1998, p. 14)

Here, the emphasis is on the individual who is or ought to be predisposed to making the emotional change in oneself toward one's perpetrator. One reason for forgiving one's perpetrator includes not wanting to become a bitter and resentful person. In this case, forgiveness facilitates a freedom within the individual, a release from the pain and trauma that enables one to move on and live in the world without grudges or hatred. Archbishop Desmond Tutu writes that forgiveness is "the best form of self-interest" because it enables people "to survive and emerge still human despite all efforts to dehumanize them" (1999, p. 52). What enables this survival and humanity is a spirit transcendent of the bodily world. This religious aspect emerges at the invocation of forgiveness and it can become a natural given when there is an apology and expectation for forgiveness. Numerous benefits associated with the cessation of resentments and bitterness appear to aggregate naturally at the level of the collectivity, in Minow's view. She writes that "such reconciliation would assist stability, and democracy," but does not elaborate how this would come about (1998, p. 23).

Forgiveness, it turns out, becomes a state expectation that incorporates a degree of coercion. That is, victims are expected to offer forgiveness and be willing to exchange it for the new national identity that embodies forgiveness and the accompanying healing, emotional release of pain and suffering, and embrace one's perpetrators, even when abstractly represented by the state, as new citizens or institution ready to embark on a meaningful relationship. Regarding forgiveness, Prime Minister Stephen Harper's statement of apology for the Indian Residential Schools asked for forgiveness from Canada's aboriginal peoples and directed this statement in the House of Commons to their representatives unprecedentedly seated on the Chamber floor. Still, the exchange has not yet been completed. None of the representatives explicitly expressed forgiveness. As well, there was no clear sign of a verbal affirmation or physical handshake or embrace that conventionally signifies a degree of forgiveness. The closest sign of forgiveness came from Clem Chartier, President of the Métis National Council, who said in his statement that the "apology has been well received" (2008). The remaining representatives spoke of the importance of the apology. Chief Phil Fontaine, National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, said "the apology is momentous" (2008). Patrick Brazeau, National Chief of the Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, stated that the apology "is a positive step forward in the history of this great country of ours" (2008). Mary Simon, President Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, stated "a new day has dawned" (2008). Beverley Jacobs, President of the Native Women's Association, stated: "We have given thanks to you for your apology. I have to also give you credit for standing up. I did not see any other governments before today come forward and apologize, so I do thank you for that" (2008). All but Fontaine thanked the Prime Minister. All but Brazeau referred to demands still to be negotiated between aboriginal peoples and the federal government.

With the exception of Brazeau, aboriginal leaders expressed a guarded and vigilant stance in response to Harper's statement of apology that they connected the occasion to Canada's colonial history. Chief Fontaine stated that "brave survivors...have stripped white supremacy of its authority and legitimacy," and continued later in his response that "there are still many fights to be fought" (2008). Chartier said "I also feel deeply conflicted because there is still misunderstanding about the situation of the Métis Nation, our history and our contemporary situation" (2008). Jacobs said that aboriginal women and men want respect, respect and honour that has been systematically taken away through past federal programs like the Indian Residential Schools. In particular, Jacobs noted:

Women have taken the brunt of it [colonization] all. ... What is going to be provided? That is my question. I know that this is the question from all of us. That is what we would like to continue to work on, in partnership. (2008)

In the case of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, glimpses of the coercive character of the state came out through the bureaucracy-in-action of the Commission. Federal control destabilized the Commission from the very beginning. Part of the instability of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission had to do with the perceived loss of independence of the Commission regarding its organizational composition. One month into the Commission's term, then Chair Justice LaForme publicly reported concerns of meddling from the Department of Indian and Northern Development (DIAND). LaForme claimed that DIAND was holding tightly onto the budget of the Commission, wanting to appoint the Executive Director and staff of the Secretariat that would do the work of the Commission, and expecting the Executive Director to report to DIAND. In relation to soliciting personal statements from survivors from Schools, he and the Assembly of First Nations were concerned that this would undermine the credibility and independence of the Commission and discourage survivors from coming forward. Lastly, LaForme expressed concern over the adequacy of the budget to fulfill the Commission's mandate.

