

## Unsettling reconciliation: Decolonial methods for transforming social-ecological systems

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Political reconciliation refers to processes for establishing right relations between groups that are emerging from histories marked by violent relations. Examples include, South African Apartheid, the Canadian Indian Residential Schools System, and racial slavery and segregation in the United States. Philosophies of political reconciliation focus on identifying the nature of harm and then determine strategies for repair. For example, Margaret Walker's widely read work on political reconciliation articulates a primary locus of harm in politically damaged relations as distrust and offers the related repair strategy of establishing or creating trust (Walker 2006). But interestingly, the majority of Western, euro-descendent philosophies of political reconciliation do not explicitly address ecological forms of harm or indeed consider ecological harms constitutive of violent political relations. This omission of ecological harms, especially ecological violence, from the Western euro-descendent paradigm of reconciliation poses a unique problem for the success and sustainability of these reconciliation models. I will explore this problem in the North American context of settler-Indigenous conflict and reconciliation. I will argue that omission of ecological harms, articulated here as a problem, can help contextualize the dissatisfaction that many Indigenous groups, in settler colonial contexts, have with reconciliation processes that ultimately do not address underlying environmental harms and injustices.

In this paper, I will argue that many Western euro-descendent models of reconciliation, in the North American context, import settler colonial commitments (commitments to the maintenance and reproduction of settler colonialism), which contribute to a lack of recognition of ecological violence in settler-Indigenous conflict. I will examine how these settler colonial commitments permeate both Truth and Reconciliation and settler juridical models of reconciliation and justice. The settler colonial components of these models of reconciliation pose an obstacle to what I call deep reconciliation partly because

dominant euro-descendent cosmologies regarding land are still valued over and above Indigenous ones. Deep reconciliation involves more thorough attention to the ecological violence of settler colonialism at the heart of settler-Indigenous conflict in North America. This paper argues that the possibility of deep reconciliation exists and requires engaging with Indigenous philosophies that center land and relating to land as the cornerstone of right relations, thus decolonizing settler-colonial-infused forms of reconciliation.

For the purposes of this paper, the signifier Indigenous Peoples refers to the nearly 400 million people, the world over, who exercised self-determination as communities guided by their own social, cultural, political, and ecological systems (governance systems) prior to historical periods of invasion, colonial exploitation, and occupation and settlement of their lands by other human groups. Indigenous peoples as descendants of these communities continue to exercise self determination currently, even within nation states formed by descendants of settlers and imperial allies that are largely recognized globally as the primary political sovereigns (Anaya 2004; Sanders 1977). Indigeneity is a diverse, heterogeneous, and sometimes contested category, however, this paper will not take up arguments defining or debating Indigeneity as such.

Before proceeding, it is necessary to situate myself within the context from which I write this piece. I am a multi-ethnic woman of colour descended from both enslaved Africans and European settlers in the United States. I studied in Anishinaabe lands and am shaped significantly by my interaction with and communal learning in those spaces. As such, I write from a positionality of a historically and currently oppressed racially minoritized group that experiences some of the issues of this paper; though in some circumstances differently than Indigenous peoples, but in some cases overlapping. I witness Indigenous peoples as taking strong and necessary leadership on these issues and have worked to study these ideas and practices from a standpoint of solidarity.

The remainder of the paper proceeds as follows. In Section One, I briefly discuss the absence of the environment as paradigmatic of many dominant Western, euro-descendent models of political reconciliation. I then show how, in cases of the practice of political reconciliation, Indigenous peoples – using Canadian reconciliation as an example – have expressed concerns that the reconciliation process did not address environmental issues, thus still function in the Western euro-descendent paradigms with settler colonial elements intact. In Section Two, I propose ways in which these concerns can be contextualized through an analysis of how settler colonialism violently disrupted and displaced Indigenous systems (physical, epistemological, ecological, spiritual) and lifeways. In Section Three, I examine how within the context of settler colonialism, ecological forms of violence are often purposefully difficult to track within dominant euro-descendent narratives of history. This is due in part to the ways dominant Western, euro-descendent epistemological systems uproot and erase Indigenous ones. This erasure affects the uptake of Indigenous truth-telling that conflicts with dominant myths about past and on-going wrongdoing, which problematizes Truth and Reconciliation models reliant on testimony within settler juridical venues. This section also explores Indigenous feminist theory as an alternative method for tracking the ecological violence of settler colonialism and land conflict through truth telling based in the emotional lived experiences of Indigenous trauma. Section Four examines the differing conceptions of land and resources within Indigenous political philosophies that prioritizes relating to land as an essential feature of right relations, justice, and hence, deep reconciliation. It also argues that euro-descendent settler juridical models of reconciliation based on the goal of shared citizenship are inappropriately geared toward careful consideration, respect for, and inclusion of Indigenous philosophies, which deep reconciliation processes must acknowledge. Section Five examines these possibilities for deep, cross-culturally cooperative reconciliation projects through a settler-Indigenous land

