From Reconciliation to Reconciling: Reading What "We Now Recognize" in the Government of Canada's 2008 Residential Schools Apology

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In June 1991, assistant deputy minister for Indian Affairs, Bill Van Iterson, offered what may have been the first governmental apology for the Canadian Indian residential schools system. While attending a national conference convened in Vancouver to examine the legacy of the residential schools system, Van Iterson apologized to the Indigenous and Métis peoples present, according to the *Vancouver Sun*, "on behalf of public servants" (Todd A2). Reaction to this apology and others offered on the same day by Anglican, Catholic, and United Church officials was mixed, with at least one respondent stating that the apology ought to come from "the Prime Minister and his cabinet" (Todd A2), rather than from an assistant deputy minister. On 7 January 1998, Jane Stewart, then Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, issued a significantly more detailed and specific "Statement of Reconciliation." Speaking on behalf of "the Government of Canada," in her address to First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples "who experienced the tragedy of sexual and physical abuse at residential schools," Stewart said, "we wish to emphasize that what you experienced was not your fault and should never have happened. To those of you who suffered this tragedy at residential schools, we are deeply sorry" (Canada, *Notes*). The statement was explicitly positioned as the

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state's response to the final report delivered by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP); although it acknowledged RCAP's insistence that "The main policy direction, pursued for more than 150 years, first by colonial then by Canadian governments, has been wrong," the statement did not, for example, respond to RCAP's call either for the dismantling of the Department of Indian Affairs or for the establishment of a separate Aboriginal parliament (Canada, *Notes*; DePalma). The Stewart Statement of Reconciliation was delivered on Parliament Hill during a lunch-hour ceremony from which then Prime Minister Jean Chrétien was notably absent (Murphy 7). In contrast, Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered the most recent apology, on 11 June 2008, to a sitting Parliament in the House of Commons. This "official statement of apology" was offered "on behalf of the government of Canada and all Canadians."[1] The apology situates itself as initiating the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission and as proceeding from the "implementation of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement agreement [which] began on September 19, 2007," an agreement that promised a compensation package of close to $2 billion in order to settle a class-action lawsuit against the government which consolidated what had been thousands of individual lawsuits by residential schools survivors and relatives (Shingwauk News).[2] Harper's apology was spurred in part by Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology to Indigenous peoples for the "Stolen Generations" in February 2008 (Welch). Harper's mea culpa was also an attempt to offset negative international press for Canada's 2007 vote against, and subsequent refusal to adopt, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, a move that received, and continues to receive, widespread criticism both within Canada and abroad (see Bruner; CBC, *Canada Votes 'No'*).

The government's repeated statements of contrition suggest the difficulty of attempting to preserve the dominant narrative of Canada as a progressive, peaceable, and inclusive nation, while responding to the longstanding insistence by First Nations, Inuit, and Métis groups that the state acknowledge and apologize for the egregious and systemic abuses of the residential schools system. In a 2008 open letter to Prime Minister Harper, Ted Quewezance, then Executive Director of the Residential School Survivors of Canada (RSSC), summarizes RSSC's expectations for the apology,

1 I quote throughout from the English translation of the House of Commons —Minutes of Proceedings of 11 June 2008 (Canada, *Debates*).

2 Questions have been raised about the percentage of this money that will actually be dispersed to residential school survivors (see Flatfoot).

