Decolonizing Reconciliation   **WORD COUNT: 1185**

In the past twenty years, the term "reconciliation" has become central to addressing past

collective injustices, primarily understood within a national context (United Nations, 2007;

Amnesty International, 2012). Often presented as an alternative political solution to retributive

justice and understood as providing a concerted means to stem further outbreaks of violence,

early conceptualization of reconciliation was developed within the broader framework of peace

studies, in the specialization of conflict transformation and transitional justice studies. However,

critiques of reconciliation have led to questioning the assumption that such initiatives necessarily

will lead to democratizing nation-building following civil unrest, revolutionary activity, and

ethnic violence. These criticisms have generated further investigations into fundamental

assumptions, such as the role of government, institutionalization and management of

reconciliation initiatives, and ongoing power differentials between individuals and communities,

that keep the scope of reconciliation programs to transform social dynamics in political check.

One of the seminal definitions of reconciliation is presented by Hizkias Assefa (1998) who

places the term on a linear scale as a qualitatively distinguishable political alternative to conflict

suppression. Within Assefa's much cited definition is an elaboration of healing as it pertains to

the need for political transformations of communities that have become divided by enduring

conflict. Assefa argues that a causal association exists between reconciliation and conflict

resolution, such that the former has a performative function in the long-term stability of the latter

(Assefa, 1998; Bar-Tel & Bennink, 2004; Bailey, 1997; Minow, 1998; Hoddie & Hartzell, 2005).

Concomitantly, Assefa's definition of reconciliation extends the parameters around normative

and formal stipulations of reconciliatory measures so that they take into account the psycho-social consequences of legislating and enacting such procedures. Ultimately, the validity of Assefa's conceptualization can be tested in case studies of past and present reconciliation commissions.

Reconciliation is frequently understood within the framework of truth and reconciliation commissions (TRCs). Between 1974 and 2009 over 30 truth and reconciliation commissions were established, 20 of which had formed in the past ten years (Amnesty International, 2012; Hayner, 2011). Among the most notable was the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SATRC), which initially was heralded a success for its court-like restorative justice proceedings, purportedly designed to put on fair trial, and in exchange for amnesty from criminal prosecution, those who perpetrated crimes against humanity either for or against the apartheid regime (Boraine, 2001; Hayner, 2011). Another key aim of the SATRC was to put the system of apartheid itself on trial (Boraine, 2001; Moon, 2008). Finally, the SATRC was the first to provide psychological support services nationwide in anticipation of acute trauma affects on those who provided testimonies to the commission (Hamber, 2009). Overall, the relatively peaceful proceedings of the SATRC is often referenced to substantiate the argument that developing nations could circumvent violent regime shifts in their bid to transition into a democratic, developed society (Daly & Sarkin, 2007; Minow, 1998; Lederach, 1997; Opotow, 2001; Saunders, 1999).

Despite and perhaps because of the perceived success of the South African TRC, the concept of reconciliation has been subjected to multiple critiques in the areas of psychology, sociology, law,

and in the interdisciplinary fields of critical race theory, cultural studies, and Indigenous studies. Over time, several limitations of the SATRC have been identified: (1) concern over the retraumatization of victims who give testimony (Hamber, 2009; Ross, 2003); (2) the ongoing systemic social and economic inequalities between different racial groups in a democratized republic of South Africa (Cuthbertson, 2008; Moon, 2008); (3) a xenophobic inability to accommodate new immigrants who are not affiliated with the history of apartheid (Neocosmos, 2006; Jefferess, 2008).

Post-colonial and critical race theorists have brought reconciliation practitioners and development theorists to task on broader political and cultural issues regarding both power inequalities in the construction of the global north versus the global south (Williams & Chrisman, 1994), the systemization of racism (Gilroy, 2000), and nationalism and nation-building following gross human violations (Mamdani, 2001). Bhabha and Spivak champion the notion that the most constructive critiques of nation-building occur in interstitial spaces and the subaltern, the "beyond" that exposes the structural and epistemic limits of advocating nationalism in post-conflict societies (Bhabha, 1994; Spivak, 1999; Razack, 2002). Spivak develops her discussion of the liminal in critiquing the construction of the "Third World" and the ongoing colonial ideologies that are presupposed in narrating the lives of the oppressed (Spivak, 1994). Mamdani and Gilroy take these arguments further in identifying the dangers of espousing ethnic, tribal, indigenous, and racial grounds for contesting colonial hegemony, and for instating culturally essentialist foundations for nation-building (Mamdani, 2001; Gilroy, 2000).