co-management case study where partners work together to repair relationships to Nmé (lake sturgeon) in the Manistee Watershed. This case illustrates deep reconciliation where cultural and ecological values are communicated, respected, and negotiated to achieve restoration of both ecological systems and various communities' relations to land. The harm is importantly contextualized within the historical truth of past and continuing ecological violence as a result of settler colonialism.

### 1. The Absence of Environment

Scholars and activists view political reconciliation as a transition from harmful political relations to more democratic and inclusive political relationships (Schaap 2005; Walker 2006; van Wormer and Walker 2013; Moellendorf 2007; Murphy 2010). The motivation for political reconciliation is directly related to the identification of a certain undesirable set of relationships and the prescription of a better set of relationships as the goal of reconciliation (Stanton 2011; Rice and Snyder 2008). However, prominent Western euro-descendent models of reconciliation do not adequately address environmental dimensions of harm as integral to the construction of the violent relations that reconciliation hopes to repair; similarly excluding environmental aspects from proposed remedies (Schaap 2005; Walker 2006; van Wormer and Walker 2013; Moellendorf 2007; Murphy 2010). For example, Margaret Walker identifies the primary harm of unjust political relations as distrust, where the reinstatement or creation of trust would serve as the best model for reconciliation (Walker 2006). While Walker's work expands the range of factors considered within violent political relations, it does not sufficiently address how environmental harms constitute a fundamental cause of legitimate distrust and, thus, politically harmful relationships. For example, settler Canadian occupation, modification, and degradation of Indigenous lands displays a pernicious lack of regard for Indigenous land, sovereignty, relationships, cultures, and general well being. The attempt to repair trust relationships between settler Canadians and

Indigenous peoples in Canada without also identifying a locus of justified distrust in this practice of environmental trauma (that still affects environmental inequities between settlers and Indigenous peoples) constitutes a legitimate claim of an unsatisfactory reconciliation process (Frideres 1998; Rice and Snyder 2008, 55). While Walker's theory of reconciliation does not specifically address ecological harm, it could be expanded to include ecological dimensions of trust and distrust toward deeper forms of reconciliation. More broadly, Western euro-descendent reconciliation models' omission of environmental dimensions of trauma, violence, and repair are marked and must be amended in order to engage deeper forms of reconciliation.

I argue that this larger absence of environmental regard surrounding harm analysis and remedy proposal is one way of understanding the dissatisfaction Indigenous peoples are voicing in relation to past and on-going forms of reconciliation (Stanton 2011; Chrisjohn and Wascase 2012; Alfred 2013; Rice and Snyder 2008). The absence of environmental dimensions of harm and repair within dominant Western models is particularly disconcerting given the growing understanding of how political injustice is often coupled with environmental degradation (Cole and Foster 2001; Shrader-Frechette 2002; Bullard 1990; Mohai, Pellow, and Roberts 2009; Schlosberg 2013). Unaddressed harms, specifically environmental harms, can thwart reconciliation projects and in some cases the exclusion of specific understandings of harm can incite further injustices (Rice and Snyder 2008, 48). One reason certain harms have historically not been adequately addressed, and continue to not be addressed, is the different cultural understandings of which harms and values are paramount. This is supported by arguments about the importance of including and considering different cultural backgrounds, ways of being, heritages, and identities, which inform how groups relate to land and may conceive of environmental interaction or management differently from euro-descendent discourses (Figueroa 2006; Bhattacharyya and Larson 2014).