insisting that the state provide a full and public accounting of, and take full and public responsibility for, the creation and implementation of the Indian residential schools system (Quewezance). The letter's emphasis on the need for a "sincere" apology (5) can be read in part as a response to the 1998 "Statement of Reconciliation" that many found wanting. Kenneth Deer, for example, replying to the Stewart statement in the *Montreal Gazette*, writes: "Saying that it is 'deeply sorry' and expressing 'profound regret' may sound sincere, but the carefully worded statement from Canada avoided the term apology and, therefore, any legal implications of the use of the word. Therein lies the lack of sincerity" (Deer). The government has also been criticized for its refusal to commit sufficient funding (Deer, see also Alfred, 151–56). At the heart of the criticism directed at the state's previous attempts to address the legacy of the residential schools system is the charge that these rhetorical gestures have not been accompanied by and/or have not brought about substantive change in the either the lives of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples or in the relationship between Indigenous and Métis peoples and the Canadian people and state. While similar criticisms have been mounted against the current apology (see, for example, Flatfoot, Kreb, Annett) it is perhaps too soon to know for certain what changes will result from the Harper apology. That the most recent statement was delivered by the Prime Minister in the House of Commons certainly grants greater visibility to the statement, the first to be explicitly labeled "apology," and suggests that the state now places a greater importance on addressing the residential schools legacy. That said, as many of the responses to past and present statements of apology and reconciliation attest, it is critical to attend to the statement itself. Examining how the text of Stephen Harper's apology both constructs and responds to past abuses—indeed, how it imagines the past, present, and future relations between Indigenous and Métis peoples and the Canadian government and people—allows for insight into the depth and degree of the changes in this relationship to which the state is willing to accede.

In offering a reading of the 2008 residential schools apology in this paper, I draw attention to some of the more glaring omissions and celebratory rewritings of history within the document. However, my primary aim is not to demonstrate the inaccuracy of the history reproduced within the apology but, rather, to suggest some of the ways this history serves to imagine a benevolent, inclusive, and peaceable nation-state past and present and to construct "Aboriginal" and "Canadian" identities in relation to this nation. I argue that the construction of the statement of apology as a narrative of progress confines the abuses of the residential schools

system to the past while removing the contextual information needed to understand the schools system as a critical component of a larger and continuing colonial project. The apology's focus on closure rather than disclosure impedes national subjects from any comprehensive consideration of the past abuses carried out in their names or from reflecting on their current complicity in the oppressions and inequalities visited upon racialized minorities by the nation-state. Instead, the apology delivered on behalf of "all Canadians" reinforces and enhances the benevolence and compassion of the state, in turn allowing national subjects to lay claim to these same progressive attributes.

Given that this apology is offered on behalf of both the federal government and "all Canadians" and that the state positions this document as one which inaugurates reconciliation between Indigenous and Métis peoples, on the one hand, and the government and the Canadian people, on the other, how the state chooses to construct the past cannot but be indicative of how it wishes to represent itself in the present and what ideas of reconciliation it seeks to model. Therefore, in reading the apology as a statement intended to inaugurate reconciliation, I argue that the statement of apology fails to set a framework for the reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples it purports to inspire. Instead, I hold that if this document inaugurates any reconciliatory process at all, it is the reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples to a progressive and inclusive narrative of the nation-state. I also demonstrate the ways in which the narrative production of the apology encourages a reconciliation that does not alter the fundamentally colonial relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. Although I am skeptical of the ability of the apology itself to markedly alter existing relations between non-Indigenous and Indigenous groups, it is in the multiple individual and group responses—which interpret, accept, re-imagine or reject the narrative of the apology, in whole or in part—that I see hope for an ongoing process of reconciling. As such, I discuss the need for a conceptual move from reconciliation to reconciling, from a finalizing process seeking closure to one which privileges an open-ended, ongoing dialogue between and amongst individuals and communities.

In order to demonstrate how the apology preserves, and even augments, the benevolent and progressive attributes of both the Canadian state and its national subjects instead of revealing their deficiencies or failings, I draw on Sunera Thobani's *Exalted Subjects*. Thobani argues that "there prevails in Canada a master narrative of the nation, which takes as its point of departure the essentially law-abiding character of its enter-