Scholars specializing in Aboriginal and Indigenous Studies have been examining the political

impetus behind reconciliation initiatives in so-called "developed" nations (Henderson &

Wakeham, 2009; Heath Justice, 2010; Short, 2008; Augoustinos, Lecouteur, & Soyland, 2002).

In Australia and Canada, reconciliation has been taken up as a means to address systemic

historical injustices, the Stolen Generation of Aboriginal People and the forced attendance of

Indigenous children at Indian Residential Schools, respectively (Moses, 2011; Short, 2008;

Attwood, 2005; The Truth & Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2010; Younging, Dewar, &

DeGagné, 2009; Castellano, Archibald, & DeGagné, 2008; Milloy, 1999; Haig-Brown, 1988).

First endorsed heavily by Archbishop Desmond Tutu during the SATRC (Boraine, 2001;

Favazza, 2002), the terms "truth" and "forgiveness" have been interlinked with reconciliation

and consequently debated in South African, Australian and Canadian contexts (Dwyer, 1999;

Augoustinos, Lecouteur, & Soyland, 2002; Moses, 2011). Scholars argue that undue demands

are placed upon the victim or oppressed to forgive the aggressor or oppressor for past injustices,

simply because the aggressive party has apologized for collective wrongdoings (Rasmussen,

2001; Augoustinos, Lecouteur & Soyland, 2002). Aboriginal and Indigenous scholars maintain

that the centrality of truth and apology in reconciliation discourse and in society leads to the

marginalization of critical enquiry into larger systemic considerations, such as: (1) the politics of

recognition and Indigenous identity (Coulthard, 2007; Heath Justice, 2010; Short, 2008); (2) the

prolongation of colonialism in settler societies (Armstrong, 2012; Regan, 2010; Attwood, 2005);

(3) reconciliation in relation to memory and the erasure of traumatic pasts (Opotow, 2001;

Cuthbertson, 2008; Rasmussen, 2001); and (4) existing socio-political tensions and allegiances

between Indigenous people and other oppressed groups (Mathur, Dewar, & DeGagné, 2011; Mawani, 2009; Henderson & Wakeham, 2009).

In the Canadian context, political reconciliation (Schaap, 2005; Moon, 2008) is advocated as a method for bringing together post-colonial and Indigenous ideas that promote cultural, social, institutional, and legal transformations of a society (Castellano, Archibald, & DeGagné, 2008), which hinge upon political resistance to systemic oppression (Jefferess, 2008; Miki, 2004; Kin-Gagnon, 2000). Framed in relation to the redressing of other past collective wrongs such as the Chinese Head Tax (Dyzenhaus & Moran, 2005; Mawani, 2009) and internment of Japanese Canadians (Miki, 2004; Henderson & Wakeham, 2009), critiques of reconciliation are creating new avenues for challenging the political and epistemological privileging of knowledge. They build upon conversations between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities that invert power relationships in education (Castellano, Archibald, & DeGagné, 2008; Haig-Brown, 1988), sociology (Tuhiwai-Smith, 1999), literature (Armstrong, 2012; McCall, 2011), the visual arts (Townsend-Gault, 2004; Mathur, Dewar, & DeGagné, 2011), and media studies (Cubitt, 2008).

Key Questions That Guide My Research

As reconciliation moves beyond the context of being a possible solution for developing nations attempting to transform into democratic and capitalist societies, a number of important critical questions with respect to its political purpose have been raised:

1. What is the function of reconciliation in countries that are not facing imminent civil war or escalation of nationwide conflict?

2. Is nation-building necessary for uniting divided societies? If so, are reconciliation programs the best means to achieve national reunification?

3. In states identified as 'developed nations', what are some of the tacit socio-political goals of those in charge of instituting and institutionalizing a program of reconciliation?