For example, there has been much discussion and research on the importance of resource rights and protection as linked with cultural sovereignty and justice for Indigenous peoples. The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples states that Indigenous peoples ‘have the right to maintain and strengthen their distinctive spiritual relationship with their traditionally owned or otherwise occupied and used lands, territories, waters and coastal seas and other resources and to uphold their responsibilities to future generations in this regard’ (United Nations General Assembly 2007). However, settler states have not acknowledged Indigenous land use histories, rights, and access to Indigenous peoples’ own traditionally held lands even within deliberate reconciliation processes<sup>1</sup> (Deborah McGregor 2013; Ruru 2013; Alfred 2013). Consider the denial of subsurface mineral rights on First Nations’ lands in Canada, which opens these lands and Nations up to environmental danger and destruction in the form of resource extraction and colonisation (Hoogeveen 2014). Denial of subsurface rights on Indigenous lands reveals an intact settler colonial commitment to appropriating Indigenous land and valuing euro-descendent colonial culture over Indigenous cultures. The denial of subsurface rights constitutes a locus of distrust for Indigenous peoples because it demonstrates the continued domination of settler euro-descendent values and the privileging of settler constructions of land, ownership, and trust.

## 2. ‘Settled’ Landscapes

The ecological omissions within dominant Western, euro-descendent theories of political reconciliation are affecting reconciliation processes on the ground with important consequences for the communities involved. In this section, I examine how the initial and continuous ecological violence of settler colonialism establishes violent relations in need of

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<sup>1</sup> Not to mention the denial of these rights even when they are explicitly stated and legally mandated by treaties (Gedicks 1998).

reconciliation as a way of contextualizing and understanding Indigenous claims of dissatisfaction with dominant Western, euro-descendent models. I will do this through an examination of how settler colonialism interrupts and displaces Indigenous systems (physical, epistemological, ecological, spiritual) and lifeways.

To begin, it is necessary to examine the on-going system of settler colonialism as fundamentally reliant both on the ecological violence of Indigenous land appropriation and the simultaneous erasure of this occurrence. Settler colonialism can be defined as the imposition of *external* values on both peoples and landscapes enacted through various forms of violence (Hoogeveen 2014). As Patrick Wolfe asserts, settler colonialism's primary motivation and irreducible element is access to territory (Wolfe 2006, 388). This motivation is problematized when that territory is inhabited and occupied, which leads to the secondary movement of the erasure of those who inhabit and belong to that land. This destruction of Indigenous land, land-belonging, land use histories, and relations in order to establish settler access to territory is not a single event, but rather requires a system of settler colonialism that is constantly making and re-making itself. I should draw attention again here to the limited purview of this paper to settler colonialism in the North American context, specifically focused on settlers and Indigenous peoples in this context. Land appropriation can and does look differently in various contexts such as indirect colonial rule in many parts of the world. Settler colonialism in the Americas also fundamentally relies on the clearing of territory with forced labor and the transatlantic slave trade/slavery (King 2013), neither of which are addressed in this paper.

The especially pernicious nature of settler colonialism is that in settlers' quest for territory, it invokes the wholesale and continuous displacement and erasure of not only Indigenous land use histories and belonging, but also the entire historical/social/political structures that are bound up in those people's relationship to that landscape. This is what

Wolfe refers to as the ‘elimination of the native,’ which is one of settler colonialism’s main methods. In this way, ‘settler colonialism is a structure not an event,’ incapable of being reduced to a finite, closed occurrence (Wolfe 2006, 388). Part of this structural violence is achieved through a mythical narrative of how the settler state comes into being and subsequent denial or evasion of facts that directly contradict and disprove this ‘creation story.’ In the context of Canada, this can be seen in the prevalence of the ‘two founding nations’ doctrine of Canadian history, which references the French and English as essential to Canada’s development to the erasure of Indigenous presence, histories, and role in the emergence of the Canadian state (Rice and Snyder 2008, 55).

As evinced above, land and territory are fundamental to the on-going project of settler colonialism, which makes the absence of land and environment from Western euro-descendent political analyses of harm and models of reconciliation all the more suspect. I argue that this omission or political amnesia of the territoriality, physicality, and ecological violence of settler colonialism is key to the maintenance of settler colonial systems through the erasure of the violent ecological genesis of Indigenous land appropriations. This erasure functions as a justification not only of settler land seizures, but just as importantly the gateway to land modification and further ecological violence (resource extraction, deforestation, development, and the like) (Indigenous Peoples Earth Charter 1992, Section 74). Part of how this is achieved is through the displacement, erasure and replacement of Indigenous conceptions of lands as well as relations to land with settler conceptions of land largely understood as property, resource, and commodity (Plumwood 2002; Indigenous Peoples Earth Charter 1992, Section 77). A key cultural and environmental conflict exists in the cosmological differences of how groups view and relate to the environment. The viewing of human and non-human beings as relatives, as well as differently embodied persons is a

central one to many Indigenous philosophies as will be seen in the Nmé (lake sturgeon) case study later (Wall 2001).