prising nationals, who are presented (for the most part) as responsible citizens, compassionate, caring, [and] committed to the values of diversity and multiculturalism" (4). Organized through "state policies and popular practices," this figure, while ostensibly inclusive, has changed little from that of the civilized white Christian European subjects who were figured as the "true subjects" of Canadian nationhood at the time of the founding of the nation (6, 13–14). This national subject is "exalted above all others as the embodiment of the quintessential characteristics of the nation and the personification of its values, ethics, and civilizational mores" (3). Thus the nation and the exalted national subject exist as mutually reinforcing figures or narratives: the positive attributes of the nation are exemplified through the relations between national subjects and their others—the "Indian" and the "immigrant"—and the positive attributes of national subjects are reinforced through the progressive and benevolent policies of the state in relation to these others (4–6). Thobani argues that because "national identity becomes instated in the 'encounters' between national subjects and their various others, the identity of this subject remains inherently and enduringly unstable" (18). As such, in order to maintain the appearance of a stable and coherent national identity, both nation and nationals require the continual production of others on whom to "practice" benevolence and against whose backwardness progressiveness is compared and produced. Again, because of the mutually reinforcing narratives, the national subject is neither required to exercise any actual benevolence toward the nation's others nor to necessarily engage in direct interaction of any kind; the national subject nonetheless becomes exalted through his or her ideological commitment to the inferiority of the "immigrant" or the "Indian." Within the text of the apology, all non-Indigenous peoples are assembled under the phrase "all Canadians," a grouping which covers over the internal divisions Thobani presents, maintaining the unmarked nature of whiteness and homogenizing the differential implication of white and racialized national subjects in the colonization of Indigenous and Métis peoples.

Reading the Residential Schools Apology

On the one hand, Stephen Harper's apology constructs a break between past and present state policies and their supporting racial ideologies, while, on the other hand, it links past and present through a narrative of national maturation and progress.[3] The opening lines of the statement are instructive:

> Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today to offer an apology to former students of Indian residential schools. The treatment of children in Indian residential schools is a sad chapter in our history. In the 1870s, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools.

Here, the statement sets the temporal boundaries of the apology, limiting the abuses—before they are even identified—to a "chapter" in the progressive history text of the nation. The redundant formality of Harper's pronouncement, "I stand before you today," serves to immediately emphasize and contrast the progressive presentness of the apology with the distant nineteenth-century origins of the failures to be addressed. Once this temporal claim has been staked, the statement's format generally follows a narrative of intellectual, temporal, and moral progress. It begins by admitting that the primary objectives of the residential schools "were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures," in order to "assimilate them into the dominant culture." The narrative then moves from a limited recitation of the "emotional, physical, and sexual abuse and neglect" suffered by Indigenous and Métis children to the contemporary recognition of these abuses. The document closes by looking to the future in anticipation of the "forging [of] a new relationship between aboriginal peoples and other Canadians." Throughout the statement, variations on the phrase "we now recognize" are repeated in order to clearly indicate that (only) with the passing of time has the nation-state gained the insight necessary to ethically carry out its responsibilities to Indigenous and Métis peoples, though the actual time of the dawning of this recognition is notably ambiguous. This disconnect between past and present recognition serves to reassure contemporary national subjects that they can bear no responsibility for the implementation and execution of the residential schools systems. By employing a narrative of progress that emphasizes the civility of a mature nation prepared to take on "the burden [that] is properly ours," the apology situates the past abuses as regrettable, but understandable, and even necessary to that process of maturation.

By locating the oppression of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples in the past while omitting the historical context of the colonial project that was the foundation for the residential schools system, and the founda-

3 See Daniel Coleman's "From Contented Civility to Contending Civilities" for a more in-depth discussion of the timelines or chronotopes that shape the Canadian state and national subject.

