

## Unsettling the Settler Within



# Unsettling the Settler Within

Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling,  
and Reconciliation in Canada

Paulette Regan



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To the Hazelton Alternative Dispute Resolution Pilot Project  
Indian Residential School survivors and the Gitxan people,  
and  
to the memory of my mother, Lily Lee Regan,  
who taught me that truth and justice always come from the heart;  
may her grandchildren and great-grandchildren live her legacy



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# Foreword

*Taiaiake Alfred*

In a global era of apology and reconciliation, Canadians, like their counterparts in other settler nations, face a moral and ethical dilemma that stems from an unsavoury colonial past. Canadians grow up believing that the history of their country is a story of the cooperative venture between people who came from elsewhere to make a better life and those who were already here, who welcomed and embraced them, aside from a few bad white men and some renegade Natives who had other, more *American*, ideas.

Canadians like to imagine that they have always acted with peaceful good intentions toward us by trying to fix “the Indian problem” even as they displaced, marginalized, and brutalized us as part of the colonial project. Canadians do not like to hear that their country was founded through frauds, abuses, and violence perpetuated against the original peoples of this land. Canadians are in denial, *in extremis*. For those who dispute this reality, Paulette Regan offers up the history and living legacy of colonial violence that characterizes the Indian residential school system as a case in point. She rejects a self-congratulatory version of Canadian history and challenges the benevolent peacemaker myth that forms the basis of settler identity.

We were always in the way. And we still are. It’s just that now we do not present a physical obstacle so much as a psychological, or should I say spiritual, barrier to the peaceful development of the Canadian economy and society. Some may say, “Well, you know, things were different back then, two hundred years ago.” But, really, how different?

The convenient way to deal with the founding injustice of Canada is to allow colonialism to continue by ignoring the truth, to erase it from our

memory, ban it from the schools, and suppress it in public. Canadians can continue to glorify their country's criminality, from Cartier to Caledonia, and force those who suffered the fraud, abuses, and violence to accommodate the denial and artifice of justice that has been set up. But as the original people of this land, as the blood and spiritual descendents of the people who lived on the land and fought and died to preserve the loving relationship they had with this continent, we cannot forget what has been done to create the myth of the country now called Canada.

Writing from a settler perspective primarily for other settlers, the author avoids the trap that so many non-Native scholars fall into – telling Native people how we must live. Instead, she homes in on what settlers must do to fix “the settler problem.” By this, she means that non-Natives must struggle to confront their own colonial mentality, moral indifference, and historical ignorance as part of a massive truth telling about Canada's past and present relationship with the original inhabitants of this land. The author argues that the settler version of national history denies a critical Indigenous counter-narrative. Populating the story of this country with Indigenous history and presence would mean that non-Natives will have to stop thinking of us as “obstacles” or “problems,” which is counter-intuitive in Canadian society.

Exposing the mindset that perpetuates “benevolent” colonialism, *Unsettling the Settler Within* urges settlers to take responsibility for decolonizing themselves and their country. The author argues that words of apology and reconciliation are not enough to make the significant social and political change that is so sorely needed. Words must be accompanied by concrete action at all levels of Canadian society. If such actions are to be transformative, they cannot be predicated on good intentions but must be rooted instead in a fundamental recognition of the human dignity and right to freedom of self-determining Indigenous peoples.

I am highly skeptical of the vision of reconciliation that is currently embraced by most Canadians. There is a growing sense, nationally, that, as we accept apologies and payments for the crimes of the residential schools, or jobs and contracts in exchange for stolen lands, forgiveness is implied. What is the message – that material compensation can address the crimes of colonialism? Yes. Most Canadians believe that, once money is paid to a Native or “Natives” in general, these questions are dead, and we

will be able to move on. What is this notion of reconciliation doing for Canadian society, and what is it doing for Native people? More than anything else, it is obscuring. The author shares my skepticism and then proceeds to dig more deeply into what a process of ethical truth telling and genuine reconciliation entails. What she proposes is not an easy quick fix but gives Native and non-Native alike food for thought about how to break through the colonial impasse that continues to define our relationship.

Paulette Regan has offered us a necessary vision of being Canadian that reflects her hard-earned clarity and a fearless honesty. In writing my own book on the idea of decolonization, I had many conversations with Native people who are fighting to survive in all senses of the word and to restore dignity to their lives and nations.<sup>1</sup> Through these interactions, I came to understand what it is to be a true warrior and how crucial the warrior spirit is if we are going to challenge and defeat the falsehoods and violence at the core of our relationship today. Warriors put themselves forward to defend righteousness, even, or especially, when there are great risks attached to staking the claim to truth. In her own way, Paulette Regan embodies the warrior spirit too. And if taken seriously by its readers, the words and ideas she offers us in *Unsettling the Settler Within* have revolutionary and liberatory potential. They point the way toward something completely new in the five-hundred-year history of interactions between Indigenous people and settlers in this land: white people staking claim to justice and the generation of a relationship of honesty and mutual respect.

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I especially thank Brenda Ireland for the energy, heart, and sense of humour that she brings to our work together and for her friendship, and to Ramona Rose for taking me home to Newfoundland. My deepest gratitude goes to my family, whose love sustains me: my husband, Les, my children, Paul and Denise, and my son-in-law, Thomas, for being there when I needed them most; my sister, Marion, and brother-in-law, Joe; my nephew, Rob, and his wife, Angela; my stepsons, Mike and Jeff; and my niece, Barb, her partner, John, and their children, Kristina, Brianna, and Matt. Finally, I want to acknowledge a very special little person, my granddaughter, Ella, who brings me such joy and reminds me that life is indeed a beautiful gift. I carry you always in my heart, little one.

## Unsettling the Settler Within



# Introduction

## A Settler's Call to Action

The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian Residential Schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language. While some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools, these stories are far overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children, and their separation from powerless families and communities. The legacy of Indian Residential Schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today. It has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered ... The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for too long. The burden is properly ours as a Government and as a country. There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian Residential Schools system to ever prevail again. You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey.

– FROM PRIME MINISTER STEPHEN HARPER'S  
FORMAL APOLOGY FOR INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS,  
AS DELIVERED IN PARLIAMENT, 11 JUNE 2008<sup>1</sup>

## REFLECTIONS

On 11 June 2008, like many Canadians, I witnessed Canada's apology to Indian residential school (IRS) survivors. For me, as a non-Indigenous Canadian, a settler on these lands, the apology marked a watershed moment of national truth telling about Canada's past. It evoked powerful memories of the faces and voices of survivors I had encountered over the past six years. The apology was a public vindication of the many former IRS students who were not believed when they spoke out about what had happened to them in the schools. For those courageous survivors who first broke the silence and went to court to confront their abusers, it was an important symbolic recognition of the significant harms they suffered as children. For many survivors present in the House of Commons and those who watched from their communities across the country, the apology was bittersweet, as they remembered their grandmothers and grandfathers, mothers and fathers, husbands and wives, sons and daughters, aunties and uncles, sisters, brothers, and cousins who did not live to see this day. For some who rejected the apology, it was quite simply too little and too late.

As I listened to Harper's words of apology, I asked myself what it would mean in concrete terms for the settler majority to shoulder the collective burden of the history and legacy of the residential school system. History teaches us that, despite the cry of "never again," societies are quite capable of replicating in new forms the harmful societal attitudes and government policies of the past. In light of this reality, how will we actually make good on our promise to ensure that the attitudes that inspired the IRS system for over a hundred years never again prevail in this country?

If we are to join survivors on a journey to recover from the residential school experience, what is our particular role and responsibility? Is it to "help" Indigenous people recover from the devastating impacts of prescriptive policies and programs that we claimed were supposed to help them? Given our dismal track record, this seems a dubious goal. Or is it to determine what we who carry the identity of the colonizer and have reaped the benefits and privileges of colonialism must do to help ourselves recover from its detrimental legacy? How will we do so in ways that speak to truth, repair broken trust, and set us on a transformative decolonizing pathway toward more just and peaceful relations with Indigenous people?