Settler colonialism is primarily motivated by land and specific settler conceptions of what land is and what/who it functions for. 'Land is what is most valuable, contested, required. This is both because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence' (Tuck and Yang 2012, 5). Settler conceptions of land as resource or commodity in the service of capital accumulation directly affect the shape and purpose of institutions developed in that territory and who/what they function for. 'In the process of settler colonialism, land is remade into property and human relationships to land are restricted to the relationship of the owner to his property. Epistemological, ontological, and cosmological relations to land are interred, indeed made pre-modern and backward. Made savage' (Tuck and Yang 2012, 5). The dominant conception of land as commodity or private property under settler rule creates a distinction between other land conceptions and land use models, such that Indigenous conceptions become inferior, abject, and eventually illegal (Rice and Snyder 2008, 53; Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996). This alienation and subordination of Indigenous identity and land use practices helps to further the agenda of settler normality and legitimacy. For example, a settler campaign to deforest an area to sell timber for profit may inflict harm on Indigenous peoples who use that land for other purposes and who rely on the forest for survival and cultural traditions. However, by changing the conception of land from a system of relations to an inert material for profit, one can also conceal different, competing land use practices as well as traditional forms of belonging and land rights (Dunbar-Ortiz 2014).

Here, it is not just land rights or land seizure that is erased, but the very practices and traditions connected to that land that constitute Indigenous survival and identity. This is a

major reason why forms of reconciliation that do not address the physical, ecological, and territorial dimensions of conflict will not be full or satisfactory models for Indigenous peoples. The domination of the property relationship ascribed by settler systems fundamentally makes impossible, undesirable, and, again, illegal Indigenous ways of relating to the land outside of this ascription (Tuck and Yang 2012). Thus alienating Indigenous peoples from their land and themselves, since all interaction with the land now must be carried out through settler prescriptions/property relations in order to be ‘legal’ or ‘valid.’ When the modes of ecological violence necessary for the establishment of settler rule are obscured so too become the tracks, evidence, and acknowledgement of this injustice. As landscapes are drastically altered by settler colonialism, so too are the memories of and access to these spaces, changing the very meaning and possibility those places hold for people. Land seizure and modification is a severe form of ecological violence, which further facilitates the erasure of the relations key to Indigenous survival and flourishing that are also part of that land/territory. In this way the imposition of settler systems over and on top of Indigenous ones facilitates an immense obstacle to the ability of Indigenous persons not only to survive, but also to thrive in culturally appropriate ways, and values euro-descendent cosmologies over and above Indigenous ones (Whyte 2016, 178).

In this section, I have argued that the ecological/physical effects of settler colonialism are one way of understanding Indigenous oppression as the instantiation of violent relations in need of reconciliation. This violence is enacted in two ways: (1) through the enactment of ecological violence on Indigenous lands that facilitate lasting harms and ecological trauma there and (2) through the settler colonial logic that simultaneously erases and denies the fact of Indigenous land seizure. The intentional erasure of the sites of ecological violence necessary for establishing settler rule/statehood is related to the inability of settlers to understand or take seriously Indigenous voicing of dissatisfaction with reconciliatory

frameworks that do not address land and environmental issues. This inability to take these claims seriously is integral to the project of settler colonialism through concealment of Indigenous systems and relations that existed and still exist within the settled landscape. The hidden nature of these realities, memories, ways of being, make the claims of Indigenous people notoriously hard to prove by settler legal, juridical standards, which are built upon and through ecologically violent processes and limited iterations of land as property. I now turn to examining how the expression or testimony of these Indigenous claims of dissatisfaction can similarly be obscured by the pervasive erasure settler colonialism systematically enacts.