tion of the nation itself, the apology provides a narrative that resolves the only supposed obstacle—the legacy of the residential schools system—to a just and equitable relation between Indigenous and Métis peoples and the nation-state. I would not want to underestimate the importance of the apology's acknowledgement of the assimilative intent of the residential schools system: the statement clearly identifies the objectives of the schools system as the removal, isolation, and assimilation of Indigenous and Métis children and makes repeated reference to "the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children," who were "forcibly removed from their homes." It further locates the basis of these objectives in "the assumption [that] aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal." However, despite entering these acts of violence against Indigenous children into the official archive of national history, the document falls far short of its potential to bring the nation-state's larger history of colonial violence and dispossession to light. Entirely absent from the document is any depiction of the residential schools system as comprising a single, if singularly destructive, aspect of the "continuing campaign by Europeans in the 'New World' to destroy its original inhabitants" (Cardinal, *Unjust* xv). Neither is there any link made between this desired destruction, through "physical elimination or cultural assimilation," to the desire—that continues to this day—for control of Indigenous land and resources (Thobani 119, see also Alfred 56). Indeed, the document gives no indication whatsoever of the origin of these negative "assumption[s]" of Indigenous and Métis culture and spirituality and thus has no explanation for why a violently assimilative project was seen as the most reasonable recourse. Instead the document seeks to mitigate state responsibility for the abuses that resulted from this construction of deficient Indigeneity. The deliberate ambiguity of the statement, "*some* sought 'to kill the Indian in the child'" (emphasis added) suggests such a motivation was less than widely held and certainly does little to indicate that it comprised the driving purpose of the schools system and encapsulates the stated intent of its creators (Titley 75, Miller 184–85). The apology reinforces the fantasy of a peaceful Canadian state and subject, assuring contemporary national subjects of the absence of any form of continuing colonialism or racism.

The apology reinforces the fantasy of a peaceful Canadian state and subject.

By refusing to document the colonial foundations of the nation, the statement of apology seeks to avoid any suggestion that assimilationist practices are inherently violent and abusive by attempting to segregate the failures of the residential schools system from its underlying principles. This should be understood not as contradiction but as strategy: the document "*recognize[s]* that this policy of assimilation was wrong," but

"*apologize[s]* for failing to protect [Indigenous peoples]" (emphasis added). The state's failing is constructed not as their engagement in a project of assimilation but, rather, in the inability to enforce effective oversight and control of those individuals engaged by the state to implement this project. The government apologizes for its inattention and absence not for its actions and intent; it demonstrates regret not for assimilation but for failing to assimilate its racial others in a more peaceful and effective manner. Although the state justifies its failures by claiming ignorance, knowledge of the psychic and material conditions of institutionalized Indigenous and Métis "education," far from being a recent revelation, has long been a matter of record. In 1907, for example, Dr P.H. Bryce, then the medical inspector for Indian Affairs, delivered a report commissioned by the deputy minister of the department to ascertain the health conditions of residential schools in Manitoba and the Northwest Territories (Miller 133). While noting that poor record keeping and a general "lack of interest in discharged pupils" make for incomplete health records, Bryce reports that 24 percent of students between 1883 and 1907 died while in the school system, overwhelmingly from tuberculosis, with another 7 percent listed as "sick or in poor health" (the death rate by tuberculosis identified among residential schools students was twenty times the national average) (Bryce 18, Warren 728). Not only was the government aware of the abuse, neglect, and high mortality rates in residential schools, but many reports, Bryce's included, were published in the popular press (Miller 134; Titley 84). In stating that "we *now* recognize these failings" (emphasis added), the apology in fact encourages the forgetting of what was previously known, thereby endorsing the wilful ignorance of its national subjects, past and present.

Muddying past responsibility for the residential schools system renders contemporary responsibility absurd, given there is little originary responsibility that can be extended forward. The apology further attempts to downplay the state's responsibility for the residential schools and their failings by emphasizing that the government "play[ed] *a role* in the development and administration of these schools" which were "operated as *'joint ventures'* with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian or United Churches" (emphasis added). Of course it was the state that authored the residential schools policy itself, and, as the apology halfheartedly notes, it did so "partly in order to meet its obligations to educate aboriginal children." Based on treaty agreements, the state did undertake the responsibility to educate Indigenous children, and to provide health services to Indigenous people more generally, although the state's commitment to these agree-

ments was hardly consistent or dedicated (Cardinal, *Treaty* 40; Warren 728). Moreover, Inuit and status Indian children, as wards of the crown, were the unambiguous legal responsibility of the Canadian government (Miller 423), and, as such, passing the responsibility for the implementation of its educational regime on to religious institutions should in no way absolve the state of its accountability. The apology avoids any reference to the "sovereign treaty-making capacity" of First Nations, an issue that remains unresolved, in part, Cardinal claims, because "there is a continuing unwillingness on the part of Canada to acknowledge that First Nations possessed sovereign capacity when they negotiated the treaties with the British Crown" (Cardinal, *Treaty* 57).