4. What are the political and epistemological shelf lives of reconciliation as a political concept and alternative to criminal justice? What comes after reconciliation?

Decolonizing Reconciliation Reading List

Seminal Conceptualization of Reconciliation
Assefa, H. (1998). The meaning of reconciliation, in People Building Peace: 35
Inspiring Stories from around the World, part 1, no. 2. Downloaded 10 October 2005 from
http://www.gppac.net/documents/pbp/part1/2_reconc.htm.

Bar-Tal, D., & Bennink, G. H. (2004). The nature of reconciliation as an outcome and as a
process," in Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, (Ed.), *From conflict resolution to reconciliation*. Oxford:
Oxford University Press.

Conflict Resolution & Peace Studies
Amnesty International (2012). *Truth Commissions*. Downloaded 04 May 2012 from
http://www.amnesty.org/en/international-justice/issues/truth-commissions

Bailey, K. D. (1997). System and conflict: Toward a symbiotic reconciliation, *Quality
and Quantity*, 31, 425-442.

Daly, E. & Sarkin, J. (2007). *Reconciliation in divided societies: Finding common ground.*
Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Hoddie, M. and Hartzell, C. (2005). Signals of reconciliation: Institution-building and the
resolution of civil wars. *International Studies Review*, *7*, 21-40.

Lederach, J. P. (1997). *Building peace: Sustainable reconciliation in divided societies*.
USIP Press: Washington, D.C.

Minow, M. (1998). *Between vengeance and forgiveness: Facing history after genocide and mass
violence*. Boston: Beacon Press.

Opotow, S. (2001). Reconciliation in times of impunity: Challenges for social justice. *Social
Justice Research, 14*(2), 149-170.

Rasmussen, D. (2001). Reconciliation-to-forgive versus reconciliation-to-forget. *Peace
Research, 33*(2), 115-124.

Saunders, H. H. (1999). *A public peace process: Sustained dialogue to transform racial
and ethnic conflicts.* New York: St. Martin.

United Nations (2007). Resolution adopted by the General Assembly
61/17. International Year of Reconciliation, 2009. General assembly, 61st Session. Retrieved
from http://daccess-dds-
ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N06/495/45/PDF/N0649545.pdf?OpenElement

Indigenous Scholars

Armstrong, J. (2012). Literature of our land: An ethos for these times. In B. Ashcroft, R. Mendis, M. McGonegal, & A. Mukerjee, (Eds.), *Literature for our times: Post-colonial studies in the twenty-first century* (pp. 345-356). Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Castellano, M. B., Archibald, L., & DeGagné, M. (2008). *From truth to reconciliation: Transforming the legacy of Residential Schools*. Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

Coulthard, G. (2007). Subjects of empire: Indigenous peoples and the 'Politics of Recognition' in Canada. *Contemporary Political Theory*, *6*(4), 437-460.

Haig-Brown, C. (1988). *Resistance and renewal: Surviving the Indian Residential School.* Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.

Heath Justice, D. (2010). Rhetorics of recognition: On Indigenous nationhood, literature, and the para-colonial perils of the nation-state. *The Kenyon Review*, *32*(1), 236-261.

Townsend-Gault, C. (2004). Circulating Aboriginality. *Journal of Material Culture*, *9*(2), 183-202.

Tuhiwai-Smith, L. (1999). *Decolonizing methodologies: Research and Indigenous peoples.* Dunedin, NZ: University of Otago Press.

Post-Colonial Writings

Bhabha, H. (1994). *The location of culture.* London: Routledge.

Gilroy, P. (2000). *Against race: Imagining political culture beyond the color line*. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap of Harvard UP.

Jefferess, D. (2008). *Postcolonial resistance: Culture, liberation and transformation*. Toronto: UofT Press.

Mamdani, M. (2001). *When victims become killers: Colonialism, nativism, and the genocide in Rwanda.* Kampala: Fountain Publishers.

Razack, S. H. (Ed.). (2002). *Race, space, and the law and the unmapping of a white settler society*. Toronto: Between The Lines.

Spivak, G. (1994). Can the subaltern speak? In P. Williams & L. Chrisman (Eds.), *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory: A reader* (pp. 66-111). New York: Columbia University Press.