In summary, I have outlined an economy of apology, admission of wrongdoing, and truth and reconciliation as currencies that are supposed to purchase reconciliation, a renewal of national identity, and rectification and renewal in national history. The federal government gives up its past by confessing its wrongdoings and moving into a fresh present to start anew. Victims through their testimony can open their hearts and become new in sharing their experiences, forgiving the past and embracing the federal government and the non-aboriginal Canadian population as renewed human beings. Together they become partners in a new order. But what does this currency actually purchase? I suggest they purchase at best a very partial step in reconciliation and at worst a myth of satisfactory and sincere attempt at resolution, at least in large part because the state maintains control over the exchange, as well as cultural and economic power over aboriginal peoples. Underlying this narrative is a coercion that produces the opposite intended effect, especially when the psyche is involved. Added insult to injury is the possibility that the statement of apology and the Commission itself become remembered as a staged performance of state legitimation. The degree of legitimation will become clearer if the context of exceedingly unsatisfactory change in social, economic, racialized experiences of aboriginal peoples continue unaddressed.

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How can reconciliation become a possibility when forgiveness is deeply associated with the private? When victims are subject to brutality, murder of their loved ones, stolen property, daily physical harassment, verbal abuse, sexual abuse, physical and verbal threats, racist epithets and treatment, such experiences, according to Jacques Derrida, become a sacred place where others cannot enter until the time is right.<sup>9</sup> Yet, each experience is so unique, the right time, let alone the sign, is likely peculiar to each individual. Hannah Arendt tells us, "forgiving is the only reaction which does not merely re-act but acts anew and unexpectedly, unconditioned by the act which provoked it and therefore freeing from its consequences both the one who forgives and the one who is forgiven" (1998, 241). This suggests that forgiveness is at once of and not of this world because it is so interior and structured by Judaeo and Christian transcendent practices and understanding of forgiveness; at the same time forgiveness is the concept upon which politics



depends for suturing civil society and the nation-state when it has been ripped asunder. Thus, forgiveness becomes simultaneously a hopeful (im)possibility and instrumentalized political tool. Apology and Truth and Reconciliation Commissions inadvertently force forgiveness from victims that serves the purpose of constructing a shared progressive history and linear narrative within a specific time period. Yet, the time of forgiveness does not unfold according to a linear narrative. The results are as Derrida so aptly put it ‘impure.’

Each time forgiveness is at the service of a finality (atonement, redemption, salvation), each time that it aims to re-establish a normality (social, national, political, psychological) by a work of mourning, by some therapy or ecology of memory, then the ‘forgiveness’ is not pure – nor is its concept. Forgiveness is not, it *should not be*, normal, normative, normalizing. (Derrida 2001, pp. 31-32)

Under a normalizing imperative, the cost to victims includes exacerbated injury in what they feel is a false reconciliation, continued fear and threat to their security, and continued sense of injustice with impunity.

In the psychoanalytical understanding of forgiveness, forgiveness involves sufficient witnessing where “recognition of suffering, the crime, and the possibility of beginning again,” occurs (Kristeva 2002, p. 82). However, and this is key, while Kristeva sees this possibility occurring in psychoanalysis in the private space of analysis, she claims that the public sphere requires punishment through laws that cannot be transgressed. Canada’s Commission does not have powers of subpoena and prosecution. She writes: “the idea that the social sphere would deprive itself of jurisdiction and punishment from the outset seems to me unbearable for that would open the path to all sorts of racist, sexist, and various other violations” (Kristeva 2002, p. 283). [Need to complete the point, here.]

Resentment, in a Nietzschean vein, can be expected to occur when the apology rendered disingenuous or undercut by subsequent state (in)action runs contrary to the statement of apology made by the Prime Minister and the goals of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Liberal discourse does not address these failures and the impact of the failures on the victims and survivors, in large part, because it is assumed that the subject has the capacity to heal and create the conditions for her or his own participation in the polity. Yet the failure, elicits further suffering which, along Nietzschean lines, returns to the subject, reinforces the failure of the outstretched promise, and extends outward to sites where external blame can be attached.