### 3. Tracking Ecological Violence

In the previous section, I argued that part of the dissatisfaction expressed by Indigenous peoples about reconciliation processes that do not seriously attend to ecological harms has to do with the primacy of ecological violence inflicted through settler colonialism. I also argued that settler colonialism functions by erasing the ecological dimensions of harm its systems inflict and thus cannot see the Indigenous value of relating to land from the purview of euro-descendent models of reconciliation. This reveals that euro-descendent models of reconciliation still function in support of settler colonialism and must be decolonized to name and address these ecological dimensions of harm as well as repair. The primacy of erasure within settler colonialism further complicates reconciliation that relies on testimony as a means of proof of these ecological dimensions of harm/violent relations. Settler colonialism is always reproducing the objective and normative power of settler rule through the creation and maintenance of settler governmental institutions that rely on the erasure of Indigenous land use histories, relations to land, and cultures for settler legitimacy. Thus, implying that settler institutions are unproblematically primary and original to the space in question (Tuck and Yang 2012). Settler institutions' recognition and validation of

Indigenous cultural understandings or Indigenous reference to ecological violence would open the space of possibility for identifying settler institutions as at least historically problematic, at worst illegitimate. In this section, I will argue that there are challenges and potential advantages to reconciliation processes that rely on settler juridical forms of testimony that require Indigenous peoples to translate or make legible ecological violence, Indigenous land appropriation, and land based epistemologies to the settler state.

A prominent prototype of political reconciliation has been the Truth and Reconciliation Commission model (TRC), which can rely on testimony and apologies (Truth & Reconciliation Commission 1998). While TRC models open the door to establishing a truthful narrative of historic wrongdoing (Stanton 2011), the TRC paradigm can prove problematic because it functions in a liberal humanistic model that is inappropriately geared toward to specificity of Indigenous positionalities and measures truth by settler institutional, legal-juridical standards. In this sense, attention to ecological violence and recognition of ecological violence against Indigenous peoples as foundational to the legitimacy of settler colonial rule is antithetical to settler colonial interest. As a successful end of reconciliation under this model, might be something like superficial multi-culturalism (Fraser 1997; Alfred 2013). This conflict of interest is related to the inability of euro-descendent models in this context to honour, validate, and include Indigenous concerns for ecological grounded forms of reconciliation, which makes testimonial venues a potentially epistemically dangerous space.

Exploring the danger of silencing, Kristie Dotson offers an account that addresses the practice of epistemic violence as it occurs when hearers exhibit ‘pernicious ignorance’ and are not adequately attuned to meet their speakers’ need within a testimonial exchange (Dotson 2011, 236).

But a speaker has no direct way to force an audience to “hear” her/him, where direct control would take the form of some kind of mind control. In short, to communicate *we all need an audience willing and capable of hearing us*. The extent to which entire populations of people can be denied this kind of linguistic reciprocation as a matter of course institutes epistemic violence (Dotson 2011, 238).

The context of Truth and Reconciliation Commissions settings matter because the dominance of euro-descendent cosmologies affect the capability of settler audiences to hear and accept the testimony emerging from these settings when the acceptance of these testimonial exchanges as valid and true is directly related to the unearthing and delegitimization of settler histories, projects, and existences. The translation of testimony and the guidelines by which testimony is considered proof of wrongdoing are set by settler colonial institutions that directly harm and silence Indigenous life ways, ways of knowing, cosmologies, as well as relations to land. The conditions which make reconciliatory frameworks which acknowledge and address ecological violence possible, require an honest interrogation of how reconciliation projects within settler states that do not reveal or identify Indigenous land seizures are *still* projects of settler colonialism and Indigenous erasure. However, testimony also has the potential and ability to uncover that which unjust systems of power drastically attempt to keep hidden. But to do this, modes of proof and testimony must move beyond settler juridical models of evidence that assimilate difference to the end of liberal humanism to more liberatory methods rooted in recognizing, valuing, and incorporating Indigenous philosophies which delve into the emotional depths of trauma and shame existent in multigenerational land-based violence.