My own journey into the visceral heart of Indigenous-settler relations began in the mid-1980s. It has taken me from the university classroom, where I studied



fur trade history, to the safe haven of quiet archives, where I spent my days doing historical research on Aboriginal rights, land claims, and treaty issues, to the uncharted and highly contentious terrain of Aboriginal-government politics and policy. It eventually took me to small remote Native communities in northern British Columbia and southern Alberta, where I learned first-hand from residential school survivors not only about their experiences in the schools but about how the road to hell is indeed paved with good intentions.

Growing up in East Vancouver in the 1950s and '60s, I read about "Indians" in textbooks as part of a distant past. Occasionally, I would see the walking wounded, but I didn't distinguish Native people from the many other lost souls who wandered the streets of my neighbourhood. Unbeknownst to me, Indigenous children across the country who were the same age as myself were being sent to residential schools far from their homes and families. I knew nothing about the long history and presence of the Coast Salish on these lands that I call home. Today, when I walk through the city, I see it through new eyes. A history that was once invisible to me is now so apparent in the mountains, the outlying deltas and valleys, and the rivers and Pacific Ocean that were part of my childhood. I see Coast Salish presence and memory embedded everywhere in the city's landscape. When I look at the railway tracks that run through the city, what springs to mind is not so much the celebratory history of Canadian settlement but the lesser-known story of appropriating Indian reserve lands in the name of progress and the ensuing Native struggle for justice and restitution. When I see Indigenous people on the mean streets of the Downtown Eastside, or read about high incarceration rates or the low education success rates for children and youth, I now understand that much of the social dysfunction, violence, and poverty that exists in communities today is part of the intergenerational legacy of Indian residential schools.

But on this day of apology, I also know that these same communities have always resisted the attacks on their distinct cultural identities as they work to reclaim their histories and revitalize their languages, governance, and legal systems. I have been fortunate. I think about the many Indigenous teachers – scholars, friends, elders, community people, political leaders, and, most importantly, residential school survivors – who have been part of my journey thus far. Together, they have taught me hard lessons about the destructive impacts of colonialism. But they have also taught me something about the rich counter-narrative that exists across Turtle Island (North America). This long history and legacy of Indigenous diplomacy, law, and peacemaking reveals itself to those willing learners who have eyes to see, ears to listen, clear minds, and open, humble hearts. My teachers

compelled me to question deeply the accepted wisdom that still prevails among majority Canadians, that we know what is best for Indigenous people. Why, despite all the evidence to the contrary, does this belief still persist? After all, it was this attitude of Euro-Canadian cultural superiority that justified the IRS system. Our government and various churches put into motion what is now described as a well-intentioned but ultimately devastating solution to what was known as the Indian problem.<sup>2</sup>

For me, Canada's apology was a call for settlers to take seriously our collective moral responsibility for the systematic removal and institutionalization of Native children, some of whom were abused and most of whom were deprived of their family life, languages, and cultures. Although the debilitating impacts of sexual, physical, and psychological abuse upon children are self-evident, and Canadians condemn such practices, the problematic assimilation policy that gave rise to such abuses is less understood by the Canadian public. To those who argue that they are not responsible, because they were not directly involved with the residential schools, I say that, as Canadian citizens, we are ultimately responsible for the past and present actions of our government. To those who say that we cannot change the past, I say that we can learn from it. We can better understand how a problematic mentality of benevolent paternalism became a rationale and justification for acquiring Indigenous lands and resources, and drove the creation of prescriptive education policies that ran counter to the treaty relationship. Equally importantly, we can explore how this mentality continues to influence Indigenous-settler relations today. Failing to do so will ensure that, despite our vow of never again, Canada will create equally destructive policies and practices into the future. To those who argue that former IRS students should just get over it and move on, I say that asking victims to bury a traumatic past for the "greater good" of achieving reconciliation does not address the root of the problem – colonialism. For all these reasons, I think of the apology not as the closing of what is commonly referred to as a dark, sad chapter in Canada's history but rather as an opening for all Canadians to fundamentally rethink our past and its implications for our present and future relations.

### **Setting the Context**

Indian residential schools were jointly established and run by the federal government and various churches in most provinces and territories across the country.<sup>3</sup> This history is still very much alive – the last school closed in 1996, and approximately eighty thousand former students are still alive

today. The history of Indian residential schools in Canada is complex and spans more than a century. One part of the story is about well-meaning paternalistic educators, government and church officials who sought to educate and assimilate Indigenous children into mainstream Canadian society “for their own good.” To accomplish this task, children were removed from their families, in many cases forcibly, by Indian agents or police officers. They were forbidden to speak their own languages or practise their own cultural and spiritual traditions, and were punished for doing so. The other part of the story is about the devastating cultural, psychological, and emotional harms and traumatic abuses that were inflicted upon small children – an intergenerational history of dispossession, violence, abuse, and racism that is a fundamental denial of the human dignity and rights of Indigenous peoples. These aspects of the story have been revealed through the IRS litigation and claims process. But the whole story – the one that will provide new insights into how and why the system was able to flourish for so long, despite overwhelming evidence of its flaws – has yet to be told.

Telling the whole truth about the history and legacy of the IRS system means that settlers must consider the possibility that our relationship with Native people has never been predominantly peaceful or reconciliatory. Deconstructing our identity and history necessitates a rethinking of what constitutes violence as well as a closer investigation of its more nuanced forms. Why focus on violence? Some readers may think that I overstate the case and will resist this particular reading of Canadian history. They point to the many examples of cooperation, alliance, and intermarriage that also shape our past. Others rationalize, declaring that not all children had a bad experience in residential schools, not all teachers were abusers, and that some staff and officials spoke out courageously, criticizing conditions at the schools. I acknowledge these realities. In fact, if we are to fully understand the complexity and insidious nature of the attitudes, policies, and practices that gave rise to the residential school system, these aspects of the story must also be told. Important decolonizing lessons can be learned from the ways in which teachers, staff, and various officials chose to ignore, vigorously enforce, comply with, or resist residential school policies and practices in various times and places.

Despite the long history of Indian residential schools, characterized by the imposing presence of the school buildings that dotted the Canadian

landscape and were embodied in the lives and memories of survivors, most ordinary citizens say that they know nothing about them. The schools, some of which are still standing, remain comfortably invisible to Canadians, as do the former inhabitants themselves. Perhaps we, as non-Indigenous people, can begin by asking ourselves some troubling questions. How is it that we know nothing about this history? What does the persistence of such invisibility in the face of the living presence of survivors tell us about our relationship with Indigenous peoples? What does our historical amnesia reveal about our continuing complicity in denying, erasing, and forgetting this part of our own history as colonizers while pathologizing the colonized? How will Canadians who have so selectively forgotten this “sad chapter in our history” now undertake to remember it?<sup>4</sup> Will such remembering be truly transformative or simply perpetuate colonial relations? Surely, without confronting such difficult questions as part of our own truth telling, there can be no genuine reconciliation.