The Harper apology also attempts to limit its responsibilities by employing a homogeneous view of Aboriginality. While the document does refer to the fact that "First Nations, Inuit and Métis languages and cultural practices were prohibited" in residential schools, it otherwise refers to "Aboriginals" as an undifferentiated group. Both Clem Cartier, President of the Métis National Council, and Inuit leader Mary Simon voiced concerns, inside and outside of the House of Commons respectively, that the Harper apology did not recognize or respond to the majority of Inuit and Métis peoples who were subjected to "day schools" and are thus not covered by the apology or related compensation agreements (Canada, *Debates*; Fiddler 8).[4] By reducing the parties involved in reconciliation to Canadians and Aboriginals, the apology imagines a simplified reconciliation between two distinct and yet internally homogeneous groups. By minimizing its actual responsibilities to Indigenous peoples, the state reinforces the supposedly altruistic and compassionate motives for the schools system, while avoiding reference to its repeated and various abrogations of treaty agreements. Reducing the "wrong" of residential schools assimilation to problems of implementation, rather than acknowledging the violence inherent in the project, allows the state to minimize its responsibility and thus preserve the benevolent, caring spirit shared by state and national subject as well as the legitimacy of continued imposed interventions into Indigenous and Métis lives.

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Given the document's failure to denounce assimilation qua assimilation, and the preference it displays to beneficence over duty, the fact that the state narrates itself as "joining [Indigenous people] on [their] journey" of recovery is troubling. Indeed, the apology's closing phrase, read within

4 This failure has led to new lawsuits being brought against the government (see, for example, CBC News, *Indian Day School*).

the context of the larger apology, should raise serious doubts about the conditions under which the state and national subjects are said to be ready to join Indigenous and Métis peoples on this path to healing. The final sentence of the apology reads:

> [The Truth and Reconciliation Commission] will be a positive step in forging a new relationship between aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.

The apology's earlier division between "all Canadians," the homogeneous group on whose behalf the apology is made, and the Aboriginal peoples to whom it is offered appears markedly altered here. In the call for a "new relationship between aboriginal peoples and *other* Canadians" (emphasis added), it appears that Aboriginal people have been enfranchised on the sly. For members of sovereign First Nations in particular, reconciliation by enfranchisement is wholly contrary to their longstanding demands for state recognition of the unceded sovereignty of First Nations.

In his article "*Sui Generis* and Treaty Citizenship," James (Sakej) Youngblood Henderson argues that inviting Aboriginal peoples in Canada to federal citizenship is "another attempt to resolve the intractable *Canadianité* colonial consciousness … rather than to implement new constitutional rights of Aboriginal peoples or to implement international human rights" (416), a claim bolstered by the state's recent unwillingness to endorse the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples or to enact RCAP's calls for treaty renewal. Henderson states:

> The call of federal citizenship to Aboriginal peoples transforms the sacred homeland of Aboriginal nations … into another version of Euro-Canadian self-congratulation and individualism. In favouring colonial over constitutional models, the invitation asks Aboriginal peoples to comply with colonial narratives posing as modernity, instead of asking Canadians and their institutions to comply with constitutional supremacy and shared sovereignties of treaties. (416)

Following Henderson's argument, the implicit call to federal citizenship within the Harper apology does not constitute a movement toward a new relationship between Canadians and Aboriginals but, rather, the reinforcement of the existing colonial relationship. That the apology depicts Canadians joining Indigenous and Métis peoples, rather than the reverse,

emphasizes a benevolent assimilation and is consistent with the state's strategy throughout the document of apologizing for the previous terms and conditions of assimilation while continuing to maintain an assimilationist agenda, albeit one that operates under a more benign guise. Given that the residential schools apology seeks to address the attempted forcible incorporation of Indigenous people into the nation-state, to offer up a narrative of celebratory assimilation in response consists of a change in tone and image rather than in aim or practice. Instead of responding to demands for a definitive repudiation of assimilative practices (Quewezance 5), the Harper apology indicates that the government is willing to address the residential schools legacy only insofar as this recognition of past wrongs does not alter the benevolent, progressive, and inclusive nature of the Canadian state, the characterization of its nationals as similarly compassionate and caring, or the subordinate position of First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples.