Spivak, G. (1999). *A critique of postcolonial reason: Toward a history of the vanishing present.* London: Harvard University Press.

Williams, P. & Chrisman, L. (Eds.). (1994). *Colonial discourse and post-colonial theory: A reader.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Case Studies in TRCs

Hayner, P. (2011), *Unspeakable truths: Transitional justice and the challenge of truth commissions.* New York: Routledge.

1. South African TRC and Reconciliation

Boraine, Alex (2001) *A country unmasked: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.* Capetown, SA; Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Cuthbertson, G. (2008): South Africa's democracy: From celebration to crisis. *African Identities, 6*(3), 293-304.

Moon, C. (2008). *Narrating political reconciliation: South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission.* Maryland: Lexington Books/Rowman & Littlefield.

Neocosmos, M. (2006). *From "foreign natives" to "native foreigners": Explaining xenophobia in post-apartheid South Africa.* Senegal: CODESRIA.

Ross, F. C. (2003). On having voice and being heard: Some after-effects of testifying before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *Anthropological Theory, 3*(3), 325-341.

2. Reconciliation in Australia

Attwood, B. (2005). Unsettling pasts: reconciliation and history in settler Australia. *Postcolonial Studies, 8*(3), 243-259.

Augoustinos, M., Lecouteur, A., & Soyland, J. (2002). Self-sufficient arguments in political rhetoric: Constructing reconciliation and apologizing to the Stolen Generations. *Discourse & Society, 13*(1), 105-142.

Moses, A. D. (2011). Official apologies, reconciliation, and settler colonialism: Australian indigenous alterity and political agency. *Citizenship Studies, 15*(2), 145-159.

Short, D. (2008). Reconciliation and colonial power: Indigenous rights in Australia. Aldershot, UK: Ashgate.

3. Redress & Reconciliation in Canada
Dyzenhaus, D. & Moran, M. (2005). *Calling power to account: Law, reparations, and the Chinese Canadian head tax.* Toronto: UofT Press.

Henderson, J. & Wakeham, P. (2009). Colonial reckoning, national reconciliation?: Aboriginal peoples and the culture of redress in Canada. *English Studies in Canada, 35*(1), 1-26.

Kin Gagnon, M. (2000). *Other conundrums: Race, culture, and Canadian art.* Vancouver: Arsenal Pulp Press.

Mathur, A., Dewar, J., & DeGagné, M. (Eds.). (2011). *Cultivating Canada: Reconciliation through the lens of cultural diversity.* Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

Mawani, R. (2009). *Colonial proximities: Crossracial encounters and juridical truths in British Columbia, 1871-1921.* Vancouver: UBC Press.

McCall, S. (2011). *First person plural: Aboriginal storytelling and the ethics of collaborative authorship.* Vancouver BC: UBC Press.

Miki, R. (2004). *Redress: Inside the Japanese Canadian call for justice*. Vancouver: Raincoast Books.

Milloy, J. (1999). *A national crime: The Canadian government and the residential school system – 1879-1986.* Winnipeg, MB: The University of Manitoba Press.

Regan, P. (2010). *Unsettling the settler within: Indian residential schools, truth telling, and reconciliation in Canada.* Vancouver: UBC Press.

Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2010). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada research opportunities. Retrieved August 01, 2010 from http://www.trc.ca/websites/trcinstitution/File/pdfs/Research opportunities_EN(1)_July6

Younging, G., Dewar, J., & DeGagné, M. (Eds.). (2009*). Response, responsibility and renewal: Canada's truth and reconciliation journey*. Ottawa: Aboriginal Healing Foundation.

General writings

Cubitt, S. (2008). Indigenous, settler, and migrant media. *Third Text, 22*(6), 733-742.

Dwyer, S. (1999). Reconciliation for realists. *Ethics & International Affairs, 13*(1), 81-98.

Favazza, J. A. (2002). Reconciliation: On the border between theological and political praxis. *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, *1*(3), 52-64.

Hamber, Brandon (2009). *Transforming societies after political violence: Truth, reconciliation, and mental health.* New York: Springer.

Schaap, Andrew (2005). *Political reconciliation*. London: Routledge.