Although the prime minister assured First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples that “there is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian residential school system to ever prevail again,” my premise is that, unfortunately, such attitudes are still alive and well today, rooted in settler historical myths and colonial mindsets. To understand why this is so, it is instructive to explore how colonial violence is woven into the fabric of Canadian history in an unbroken thread from past to present, which we must now unravel, upsetting our comfortable assumptions about the past. At the same time, we must work as Indigenous allies to “restory” the dominant-culture version of history; that is, we must make decolonizing space for Indigenous history – counter-narratives of diplomacy, law, and peacemaking practices – as told by Indigenous peoples themselves.<sup>5</sup>

### **A Pedagogical Opening: Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission**

Post-apology, Canada will embark on a national journey of remembering the history and legacy of Indian residential schools in the hope of repairing the damaged relationship between Indigenous peoples and settler Canadians. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC), which has been described as the cornerstone of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), will guide this journey. The agreement was negotiated in response to over twelve thousand individual abuse claims

and several class-action lawsuits filed on behalf of approximately seventy thousand former IRS students against the federal government and church entities who shared joint responsibility for the schools. Over the past several years, the Government of Canada and its various church co-defendants have paid monetary compensation to students whose sexual and physical abuse claims have been validated. In 2005, all of the involved parties – government, churches, the Assembly of First Nations, and legal counsel representing residential school survivors – began negotiations to resolve these claims. The IRSSA was finalized in 2006, approved by courts in every province and territory in 2007, and is now being implemented under court supervision. Although the settlement agreement is not without controversy, it is comprehensive in scope and multi-faceted, consisting of the following components: monetary reparation in the form of a common experience payment awarded to all former students based solely on verification of their school attendance; an independent assessment process that adjudicates physical and sexual abuse claims and awards financial compensation; a health support program for survivors that is administered by Health Canada; a commemoration program for memorial projects; and the creation of the TRC.<sup>6</sup>

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was formally established on 1 June 2008 and got off to a rocky start with the resignations of the first chair and commissioners. The commission was reconstituted in the summer of 2009 with the appointment of a new chair, Justice Murray Sinclair, and two commissioners, Chief Wilton Littlechild and Marie Wilson.<sup>7</sup> Tumultuous beginnings aside, the creation of the commission marked a critical turning point in Indigenous-settler relations in Canada. During its five years, the commission is tasked with undertaking a truth-telling and reconciliation process, producing a report on the residential school system and its aftermath, and making recommendations to government based on its findings. It will do so in part by gathering the diverse stories of former students, staff and administrators, government and church officials, and all others who wish to make submissions.

For survivors and their families and communities, the consequences of the residential school system are profound. As the commission undertakes its task, it is vitally important that Canadians learn about and acknowledge what Indigenous people have suffered as a result of assimilation policy and actions. In doing so, we must also recognize the strength and

resilience of those who, despite the harms perpetrated against them, continue to resist colonialism, reclaiming and reconstituting their own governance systems, laws, histories, languages, and ceremonies. Equally importantly, the TRC provides a rare opportunity for non-Native Canadians to undertake a deeply critical reflective re-examination of history and themselves.

Canada's TRC is also of interest to the international community as a potential model for addressing historical injustices affecting Indigenous peoples across the globe. The TRC is distinct from other commissions in several ways. It is the first commission in the world to be established as part of a judicially supervised negotiated agreement rather than by legislation or executive order. It is the only TRC to focus on Indigenous peoples, and more specifically on the historical experiences of children who were subjected to systemic abuse. The TRC must conduct its work in a manner that educates the Canadian public and enables participants to engage in truth telling about our past in a way that also facilitates long-term reconciliation.<sup>8</sup>

Within the international context, this TRC (unlike other commissions established in transitional democracies such as Chile, Peru, Guatemala, or South Africa) will conduct its work in a stable democracy. This may present certain advantages in that there are well-established democratic governance and legal institutions. Unlike many South Africans, for example, who viewed the long-standing institutions of apartheid as suspect, the majority of Canadians perceive their legal system to be fair. (Here I note that many Native people would disagree based on their negative experiences with the justice system.) Many South Africans thought that their country's commission (SATRC) was an inadequate substitute for the criminal prosecution of perpetrators who were instead granted amnesty for their crimes in exchange for their testimony. Equally problematic, the SATRC failed to provide financial compensation and symbolic reparations to the vast majority of victims who testified.<sup>9</sup>

In Canada, attempts to bring to justice the perpetrators of criminal acts and abuses related to the residential schools have taken a different trajectory, one that eventually led to the settlement agreement. In 1993, after a former school supervisor at the Alberni Indian Residential School was convicted and sentenced to eleven years in prison, the RCMP set up a Native Residential School Task Force to investigate allegations of criminal abuse. By 2000, it "had received 3,400 complaints against 170 suspects.

Only five people were charged.”<sup>10</sup> In many instances, laying charges was no longer possible because alleged perpetrators had died. By far the vast majority of claims were filed in the civil courts, where the sheer volume of claims eventually threatened to overwhelm the system. But the early trials demonstrated that the civil litigation process itself often revictimizes plaintiffs, dehumanizing those who may seek not only financial compensation but a restoration of their human dignity. The procedural requirements of civil litigation make it difficult for plaintiffs to fully describe those experiences that are not directly associated with the abuse but nevertheless have had a significant impact upon them.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, civil litigation focuses on individuals and cannot address the collective and intergenerational harms, such as loss of language and culture, which many students experienced.

A substantive body of research indicates that symbolic and material reparations, psychological support for victims of trauma, and a public reckoning with past wrongs are all required to adequately address historical injustices inflicted upon minority groups. Canada’s multi-pronged response to the IRS issue – the apology, financial compensation, a health support program, commemoration, and the creation of the TRC – hits close to the mark. Nevertheless, each component of the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement has met with mixed responses from survivors. For example, the common experience payment process has been criticized by some students whose compensation claims were denied, whereas some recipients found the process itself retraumatizing. Yet others report that the payment was important to them as tangible recognition of the systemic harms they suffered at the schools.<sup>12</sup> Like its precursor, the Alternative Dispute Resolution Program (ADRP), which is the subject of Chapter 4, the independent assessment process has met with various criticisms and accolades. Finally, it should be noted that the settlement agreement has been disparaged because it deals only with students who attended Indian residential schools. People who attended day schools or were in foster care are excluded, and recently, new class-action lawsuits have been filed by representative plaintiffs of these groups.

Within this controversial milieu, the TRC will face the formidable task of sustaining survivor support and public interest in its proceedings over the course of its five-year mandate. Many Canadians may simply tune out, declining to observe or participate in the commission’s activities, all of

which are voluntary because the TRC is not a public inquiry and has no subpoena powers to compel witnesses to testify. Here, it is important to note that critics of the commission have already surfaced on all sides. Some say that genuine reconciliation is impossible until Indigenous people's right to self-determination is recognized, treaties are honoured, restitution is made for appropriated lands and resources, and socio-economic, health, and education outcomes improve substantively. Others view the TRC as a whitewash designed by government and churches to cover up genocide. Still others envision it as a massive public exercise in either inducing or alleviating settler guilt as survivors and former staff members tell their stories. Some fear that survivors' truth telling or public testimony about very personal experiences of abuse, trauma, and grief will simply be consumed by the public as spectacle and will have little real impact on changing Native lives or educating Canadians about the past in a way that achieves social justice or facilitates a just reconciliation.

The Canadian commission faces an additional challenge. In the public mind, there has been no epitomizing moment of genocidal crisis or mass human rights violations that would trigger a need for transitional justice mechanisms such as international criminal courts, tribunals, or truth and reconciliation commissions more commonly associated with so-called developing countries or despotic regimes. Most Canadians associate violence in this country with the kind of physical confrontation that occurred during the highly publicized conflicts at Oka, Gustafsen Lake, Burnt Church, and Ipperwash Park.<sup>13</sup> We are disturbed by these violent encounters as they call into question a core tenet of Canadian identity – that we are a nation of peacemakers in our relations with Indigenous people. We congratulate ourselves on the fact that armed confrontation is still a rare occurrence in Canada, taking this as proof of our own political and moral superiority. We tend not to attribute this absence of overt violence to Native people's methods of handling conflict and making peace. Nor do we see the more subtle forms of violence that permeate everyday Indigenous-settler relations – racism, poverty, cultural domination, power, and privilege.