From Reconciliation to Reconciling

I now turn from a reading of the Prime Minister's statement of apology to a consideration of the state's rhetorical positioning of this document as one that will inaugurate a process the state terms "reconciliation." A number of critics have questioned the usefulness of reconciliation as a concept and practice on the basis of its restorative nature. Mahmood Mamdani, in his critique of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, has argued: "To reconcile is to restore … to return to a status quo ante" (quoted in McGonegal 33). Indeed, the verb "to reconcile" is defined as to "restore to peace and unity," and all definitions related to reconciliation incorporate this return to a prior state. Not wholly unlike Mamdani, Jacques Derrida is concerned that the negotiation of forgiveness between groups will lead to the creation of an "economy of reconciliation that causes the wrong itself to be simply forgotten or annihilated" ("To Forgive" 46), particularly in cases where the state "[believes] it necessary to take responsibility in order to efface the debts and crimes of the past" and "reconstitute the national unity" (*On Forgiveness* 40). Certainly, to speak of the reconciliation of Indigenous peoples and the Canadian nation and/or state imagines a past period of national unity generally and equitable relations between Canada and First Nations, Métis, or Inuit peoples specifically. On the contrary, as many have noted, the "lawful" founding of the Canadian state was only possible through the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the rendering of their legal systems *illegal*—a dispossession that continues to underwrite the existence of the state (Thobani 12–14). Even in geopolitical

contexts where one might more reasonably speak of favourable pre-existing relations, if not outright "peace and unity," the efficacy of a figurative return to a time prior to the failure of the relationship seems dubious. Such a return in the Canadian context allows the state to maintain its colonial relationship with Indigenous and Métis people while doing little to ensure that similar abuses cannot be repeated.

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Reconciliation as renewal in the Prime Minister's apology also discourages the participation of national subjects in any reconciliatory efforts. National subjects are neither called upon to respond to their own implication in either the residential schools system or the broader colonial project nor asked to engage in any ethical re-evaluation. The only future-oriented request made of national subjects in the apology is for "the forging of a new relationship … based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us." This request for a "new relationship" predicated upon the renewal—rather than a re-imagining—of relations between "other Canadians" and Aboriginal peoples does not appear to require any action on the part of exalted national subjects. Indeed, the document suggests that once an apology has been offered by the state on behalf of its national subjects, they have but to wait for Aboriginals to respond with forgiveness while continuing to "[work] on recovering" in order that reconciliation be made complete.

If the ends of reconciliation—a definitive return to a pre-existing state of peace and unity—are unrealizable and undesirable, I argue that what must be emphasized is exactly this incompleteness. To focus on the generative and ongoing aspects of a less coercive process, and one which would emphasize the need for generating a new relationship, I suggest a move from the term "reconciliation" to "reconciling." The use of the gerund form of the verb emphasizes the necessarily agential and iterative nature of processes of reconciling, distinguishing it from finalizing processes of reconciliation. We might read the "re" of reconciling to mean not "a return to a previous state" but, rather, as "once more," that is as an appeal to repetition rather than a return to an imagined originary state of unity. The secondary definition of "reconciling" refers to the "[a]ccommodation of states, facts, qualities, etc., esp. those otherwise considered mutually exclusive or contradictory" (*OED*). While "accomodation" can suggest the assimilation of difference, I want to gesture here toward the importance of an openness to multiple and contradictory narratives. As Julie McGonegal

succinctly argues, "A politics of reconciliation that denies or suppresses differences is ultimately flawed as an ethical intervention into structures of power and inequality, as is a politics that silences or domesticates otherness" (5). When the state possesses a monopoly on, or disproportionate control over, the dominant discourse of reconciliation, it is inevitable that groups seeking reconciliation will be reconciled, albeit incompletely, to that dominant discourse.