Ressentiment is produced in the following way, according to Nietzsche:

For every sufferer instinctively seeks a cause for his suffering, more exactly, an agent; still more specifically, a *guilty* agent who is susceptible to suffering—in short, some living thing upon which he can, on some pretext or other, vent his affects, actually or in effigy... This...constitutes the actual physiological cause of *ressentiment*, vengefulness, and the like: a desire to *deaden the pain by means of affects*,... to *deaden*, by means of a more violent emotion of any kind, a tormenting, secret pain that is becoming unendurable, and to drive it out of consciousness at least for the moment: for that one requires an affect, as savage an affect as possible, and in order to excite that, any pretext at all. (1969, p. 127)

The re-construction of shared history contains within it the very conditions for failure and the entwined suffering and resentment accompanies those conditions. At the end of the process, neither a healed subject nor a socially and economically restored subject emerges, but the pain,

suffering, and rage continue paradoxically elicited and renewed through the process of a truth commission that is also tempered by a sense of unsteady coexistence, breakable at any moment when the right provocation presents itself.<sup>10</sup>

In the practice of truth and reconciliation, a more fulsome process may be required. Perhaps, truth and reconciliation may be too ambitious a project for a commission. Indeed, whether only truth was a possible objective of Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission became a momentary public issue. The two co-Commissioners Dumont-Smith and Morley apparently wanted to primarily focus on collecting personal statements from Residential School Survivors, whereas LaForme wanted to maintain reconciliation as the overarching goal. This may mean having to relinquish the view that a shared history between victims and perpetrators can be reconstituted concurrently or within the same body of inquiry, there is a need to rethink whether either apology and forgiveness can be genuinely elicited in a truth and reconciliation commission, and whether the exchange of apology for forgiveness can be facilitated and completed within a single commission. A lesson can be taken from the South African context. An independent researcher's report on the community of Duduza, a black township of about 100,000 people expressed victims' feelings on their participation in the making of shared history with reconciliation at its heart.

Reconciliation is not an event. People cannot simply one day decide that they want to forgive and forget. Most of the victims of this community are committed to a process of reconciliation. They are not necessarily demanding vengeance. They are, at the same time, not simply willing to move ahead as if nothing happened. They demand to hear the truth and to be given the time to consider it. (Hayner 2002, p. 157)

Commissions need to consider more seriously the victims' well-being and testimony both during and after the mandate of a commission. It may be that victims need more than one kind of public forum to be heard unconditionally for the fullest possibility of political recognition. After such fuller disclosure, (whether full disclosure in a public forum is humanly possible in instances of trauma remains an open question), the possibilities of further action or next steps in relation to healing can be taken. There is a need to recognize suffering, foster healing and at the same time to venture exclusively into this realm would compromise the political need for genuine belonging and full participation in society. Brown clearly illustrates this point:

For if I am right about the problematic of pain installed at the heart of many contemporary contradictory demands for political recognition, all that such pain may long for—more than revenge is the chance to be heard into a certain release, recognized into self-overcoming, incited into possibilities for triumphing over, and hence losing, itself. Our challenge, then, would be to configure a radically democratic political culture that can sustain such a project in its midst without being overtaken by it, a challenge that includes guarding against abetting the steady slide of political into therapeutic discourse, even as we acknowledge the elements of suffering and healing we might be negotiating. (1995, pp. 74-75)

The five year duration of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission may be not long enough to address the Indian Residential Schools, let alone the longer colonial legacy of the Canadian state vis-à-vis Indian, Métis, Inuit, and Tapirat peoples. The paradox of the Commission is that while

it addresses a specific demand by Aboriginal peoples it also creates a time limit on the much broader and as deeply and painful profound impact of historical colonial governance.

### **Conclusion**

Reconciliation has been emerging as a conventional process in response to appeals for apology and reparation pertaining to historically painful injustices. Past injuries and suffering incurred through systemic and diverse forms of oppressions, sanctioned either explicitly or tacitly by the state, are increasingly acknowledged nationally and transnationally. There is considerable effort being made on the part of governments, through truth commissions, for example, to recognize the injury and suffering incurred, to forge a more inclusive citizenship, and to achieve social justice.