We do not categorize the residential school system and other assimilationist strategies as acts of violence, yet their caustic effects are evident. In the seismic wake of destruction left by the public policy experiment that was the Indian residential schools, Indigenous communities struggle



with poverty, poor health and education outcomes, economic disadvantage, domestic violence, abuse, addiction, and high rates of youth suicide. It is easy, from the safety of our relatively comfortable lives, to judge the apparent inability of Native people to rise above such conditions, thus pathologizing the victims of our well-intended actions. It is equally easy to think that we know what is best for them – hence our persistence in trying to solve the Indian problem. This singular focus on the Other blinds us from seeing how settler history, myth, and identity have shaped and continue to shape our attitudes in highly problematic ways. It prevents us from acknowledging our own need to decolonize.

### ***On Unsettling the Settler Within***

How can we, as non-Indigenous people, unsettle ourselves to name and then transform the settler – the colonizer who lurks within – not just in words but by our actions, as we confront the history of colonization, violence, racism, and injustice that remains part of the IRS legacy today?<sup>14</sup> To me, this is the crux of the matter. I unravel the Canadian historical narrative and deconstruct the foundational myth of the benevolent peacemaker – the bedrock of settler identity – to understand how colonial forms of denial, guilt, and empathy act as barriers to transformative socio-political change. To my mind, Canadians are still on a misguided, obsessive, and mythical quest to assuage colonizer guilt by solving the Indian problem. In this way, we avoid looking too closely at ourselves and the collective responsibility we bear for the colonial status quo. The significant challenge that lies before us is to turn the mirror back upon ourselves and to answer the provocative question posed by historian Roger Epp regarding reconciliation in Canada: How do we solve the settler problem?<sup>15</sup>

*Unsettling the Settler Within* is based on the premise that *how* people learn about historical injustices is as important as learning truths about *what* happened. Within this context, I explore the pedagogical potential of truth-telling and reconciliation processes. I agree with transitional justice experts who argue that history education in the wake of systemic violence and deeply rooted identity-based conflict must focus not only on curricula reform but on pedagogical reform as an effective means of transforming divisive histories and identities, and shifting negative perceptions of marginalized groups.<sup>16</sup> Although transitional justice theory and practice has focused primarily on “Third World” countries, “First World” states

including settler nations such as Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States can benefit from the lessons learned in less stable regimes. In a similar vein, what might the “Third World” learn from the Canadian TRC experience?

In dealing with historical and identity-based conflict in North America, a multidisciplinary group of scholars has raised critical questions regarding culture and power in neutrality-based alternative dispute resolution (ADR) negotiation models of the sort that have been used to resolve residential school claims.<sup>17</sup> At the same time, scholar-practitioners who focus on intercultural conflict resolution are now exploring the role of narrative, dialogue, ritual, performative practices, world view, and myth in developing transformative approaches to addressing socio-political conflict. But there has been little sustained interdisciplinary dialogue between conflict resolution scholar-practitioners who influence and participate in treaty negotiations and claims resolution processes, historians who study the complexities of Indigenous-settler relations and conflicts over time, and educators who focus on the pedagogical issues related to public history education and commemorative practices associated with remembering a difficult past. Rather, their works run on parallel tracks that rarely intersect, leaving a significant gap in theory, research, and practice.

Here, I bridge this gap, linking theory to my own practice – that is, research as praxis. In doing so, I emphasize the centrality of history and myth to settler truth telling about the past. Within this context, reconnecting reason and emotion – head and heart – is integral to an unsettling pedagogy. Although the strong emotions engendered by listening to residential school survivors’ stories are potentially decolonizing, they might also create a backlash of settler denial or, conversely, generate an empathetic response that, though well intentioned, is still colonial in nature. Reframing reconciliation as a decolonizing place of encounter between settlers and Indigenous people mitigates these possibilities by making space for collective critical dialogue – a public remembering embedded in ethical testimonial, ceremonial, and commemorative practices.

### Themes and Structure of the Book

*Unsettling the Settler Within* is structured and written in a way that reflects my own ongoing decolonizing journey. More than a theoretical exposition, it is based on my lived experience. From 2002 to 2004, I worked directly

with residential school survivors, church representatives, and lawyers in my capacity as an IRS claims resolution manager for the federal government. For me, this experience put a human face on the stark violence of colonialism. This book draws on my experience as a former claims manager and employs a conceptual framework for a decolonizing pedagogical strategy that is designed to teach Canadians about their history so as to initially unsettle and then transform how they view the past as it relates to contemporary Indigenous-settler relations. It also incorporates new material based on my university classroom teaching and an intercultural workshop titled “Unsettling Dialogues of History and Hope,” which I co-developed and facilitated with my Anishinaabe Métis colleague Brenda Ireland.

I am currently the director of research for the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (the opinions I express in the book are solely my own and do not represent those of the commission<sup>8</sup>), so I continue to grapple with the question of how settlers might confront the Indian residential school narrative as part of a broader decolonization project without falling into the multiple traps that replicate colonizing attitudes and behaviours. Throughout the book, I situate and self-critique my decolonizing struggles through my own storytelling in a series of self-reflective critical personal narratives, or auto-ethnographic vignettes, that mirror an imperative to unsettle the settler within. *Webster’s Dictionary* defines “unsettle” as “to loosen or move from a settled state or condition ... to perturb or agitate mentally or emotionally.” I argue that we must risk interacting differently with Indigenous people – with vulnerability, humility, and a willingness to stay in the decolonizing struggle of our own discomfort. What if we were to embrace IRS stories as powerful teachings – disquieting moments in which we can change our beliefs, attitudes, and actions?

Chapters 1 to 4 guide the reader through a process of truth telling. I first explain the theoretical and methodological underpinnings of an unsettling pedagogy and explore various themes related to settler responsibility. I make the case for why disturbing emotions are a critical pedagogical tool that can provoke decolonizing, transformative learning. In Chapter 2, I contextualize apology and reconciliation initiatives in a comparative analysis of Australia and Canada to critique and rethink reconciliation discourse. This sets the stage for exploring how a restorying of

Canadian history through ethical testimonial encounters, public history dialogues, and commemoration of the IRS history and legacy can work as a decolonizing force.

In Chapter 3, I challenge the peacemaker myth that goes to the heart of settler identity. It reinforces the popular belief that the settling of Canada was relatively peaceful because our ancestors, unlike their more violently disposed American counterparts, made treaties rather than war with Native peoples, brought law and order to the frontier, and created well-intentioned (if ultimately misguided) policies designed to solve the Indian problem by civilizing and saving people seen as savages. I trace the persistence of this myth from its roots in nineteenth-century treaty making to a contemporary reconciliation discourse that purports to be transformative but actually replicates colonial relations, reinscribing a national narrative that celebrates settlers as peacemakers.

The peacemaker myth emerged full-blown in nineteenth-century public consciousness as the settlement process moved west. In highlighting the western numbered treaties on the prairies and Indian policy in British Columbia, my intention is not to discount the substantive history of earlier treaties but to emphasize that, during this time period, the peacemaker myth crystallizes, becoming fixed in the public mind. My purpose is not to cover old ground – the controversial history of treaty making and Indian policy in Canada is well documented. Rather, using historical-comparative analysis, I reveal the violent discursive and symbolic practices of historical treaty and policy making and demonstrate in Chapter 4 how these practices continue into the present in new forms.<sup>19</sup> Today, they are manifested in various claims settlement processes that, despite talk of healing and reconciliation, remain rooted in patterns of colonial violence. I illustrate this point in a case study of the Alternative Dispute Resolution Program, which was created by contemporary bureaucrats – policy makers, lawyers, and negotiators – to settle IRS claims as part of a broader government mandate of healing and reconciliation.