A process of reconciling that calls for the commitment of all parties to the process itself, rather than one which focuses almost exclusively on the celebratory anticipation of a finalizing reconciliation, is necessary in order to address the wrong committed with the larger aim of altering the relationship which allowed that wrong to be committed. The Harper apology, in its refusal to acknowledge that the colonial relationship between Canada and Inuit, Métis, and First Nations peoples allowed for the abuses inherent in the residential schools system, denies the connection between residential schools abuses and other issues—land claims and self-government, for example—which stem from this colonial relationship. The segregation of these closely related issues allows for the reinforcement of what Thobani has referred to as a national discourse in which "Indians are presented as making impossible and unending demands for special treatment" (4). Addressing these issues is crucial, but positing the supposed resolution of any one issue as the end goal of reconciliation can work against the larger goal of changing the overall relationship.

The need to avoid the creation of yet another celebratory and monolithic history is critical to reconciling. In the introduction to *Taking Wrongs Seriously: Apologies and Reconciliation,* Elazar Barkan and Alexander Karn argue that the negotiation of history is necessary to state reconciliation, positing that, "Through a process of open dialogue, victims and perpetrators can exchange perspectives, combine their memories and recover their lost dignity. As they allow themselves to become enmeshed in each other's stories, historical adversaries uncover new possibilities for self-definition and fresh avenues for cooperation" (8). Barkan and Karn's characterization of apology as allowing dominant national subjects to restore their "fidelity and confidence to the principles and ideals which they take to be fundamental to their group identity" (26) is premised on what Taiaiake Alfred argues is precisely the failing of state reconciliatory processes in Canada. Alfred claims that this form of state reconciliation requires and reinforces a "false notion of moral equivalency" (151) between Indigenous and non-Indigenous groups, wherein both sides are called to compromise. Compromise between unequal parties favours the dominant group and

suggests that both parties are similarly, if not equally, responsible for the abuses. Barkan and Karn's conceptualization of reconciliation might be helpful in cases that do not involve the state, but where the state is involved the power imbalance between reconciling parties makes the process described untenable. The creation of a new, but singular, version of history cannot but reflect the power imbalance between the groups that are producing it.

Allowing contradictory narratives to co-exist without rushing toward forgiveness and a "unifying" re-narration could encourage national subjects to (re-)consider 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—something Stephen Harper's statement of apology manifestly does not accomplish. Allowing for processes of reconciling which recognize that the multiple affiliations of peoples cannot be wholly or solely organized under predominantly Eurocentric conceptualizations of state citizenship is especially critical in relation to the multiplicity of national configurations of First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples. Understanding reconciling as an ongoing process would encourage national subjects, as well as Indigenous and Métis peoples, to respond to the apology with narratives that recognize affiliations and disconnections that go beyond citizenship and would help to ensure that difference not be subsumed under an imagined "equal citizenship" achieved through state reconciliation.

The reply of Beverly Jacobs, President of the Native Women's Association of Canada, to the Harper apology provides an excellent example of maintaining a focus on long-term changes in the relationship between state and Indigenous peoples. She addressed government and opposition parties, saying, "We have given thanks to you for your apology … for your words because now it is about our responsibilities today, the decisions that we make today and how they will affect seven generations from now. My ancestors did the same seven generations ago and they tried hard to fight against you." In remarks outside the House of Commons, Jacobs explained that, though she was thankful for the state's efforts, she did not yet accept the apology (Fiddler 8). I find Jacobs's response compelling for a number of reasons. By connecting her present-day response to her ancestors' fight against colonial domination, Jacobs does not allow the discourse of reconciliation to elide the ongoing colonial relation between the nation-state and Indigenous and Métis peoples. In her evocation of an Indigenous philosophy whereby all decisions must be made in consideration of their effects seven generations into the future—a philosophy which could provide an

ethical framework for reconciling—she refuses to depict the residential schools legacy as contained to the past or emptied of all residual effect through the offering of apology. In responding to the offered apology with qualified thanks, rather than forgiveness, Jacobs contests the celebratory national narrative the apology seeks to assert.

The establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission offers the potential for a movement away from a univocal narrative of reconciliation. However, while the TRC's achievements cannot yet be evaluated due to the fact that it is still in its earlier stages, I believe the fact that the commission follows the apology, rather than precedes it, raises doubts about the value the government places on Indigenous and Métis testimony. The apology insists that "we now recognize" both the incompatibility of the residential schools system with Canadian principles of inclusion and tolerance and the damage this system has caused to Indigenous and Métis peoples and communities. Because this knowledge is asserted prior to the public disclosure of the system's effects by Inuit, First Nations, and Métis survivors, the apology constructs the nation and its subjects as remarkably prescient in their knowledge of what they recognized only very recently. While the fact that the TRC follows the apology suggests that it has been positioned so as to affirm what the apology constructs as already "known," the potential certainly remains for the TRC to uncover or draw attention to information at odds with Harper's statement. This information might be employed to contest both the narrative put forward by the state and the state's attempt, by way of this narrative, to authorize testimony supporting the view that wrongs committed against Indigenous and Métis people are wholly historical in nature. Indeed, the information and testimony gathered by the TRC might well serve to demonstrate both the incommensurability of the state's apology to the abuses suffered and the need to commit to an ongoing process of reconciling.

I remain concerned, however, that the apology's absolution of contemporary national subjects prior to the publishing of information collected by the commission is more likely to encourage national subjects to continue to be disengaged from the process than it is to motivate their involvement. A statement marking the one-year anniversary of the apology released by Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Chuck Strahl, celebrates the appointment of a new chairperson and commissioners and acknowledges the "urgency to capture the statements of the survivors," given that "True reconciliation and healing will only come about when the pain and suffering of the survivors of Indian Residential Schools is spoken by them and heard by us in a spirit of respect" (Canada, *One Year Later*).

In responding to the offered apology with qualified thanks, rather than forgiveness, Jacobs contests the celebratory national narrative the apology seeks to assert.

I do not disagree that the opportunity to testify may be greatly beneficial to survivors, nor would I discount the possibility that attentiveness to this testimony may cause national subjects to rethink their understanding of, and relation to, Indigenous and Métis peoples. However, to posit that reconciliation can be accomplished by national subjects solely through respectful listening once again places the burden of "working on recovery" wholly upon First Nations, Inuit, and Métis peoples and insists that no ethical re-evaluation or reassessment on the part of national subjects is necessary.

In closing, I would like to turn to recent remarks made by Georges Sioui in *Histories of Kanatha: Seen and Told*:

> In June of this year, our Prime Minister has, very commendably, expressed Canada's deep regrets for the harsh, often inhumane treatment received by tens of thousands of First Canadians in the Residential School system during as many as six generations. To me, some words still need to be said by our Prime Minister: I believe that a much more solid foundation will be established for Canada's unity with its First Peoples when our country says with heart, the words "Thank you": Thank you, our First Peoples for humanely undergoing the sacrifice of so many of the things you prized, including your very physical existence, so that Canadians can now have this country that they so much love. The words "Thank you" have such a stronger spirit than the words "I'm sorry." They mean: "I'm grateful for what you have done for me. I wish to include you in my life. I wish us to live our lives together." (312–13)

The gesture of thanks Sioui calls for is incompatible with the dominant discourse of reconciliation and its focus on closure and resolution that work toward the effacing of abuses both past and present. This gesture of thanks would make such programmatic responses impossible because rather than focusing on an end goal that would allow moral debts to be "settled" it instead argues for a relationship predicated upon an ongoing and inexhaustible debt to Indigenous and Métis peoples—a debt that does not call for the final reconciliation of accounts or peoples but for ongoing reconciling.

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