The stated goals, actions, and outcomes of a commission intent on reconstituting the nation-state as a more reconciled, and also more vital democratic society (for self-identified democratic nation-states) can be read to take on board assumptions of a progressive history, equality of individuals prior to the specific situations considered, and a freely given and accepted exchange of apology and forgiveness between perpetrators and victims. These assumptions tend to render the constitution of shared history blind to the incomplete, partial, also unreconciled victims and lack of adequate consideration regarding the continued economic, social, and cultural demands made by victims. The process of reconstituting a shared history in the aftermath of violence risks ignoring the continued and building pain and suffering associated with the experience of the past as well as the present. Such pain and suffering occurs in the accessing of traumatic memory for public record or in the conspicuous social and economic disparities experienced by Residential School Survivors, not to mention the intergenerational effects of the residential school experience on aboriginal peoples (need to cite scholarship). The implications for shared history are that the new history's woven fabric has been manufactured without adequate attention to securing its appeal, durability, and longevity. The unraveling of a shared history could be palpable at any moment within a now controlled resentment.

The material flaws in the reconstituted history point to areas of for further work. For example, further consideration needs to be given to how pain and trauma are integrated into commissions of inquiry and to the temporal needs of victims in coping with their suffering associated with both the crimes and also the confrontation with the pain through the process of testimonials and potential witnessing of the testimony of their perpetrators. The concept of forgiveness itself deserves consideration in the forums and practices of reconciliation. Is it something that should be thought of or assumed so narrowly in terms of exchange, and also an exchange within a specific time bound forum? As long as reconciliation comprises a reconstituted nation-state with a point of resolution and renewed sense of beginning as finished products, or having a completion with the end of the formal inquiry itself, the pain and suffering experienced historically remains alive and troubled since the official narrative of shared history believes itself to have moved beyond the point of formal closure marked by an official closing ceremony. Reconciliation may require for victims recognition for the right not to forgive in order to keep the process open to their needs following from the injustices of the past. This is what the responses suggest from the Canadian aboriginal representatives sitting on the floor of the House of Commons who received the Government of Canada's official apology for the Indian Residential Schools policy and impact on aboriginal peoples.

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<sup>1</sup> For a listing of truth commissions since 1974, see (Hayner 2002, pp. 305-311).

<sup>2</sup> A selected list of scholarship in this area includes: (Hayner 2002; Govier 1999; Gibson and Bouws 1999; Graybill 1998; Kushner 1996; Lansing and King 1998; Michael E. McCullough 2000; Minow 1998; Nagy 2002; Norval 1998; Osabu-Kle 2000; Wilson 2000; Tutu 1999).

<sup>3</sup> For an account of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission producing a new national identity of forgiveness see Susan Vanzanten Gallagher (2002, p. 305).

<sup>4</sup> The same could be said for socialist doctrine and practice, but the question of the break from an orthodox Marxist historical materialism within the left to produce a more open ended, less teleological conception of time, will not be addressed in this paper.

<sup>5</sup> Prominent progress narratives coming from Europe and penned during the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries include those of Hegel, Kant, Paine Toqueville, Mill, and Marx.

<sup>6</sup> John Torpey describes reparations as a broad Boudieuiian field comprising concentric circles of compensation (financial and in-kind), apology, and communicative history, working from the core outward. (Torpey, 2006: 50).

<sup>7</sup> There is a search for new Commissioners and the deadline for applicants was March 20, 2009. There have, as yet, been no public announcements of who the Commissioners will be.

<sup>8</sup> This paper does not analyze similarities in processes of apology and reconciliation between specific human rights crimes, for example, residential school survivors and Japanese-Canadians who were interned during World War II.

<sup>9</sup> Residential school survivors have disclosed that it took them many years to be able to talk about their residential school experiences and even then in tiny bits and pieces in large part because of the emotional pain that remains unspeakable. See *Muffins for Granny: A Documentary*, (2007)

<sup>10</sup> At the same time, another possibility is assimilation and oblivion of historical events such as in the case of Japanese-Canadians who were interned during World War II in remote camps in the British Columbia and Alberta interior. The children of interned parents have assimilated and largely not continued in efforts or activism to maintain the memory of this part of Canadian history compared to their U.S. Japanese-American counterparts. See Torpey, 2006: 78-106. At the same time, James notes that Japanese-Canadians who won redress deployed their symbolic capital to support other populations seeking redress, including residential school survivors (2004: 896).

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