Chapters 5 through 8 then take the reader through a process of reconciliation. In Chapter 5, I explore a historical counter-narrative of Indigenous diplomacy, law, and peacemaking that stands as a corrective to settler history and the peacemaker myth. Settler and Indigenous visions of law and peacemaking are fundamentally at odds. I draw on various Canadian and American sources that set out this counter-narrative from Indigenous

philosophical, cultural, and legal perspectives. Although the treaty literature in Canada and the United States is vast, the number of scholarly works that articulate Indigenous understandings of diplomacy, law, and peacemaking is much smaller, and I limit my focus to them. Conflicting Indigenous-settler historical narratives are most evident in Aboriginal title and rights cases where Indigenous people bring their oral histories and law into the courtroom.

Next, in Chapter 6, I probe the possibilities of apology and testimonial exchange that is experiential, subjective, and emotionally engaged, thus enabling settlers to bear ethical witness and learn to listen differently – with a decolonizing ear – to the accounts of IRS survivors, former teachers, and staff. The unsettling questions we then ask ourselves are ripe with potentially transformative possibilities. I compare Western and Indigenous criteria for making apology and restitution, emphasizing the importance of storytelling and ceremony as embodied testimonial and commemorative practice. Within this context, recognizing and respecting Indigenous criteria, protocols, and practices, without appropriating them, is essential.

In Chapter 7, I describe my own experience as a federal government representative who was honoured to be one of the non-Indigenous hosts of an apology feast held on 20 March 2004 at Hazelton, BC, in the Gitx̱san Feast Hall for former Edmonton Indian Residential School students who participated in the Hazelton Alternative Dispute Resolution Pilot Project. In the feast hall, reconciliation is a place of intercultural encounter – a teaching/learning space wherein the Gitx̱san use their diplomatic skills to adapt traditional law, protocols, and peacemaking practices within a contemporary context.

In the final chapter, I argue that incorporating an unsettling pedagogy into the design of truth-telling and reconciliation processes is essential if such processes are to be sites of decolonizing struggle and liberatory resistance that teach us to live in truth. Building on Rupert Ross' suggestion that, as residential school survivors bring their testimonies, their life stories, to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, they are transformed into warriors, I return to the theme of Indigenous diplomacy. I consider the problematic way in which North American popular history and media juxtapose the "Indian warrior" as the diametric opposite of the "Indian peacemaker," when historically and paradoxically, "a true warrior ... is

someone who carries the burden of peace.”<sup>20</sup> I argue that, collectively, survivors have always been warriors of peace. By this, I mean that they have used various non-violent means to confront Canada with its own colonial history, speaking truth to power in the courtroom and in the IRS claims settlement process, at community gatherings, and in public forums. The very fact that a national Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement was negotiated and that Canada apologized to former students stands as a living testament to these peace warriors.

Settler identity can also be transformed from that of colonizer to ally. We can learn from peace warriors, whose moral imagination points us toward a decolonizing pathway – but as we travel on this long and arduous journey, we must also look to our own past, our own life stories, for guidance. What can we learn from historical Indigenous allies who, despite their own complicity in the colonial project, spoke up for justice and, in doing so, were often marginalized themselves? The work of the TRC will not lead us to the end of the path: rather, it gives us a place and space to begin. This entails a public truth telling in which settlers link critical reflection, enlightened vision, and positive action to confront the settler problem head-on. Truth as an act of hope nurtures peaceful yet radical socio-political change that is the necessary foundation of reconciliation.

### **Reconciliation as Regifting**

In the final years of the twentieth century and into the first decade of the new millennium, settlers came bearing the promise of a new gift – reconciliation with former students, their families, and their communities. But as I argue in subsequent chapters, earlier attempts to address the residential school history and legacy were simply a regifting of the old package of settler promises, wrapped in pretty new paper – the language of reconciliation. For years, many residential school survivors have called for a national truth-telling and reconciliation process to heal the wounds left by the residential school experiment. But they are also understandably wary. To paraphrase an old adage, they have learned through hard experience to “beware of settlers bearing gifts,” and their experience with the now defunct Alternative Dispute Resolution Program did little to alleviate this distrust. In a post-apology environment and as Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission undertakes its work, many former students and their families will choose not to participate. We must respect this

choice. But others will offer the gift of their testimonies to Canada and Canadians.

How will we, as settlers, receive these gifts? What gifts will we ourselves bring to truth telling and reconciliation? Each of us must answer fundamental questions: Do we choose to remain colonial perpetrators – benign peacemakers – bearing the token gift of a false reconciliation? Or will we bear gifts offered with humility, respect, and a genuine willingness to experience our own unsettling so that we might learn from the profound teachings that this history holds for all of us? Will we view a truth-telling and reconciliation process simply as a way to put the past, and our guilt, behind us quickly? Or will we recognize the possibility of opening transformative pathways on a journey that starts within ourselves – a journey of critical reflection upon profoundly disturbing residential school stories? This book attempts to address these questions honestly and constructively in ways designed to speak hard truths, while remaining mindful of the importance of nurturing critical hope if we are to plant the seeds of a more authentic, ethical, and just reconciliation.

### **A Settler Call to Action**

*Unsettling the Settler Within* is a call to action for non-Indigenous Canadians who do not see a need to take part in a truth-telling and reconciliation process. It makes a compelling argument for why they should care about the history of the IRS system and actively participate in dismantling its ongoing legacy. For scholars, policy makers, and negotiators, it offers new insight into the influence of the peacemaker myth on historical and contemporary intercultural negotiation practices and the concomitant erasure of the history of Indigenous diplomacy, law, and peacemaking from the Canadian consciousness. For educators, conflict/peace studies scholar-practitioners, and historians, it links theory and practice to explore the pedagogical potential of truth-telling and reconciliation processes. For those who would be Indigenous allies in the fight for justice and peace, it demonstrates how examining myth and history enriches our thinking about, and participation in, the decolonization project.

At its heart, writing this book is an act of truth telling and witnessing whereby I continue to fulfill my responsibility as host at the Hazelton feast. In this way, I “remember my obligation” to polish the “chain of testimony-witnessing held together by the bonds of an ethics forged in a relationship

of responsibility and respect.”<sup>21</sup> Thus, my writing represents one way of honouring, not just in words, but through my actions, those IRS survivors who offered me the gift of their testimonies. Somehow, these testimonies cut to the heart of the matter. The people and their stories teach us. Indigenous people have broken the silence in order to name the violence that has been directed at them, and in doing so they call us, as settlers, to account. For two years, in both private and public settings, I listened to former students describe their experiences in the residential schools. During this time, I began the difficult process of learning how to listen differently to these stories – to engage in the act of bearing witness as an ethical undertaking.

In 2005, when I left my job to return to the Indigenous Governance Program at the University of Victoria to begin the research on which this book is based, I was unsure where the journey would take me. As I began to write, I realized that, as a non-Native woman who had worked both for and with Indigenous people for over twenty-five years, mostly in non-government contexts, my own deepest learning has always come when I was in unfamiliar territory culturally, intellectually, and emotionally. It seems to me that this space of not knowing has power that may hold a key to decolonization for settlers. Back then, I was just beginning to appreciate the richness of the gift I had received from residential school survivors. Sometimes, we are offered a gift that we are reluctant to accept. Perhaps we do not recognize it as a gift because it feels like a burden, like a heavy responsibility that we don’t quite know how to carry, and we are afraid that we will do so poorly. I now realize that their gift is a life teaching that I will always carry with me and continue to learn from in new, unsettling ways.

Part of the struggle of writing as truth telling has been to make sense of my own decolonizing journey in a way that honours the gift. I write as honestly as I can about what I have learned in the critical hope that it might serve as some small catalyst in thinking about how we, as settlers, might breathe life into Canada’s apology. This is my truth. So I write not about survivors’ stories, for they are not mine to tell, but of my own unsettling. This is my reciprocal gift to Indian residential school survivors – offered with humility, in the spirit of acknowledging, honouring, and remembering their teachings.



# 1

## An Unsettling Pedagogy of History and Hope

### REFLECTIONS

"The title of your workshop, 'Unsettling Dialogues of History and Hope,' may be threatening and turn people off. Is there another one?" This question jumps out at Brenda and me as we review the evaluation sheets that we have collected from our workshop participants. It reminds us that, for some, the very notion of "unsettling" or decolonizing struggle seems frightening and counterintuitive. Yet over the years, our own experiences as an intercultural team – one of us Anishinaabe Métis and the other Euro-Canadian – tell us that, without this unsettling, little will change. We had both been in situations where people's attempts to work together became bogged down in recriminations, denial, distrust, and guilt. We wanted to explore whether using dialogue circles as a way to learn about Indigenous-settler history could be a catalyst for changing this destructive dynamic.

Our work together is grounded in a conceptual and pedagogical framework that emphasizes the importance of circle work and ceremony when sharing our stories. Circles are universal places of connection that invite paradigm shifts. Although circles have a certain structure and format, what happens within each circle is unique and unpredictable.<sup>1</sup> Brenda and I create opportunities for people to experience decolonization so that history is understood both intellectually and emotionally as an embodied place of connectivity that is essential to reconciliation. We aim to move people outside their comfort zones by putting a human face on the impacts of colonization as we share our own stories. As an intercultural team, we work with shared principles and ethics of mutual respect, recognition, and responsibility, coupled with trust and good humour. Several

workshop participants have commented that how we interact with each other models what we teach. At the same time, we are mindful that, despite the many years we have known each other, there are sometimes still moments of tension between us that reveal the colonizer/colonized dynamic in our own relationship.

Using circle protocol, Brenda and I begin the workshop by creating a safe space for participants to challenge their understanding of our shared history, examine their differing world views, values, and cultural systems, and explore how these affect Indigenous-settler relations today. Basing her approach on her elders' teachings, Brenda invites participants to join us in ceremony – those that she conducts or ones of their own choosing. Ceremony prepares everyone to work together in a good way with clear heads and open hearts.

In the first part of the workshop, we explain why decolonization is necessary to authentic reconciliation. We talk about how we have seen first-hand that, in the headlong rush toward reconciliation, there are very few opportunities for people to engage in honest, reflective dialogue about our shared but conflicting stories – our histories. For Indigenous people, the past is a painful chronicle of broken treaties, stolen lands, Indian residential schools, and the Indian Act. For non-Indigenous people, the past is a celebratory story of settling new lands, nation building, and helping unfortunate "Indians" to adjust to a new way of life. Yet this problematic history is not in the past: it sits with us in many places – government offices, boardrooms, negotiating tables, churches, hospitals, classrooms, and community halls. Whether or not we acknowledge its presence, we know intuitively that this history is still alive. But because we cannot change the past, we try to ignore it. Talking about the burden of history makes us feel frustrated and overwhelmed. We don't know how to put the past behind us, so rather than engaging in meaningful dialogue, we get stuck in destructive monologues. We talk past each other, not hearing the deeper truths residing in stories that are troubling for both teller and listener, albeit for different reasons.

Brenda and I then restory Canadian history, describing the past and present impacts of colonial policies such as Indian residential schools, the Indian Act, and involuntary enfranchisement. Although most Indigenous participants are very familiar with this history, many settler participants know only rudimentary facts and have little understanding of Indigenous-settler relations. In correcting the record, we intertwine historical facts with life stories that make the history come alive. In this way, abstract facts become connected to human experience. People find this to be a powerful and compelling way of presenting history. As one

participant said, "This is the real history." We then encourage participants to explore the coping strategies that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people have developed – distrust, anger, denial, distancing, shame, fear, and guilt – that keep us mired in a colonial relationship. We have found this to be a critical part of the workshop as participants experience an "aha" moment in which they see how their own coping strategies are self-limiting.

We encourage participants to explore how their conceptions and misconceptions about the past limit their ability to work together in the present at the individual and community level. This process evokes strong emotions. Facing our feelings and being willing to risk taking action can seem futile, given what seem to be insurmountable challenges. Debriefing this part of the workshop can be intense, so an eagle feather is passed around the circle, reminding everyone of the sacredness of the work that we are doing and honouring the courage and honesty of all those present.

At mid-day, the sharing of food and laughter lightens the energy in the room and creates a sense of camaraderie that carries over into the second part of the workshop. We work with people to identify personal strategies and practices – those concrete steps that help move them beyond overwhelming feelings of inadequacy and instill a sense of critical hope – to progress, as one participant said, "beyond 'where do we start?' to 'this I can do!'" People have a better understanding and greater respect for the role that history plays in everyday Indigenous-settler relations. They begin to get excited about applying what they have learned to their own circumstances. The workshop ends with a sharing circle. It is not unusual for everyone, including ourselves, to feel exhausted yet exhilarated at the end of a long, emotionally draining yet curiously uplifting day.<sup>2</sup>

### **Linking Theory, Critical Reflection, and Action**

Our workshop experiences showed me that most non-Native people resist the notion that violence lies at the core of Indigenous-settler relations. This is understandable, as it raises disturbing questions about settler identity and history. Thus, following Henry Giroux, my pedagogical strategy links historical consciousness and collective struggle to elements of critique and hope in ways that are potentially uncomfortable.<sup>3</sup> I aim to "uncover myths, reveal hidden truths ... accurately describing reality ... to suggest or undertake action ... [thus] challeng[ing] the claim that research can or should be neutral."<sup>4</sup> In my experience, once most non-Natives

understand the ways in which colonial violence is embedded in the institutional structures of Canadian society that gave rise to the residential school system, they genuinely want to do something to remedy the situation. This is a critical juncture, as they have a strong tendency to focus on how to fix things for Native people. This stance is familiar to us, and it seems like the right thing to do. At the same time, few people are enthusiastic about exploring difficult emotions that may leave them feeling hopeless and stuck in a quagmire. Stirring up unacknowledged denial, guilt, shame, and anger seems counterproductive to the task at hand. I was perplexed as to how to inspire learners to risk taking this approach. Ironically, this dilemma led me to consider more carefully what role hope might play in decolonization.

### **On Critical Hope**

In *Pedagogy of Hope*, educator and activist Paulo Freire identifies the importance of linking struggle with hope in spite of the apparent hopelessness of our situation. He does not mean that we should cling to an idealistic, naive kind of hope that is in actuality “an excellent route to hopelessness, pessimism, and fatalism” but rather that we should strive to maintain a critical hope that is rooted in struggles for freedom. Freire argues that, “to attempt to do without hope, which is based on the need for truth as an ethical quality of the struggle, is tantamount to denying that struggle one of its mainstays.” He says simply that, “without a minimum of hope, we cannot so much as start the struggle. But without the struggle, hope ... dissipates, loses its bearings, and turns into hopelessness ... Hence the need for a kind of education in hope.”<sup>5</sup> Yet simply acquiring knowledge and reflecting upon historical wrongs is insufficient to generate critical hope. Transformative educator Daniel Schugurensky points out that individual critical reflection is “not only unlikely to lead to transformative social action, but in some cases it may even lead to the opposite situation, which is cynicism, paralysis, and a general feeling of helplessness.” As people become “more aware of the structures of domination and the role of ... institutions in reinforcing them ... in the absence of a coherent social movement to promote an alternative ... we fall into a state of paralysis, pessimism, and cynicism,” and therefore transformative learning can occur only when “critical reflection and social action are part

of the same process.”<sup>6</sup> Maintaining critical hope reinforces our capacity to understand that, though we cannot change the past, neither are we held prisoner by it.

In *Teaching Community*, black American feminist scholar and educator bell hooks builds on Freire’s work to write with passion and warmth about the importance of generating critical hope from an anti-racist standpoint. As an educator, she strives to create a community of learning that goes beyond the classroom and encourages learners to embrace the challenges that lead to systemic social change: “In the last twenty years, educators who have dared to study and learn new ways of thinking and teaching so that the work we do does not reinforce systems of domination, of imperialism, racism, sexism, or class elitism have created a pedagogy of hope ... Hopefulness empowers us to continue to work for justice even as the forces of injustice may gain greater power for a time ... My hope emerges from those places of struggle where I witness individuals positively transforming their lives and the world around them.”<sup>7</sup> In her teaching practice, she sees transformative educative possibilities for white people who choose to resist their privilege and racism through critical reflection and social action. She argues that to be anti-racist is a moral choice and reminds us that we will always be engaged in the struggle to unlearn racism in our homes, schools, workplaces, and communities, and that we will inevitably make mistakes along the way. What makes the difference in terms of a life-long commitment to anti-racism is the willingness to continuously face our mistakes and take the actions necessary to make amends on personal and political levels.<sup>8</sup>

Like Freire and others, I believe that education is not simply about the transfer of knowledge but is a transformative experiential learning that empowers people to make change in the world. Failure to link knowledge and critical reflection to action explains why many settlers never move beyond denial and guilt, and why many public education efforts are ineffective in bringing about deep social and political change. At the same time, I am mindful that, because radical change is not ultimately in its best interest, the dominant majority is apt to reinforce benevolent imperialism and colonial attitudes, often unconsciously, in ways that are antithetical to decolonization.<sup>9</sup> An unsettling pedagogy is therefore based on the premise that settlers cannot just theorize about decolonizing and liberatory struggle: we must experience it, beginning with ourselves as individuals,

and then as morally and ethically responsible socio-political actors in Canadian society.

### **Situating Myself**

It is the strangeness of difference – the unfamiliar space of not knowing – that is so hard to tolerate for the colonizer whose benevolent imperialism assumes both herself or himself as the center of knowing and that everything can be known. For the colonizer-settler engaged in critical inquiry there is an inevitable and disturbing moment when the indigenous teacher or informant speaks. It is a moment of recognition – perhaps unconscious – that some things may be out of one’s grasp. It is a fleeting, slippery glimpse of (the possibility of) something inaccessible and unknowable.

– ALISON JONES, WITH KUNI JENKINS, “RETHINKING  
COLLABORATION: WORKING THE INDIGENE-COLONIZER HYPHEN”

Epistemologically, I am a willing learner in this “unfamiliar space of not knowing,” who writes from multiple overlapping standpoints. I am at once a non-Indigenous woman, colonizer-perpetrator, colonizer-ally, and a scholar-practitioner. In drawing on feminist theory in this study, I note that Mayan American scholar Sandy Grande rightly criticizes white feminist theorists who are “unwilling to examine their own complicity in the ongoing project of colonization,” thereby ignoring the implications of power and privilege.<sup>10</sup> Although she acknowledges that anti-racist critical feminists provide insightful analyses with regard to the intersections of gender, race, and class in colonial contexts, she remains skeptical of feminist theory’s usefulness to the Indigenous struggle for self-determination. Métis feminist scholar Emma LaRocque also addresses the problems associated with “white-constructed feminism” and challenges non-Indigenous scholars to “do some consciousness-raising about the quality of life and the nature of political and intellectual colonialism in our country.” But she cautions that rejecting feminist theory out of hand as “irrelevant because white women have conceptualized it” is counterproductive.<sup>11</sup> She points out that feminist theoretical and critical insights regarding

racism and sexism are vitally important to Indigenous women as they confront these challenges in their own lives and communities.

Cherokee scholar Andrea Smith resists creating a feminist/non-feminist dichotomy and argues that feminism is not antithetical to self-determination. Rather, what is needed are “political projects that both address sexism *and* promote Indigenous sovereignty simultaneously.” Within this context, “Native women activists’ theories about feminism ... and about the importance of working in coalition with non-Native women are complex and varied.”<sup>12</sup> Maori scholar Makere Stewart-Harawira goes a step further to call for a more inclusive non-essentialist feminism that “recognizes difference but seeks to disrupt the privileging impact of the unequal structures of power.”<sup>13</sup> For her, the most critical decolonization agenda involves not only achieving Indigenous self-determination but resisting new forms of imperialism that now threaten the globe.<sup>14</sup> She declares that, as a Maori Celtic academic, activist, and grandmother, she herself writes from a position of privilege that carries with it a responsibility “to bear witness against the wanton violence that marks humanity’s headlong slide into the abyss of self-destruction in the twenty-first century, and to call for a new model of being in the world, a political ontology grounded in spirit.” Thus, Stewart-Harawira argues that many post-modern, post-colonial white feminist theorists miss the mark when they insist that the representational linking of women and nature further oppresses women. She rejects this position as antithetical to an Indigenous world view that recognizes and values the interconnectedness between human beings, nature, and spirit.<sup>15</sup>

Despite their conflicting views on feminist theory’s efficacy for Indigenous women, all these scholars explore the complexity of their own positionality and responsibility as researchers to make a compelling argument for why non-Indigenous scholars and activists must do the same as part of their own decolonizing struggle. Their critique serves as a cautionary tale for settler scholar-practitioners about the importance of truth telling in our own work and in collaborative Indigenous-settler coalitions and partnerships more generally. It is therefore important that I acknowledge my own complicity in the colonial practices related to the IRS claims process that I critique even as I aspire to work in solidarity with Indigenous people as an ally. I have worked “in the belly of the beast,” yet I have

also fought to resist the hegemonic structures, institutions, and bureaucracies that reproduce colonialism.

Writing from an anti-racist feminist perspective, critical theorist-activist Mehmoona Moosa-Mitha describes the importance of situating oneself not as an expert but as a learner in anti-oppressive experientially based research. Thus, in seeking to know the Other, the researcher comes to know herself and to understand her own complicity: “The researcher holds the attitude of a learner, of one who is a ‘not-knower,’ but through the act of empathetic imagination and by possessing critical self-consciousness, comes to gain a sense of what the Other knows. The researcher is reflexive in her practice, whereby the knowledge of the subaltern or subjugated is used to reflect dominant practices and assumptions in which the researcher herself is complicit ... Anti-oppressive theorists ... make a connection between knowing and doing, and research as ‘praxis’ ... Knowledge, therefore, is not conceived of as neutral, nor is it abstract in nature.”<sup>16</sup> This led me to question whether objectivity and neutrality – qualities that are highly valued in Western research and conflict resolution practices – are either morally possible or ethically responsible when it comes to addressing the injustices of the IRS system.

More recently, some scholars have pointed out that even those researchers who attempt to know the Other empathically run the risk of simply perpetuating an imperial belief that their status as researchers entitles them to acquire such knowledge. A more preferable approach, they say, is one in which non-Indigenous researchers fully embrace the uncomfortable epistemological tension that comes with the realization that they can never fully know the Other; nor should they aspire to do so. From this stance, a more nuanced reworking of non-Indigenous positioning is evident in the literature.

For example, Alison Jones (Pakeha) and Kuni Jenkins (Maori) describe their intercultural collaboration as educators “working the Indigene-Colonizer hyphen,” in which they “attempt to create a research and writing relationship based on the tension of difference, not on its erasure.”<sup>17</sup> Wanda D. McCaslin (Métis) and Denise C. Breton (Euro-American) collaborate in ways that acknowledge this tension as they critique restorative justice models that they assert have failed to live up to their decolonizing potential within Indigenous communities and in the field of restorative justice itself. These shortcomings reveal the need to get to the root of the problem,



which is colonialism, and illustrate why “decolonization is critical for both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people.”<sup>18</sup> Both Jones and Breton, as non-Native scholars, emphasize the importance of continually interrogating their own colonial position within their work. Jones describes her effort to engage in collaborative dialogue while being ever mindful of the need to examine her own attitudes and actions: “To rethink collaboration between indigene and colonizer is both to desire it and to ask troubling questions about it ... Interrogating the logic of (my own) White/settler enthusiasm for dialogic collaboration, I consider how this desire might be an unwitting imperialist demand – and thereby in danger of strengthening the very impulses it seeks to combat. I do not argue for a rejection of collaboration. Rather I unpack its difficulties to suggest a less dialogical and more uneasy, unsettled relationship, based on learning (about difference) from the Other, rather than learning about the Other.”<sup>19</sup>

In a similar vein, Breton notes that her very sense of identity is rooted in “all the mental, emotional, and material habits” associated with taken-for-granted white privilege, which support ongoing oppression and are often invisible to her. Thus, “the decolonizing work begins here with naming these dynamics, so that I can engage in the lifelong work of breaking their hold.”<sup>20</sup> Acknowledging that decolonization threatens their own privileged position, Jones and Breton seek to make visible to themselves and others the ease with which the colonizer unconsciously reasserts herself.

Viewed from a colonizer-ally’s perspective, the challenge of learning from rather than about the Other, from “an unfamiliar space of not knowing,” seems a particularly appropriate standpoint for a study that focuses on the personal and socio-political unsettling of settlers. It is also congruent with a broader Indigenous research agenda that supports decolonization and self-determination in ways that confront the historical and theoretical foundations of Western research paradigms and practices that privilege objectivity and neutrality over subjectivity and engagement. Like Jones and Breton, I aim to interrogate my own positionality as both colonizer-perpetrator and colonizer-ally as I work through the complexities of settler participation in truth-telling and reconciliation efforts. Therefore, I make settlers (myself and others) the subject of this study, linking it to my own practice as a former claims resolution manager through critical self-reflective storytelling.

## On Settler Storytelling

In her auto/ethnography, *Pieces of White Shell: A Journey to Navajoland*, [Terry Williams] praises the wisdom of Navajo storytellers and the stories they tell. But she warns the reader we cannot emulate Native peoples: “We are not Navajo ... Their traditional stories don’t work for us. Their stories hold meaning for us only as examples. They can teach us what is possible. We must create our own stories.” As nonindigenous scholars seeking a dialogue with indigenous scholars, we ... must construct stories that are embedded in the landscapes through which we travel. These will be dialogical counternarratives, stories of resistance, of struggle, of hope, stories that create spaces.

— NORMAN K. DENZIN AND YVONNA S. LINCOLN, “INTRODUCTION:  
CRITICAL METHODOLOGIES AND INDIGENOUS INQUIRY”

Settler stories as counter-narratives that create decolonizing space are both interior and relational. As such, they require us to risk revealing ourselves as vulnerable “not-knowers” who are willing to examine our dual positions as colonizer-perpetrators and colonizer-allies. Canadian historian Robin Jarvis Brownlie writes that, “in the field of Aboriginal history, the belief that oral history is important has come to be almost universally accepted ... It is becoming almost a platitude to state that oral history is essential, but oral history is difficult to do.” She cites various reasons for this, including an understandable reluctance on the part of Native communities to share their knowledge with outsiders, the difficulty of establishing long-term collaborative research relationships with communities, and the academic institutional and timeline pressures scholars face with regard to publication, which is linked to achieving tenure.<sup>21</sup> Brownlie does not suggest that such difficulties are reasons to avoid conducting oral history but rather aims to alert the reader to the ethical and practical complexities of undertaking such projects. I will add that one should also consider whether interviews or other oral history methodologies are best suited to the research task at hand. Within emergent qualitative research design, oral history methodology and data collection are not restricted to interviews but can take many other forms, including auto-ethnography, or critical personal narrative.

Despite the fact that it has become almost standard for non-Native researchers to conduct oral history interviews with Native people in studies dealing with Indigenous-settler relations, I did not follow suit for this book. The reasons are threefold. First, applying a research ethic of “do no harm,” I consider it ethically questionable to ask survivors to relive events associated with their residential school experiences for a book that is focused on examining settler attitudes, perspectives, and responsibility. Through the work of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation and other organizations that work directly with survivors, we now know that the constant retelling of traumatic personal histories may trigger unintended but potentially harmful consequences.

Second, I believe strongly that Gitx̱san stories about the Hazelton feast (which is the subject of Chapter 7) are not mine to tell: instead, they belong with the survivors and with the Gitx̱san, who are documenting their history of Indian residential schools in their own voices. But neither was this study written in isolation. I consulted with and received invaluable feedback from various feast participants and witnesses, as well as several Indigenous scholars and professional colleagues as I presented earlier versions of this study at symposia and conferences. Without exception, they all encouraged me to tell my own story, not theirs. This entailed adopting an oral history methodology that was congruent with my research focus on unsettling the settler within. By incorporating my own ongoing decolonizing journey into the book, I intend to demonstrate the transformative personal and socio-political pedagogy I am advocating. However, in doing so, I am also aware that injecting a critical personal voice into an academic work is fraught with its own difficulties precisely because it is not neutral, objective, or abstract.

My methodology thus involves using oral history evidence in the form of auto-ethnography – my own storytelling – to document and analyze my own lived experience. This approach is common in Indigenous scholarship but still not as widely used in the social sciences and history disciplines. Yet it is particularly well suited to the parameters of this study. The authors of *Telling Stories* note that

there has been an increasing interest among a number of scholars in writing ... “auto/ethnography” ... These scholars are interested in narratives of self-inscription, but rather than studying the “other” they write

critical ethnographies of themselves, or themselves in relation to others. Informed by developments in postmodern, feminist, and postcolonial theory and methods, auto/ethnographers build on recent reconsiderations of the uses and meanings of personal narratives to examine the ways in which selves and social forms are culturally constituted through biographical genres ... [They] reject the search for universal and objective “truths” in favor of the personal and the subjective ... [They] address, for example, the emotional and personal experiences that characterize and shape fieldwork. What makes these works distinct from an autobiography or a life history is the narrator’s attempt to turn the ethnographic gaze on his or her own life and work. In this respect ... auto/ethnographers are at once narrator and analyst.<sup>22</sup>

Auto-ethnographic methodologies incorporate textual and performative components as embodied research in which “researchers use their own thoughts, feelings and experiences as a means of understanding the social world.”<sup>23</sup>

Very few non-Indigenous negotiators or policy makers who have been involved in attempts to resolve Indigenous-settler conflicts or in treaty or claims resolution processes have written about the personal and socio-political insights they have gained from their experience. Yet their stories, forged within the harsh realities of their everyday work, have much to teach us about the importance of building trust, attending to history, and repairing relationships. These stories can also reveal the emotional toll exacted upon non-Native people who work in Indigenous contexts, grappling with the moral and ethical issues that confront them. Writing from two very different perspectives, BC treaty negotiator Tony Penikett and John Ciaccia, minister of Native affairs for Quebec during the Oka crisis, both describe themselves as “peacemakers” who became increasingly frustrated by the actions of recalcitrant politicians and resistant bureaucrats. They argue that a fundamental lack of leadership, political will, and creativity bogs down negotiations. Both emphasize how important it is for the Canadian public to understand the destructive impacts of colonial history on contemporary Indigenous-settler conflicts.<sup>24</sup> Ciaccia also reveals the deeply transformative journey he embarked upon and the emotional, physical, and spiritual consequences of his own ethical and moral crisis. In *The Oka Crisis*, published in 2000, he writes, “My plans, and my life,