Through the process of researching reconciliation projects, I came across many video testimonials of various First Nations individuals speaking about their experiences within the Indian Residential School System in Canada.<sup>2</sup> The theme of shame is one that surfaced over

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<sup>2</sup> There is a wealth of literature surrounding the context and consequences of the Indian Residential Schools TRC in Canada, many coming from Indigenous scholars in that context. It is outside the purview of this piece to explore in depth the specificity and complicated problems around this particular TRC, but please see sources

and over again. First Nations men and women, who were taken as children from their families and put into residential schools, spoke about the intense feelings of shame they felt in not only recalling these experiences, but also in being approached to participate in this project for the purposes of reconciliation. They spoke about the *shame* of reconciliation. They recounted not understanding what was happening to them in these schools and why they were so hated and abused for being who they were: speaking their languages, practicing their traditions, existing as First Nations peoples (Legacy of Hope Foundation 2001). This testimony directly speaks to the dangers of TRC models, while also articulating space for the emotional knowledges and the unspeakable yet experienced traumas that occur that cannot, and maybe should not, be captured by certain dominant epistemological frames and testimonial venues.

Here, I must add that part of the danger of testimony within TRC settings, as well as elsewhere is the re-victimization of already vulnerable/marginalized victims of injustice. Often testimony requires victims to relive their trauma in public and shameful ways within dominant juridical models (Stanton 2011, 6). People of colour and members of marginalized communities are often disproportionately and unjustly burdened with the work of proving their oppression to their oppressors (Dotson 2011; Stanton 2011, 11). This is not the goal or end of reconciliation advocated here. Deep reconciliation between settlers and vulnerable communities oppressed through settler colonialism will be an ongoing process that requires serious work and discomfort for settlers as well. It should also be noted that the Canadian TRC convened to address the Indian Residential Schools was the result of settlement to litigation brought by thousands of survivors and not initiated by the Canadian Government through its own volition or overwhelming public outcry (Stanton 2011; The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada n.d.).

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that do: (The Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada n.d.; Younging, Dewar, and DeGagné 2009; Rogers et al. 2013).

In her essay, 'Felt Theory: An Indigenous Feminist Approach to Affect and History,' Dian Million writes of the danger, vulnerability, and power that emotional and experienced knowledges hold within a settler colonial framework of 'truth-telling.' She writes about how the personal experiences recounted through the sharing of emotional knowledges 'changed the actual conditions for what *could be* said about the poverty and discrimination that were their [First Nations women's] daily fare' (Million 2009, 54). Emotional space and expression for Million can change the actual conditions of what can be said in a settler colonial context where so much of the truth especially in relation to physical/ecological violence to Indigenous lands and peoples is kept hidden. Instead of viewing emotional or experienced knowledges as something additional or outside the realm of theory, Million explores how integral personal experiences, especially of First Nations women, is to the process of truth-telling and reconciliation. In trying to understand the paralysis of shame the residential school survivors spoke of in their testimony, Million examines the moral affective power that centring lived/felt experiences can have in transforming the very frameworks that try to further stigmatize and other Indigenous existence. 'Native women's personal narrative explored the racialized, gendered, and sexual nature of their colonization. In doing so, they transformed the debilitating force of an old social control, *shame*, into a social change agent in their generation' (Million 2009, 54). It is also important to note the ways in which experiences of oppression and trauma within settler states is highly gendered and often disproportionately affect women for the worse (Deer 2015; Goeman 2013; Million 2014). Here we see how testimony of the lived experiences of Indigenous peoples shared on their own terms and in culturally appropriate ways is vital to the uncovering of that which settler colonial institutions conceal and deny. The trauma of Indigenous ecological violence lives in those who experience it and express this truth, reality, and existence.

Million explores the ways in which what she calls ‘felt analysis’ challenges and also ‘creates a context for a more complex “telling,” that illuminates the deeper meaning’ of the dominant (in this case Canada’s) narrative of what happened within the Indian Residential School System (Million 2009, 54). The very assertion of a lived/emotional sphere of experience within this context directly contradicts the myths the state presents as valid in terms of historical record and uncovers/makes present a realm of experience that this record actively attempts to cover over and make unreal (Rice and Snyder 2008). Addressing the power of ownership of their stories, Million references the process of centralizing emotional knowledges and lived experiences as a way in which these Indigenous women ‘create[ed] a new language for communities to address the real multilayered facets of their histories and concerns’ (Million 2009, 54). By making lived experience and emotional knowledges actively present within the remembrance and telling of their own histories, Indigenous women are in many ways expressing the inexpressible, the truth that in many ways exceeds pure juridical models of testimonial exchange. By claiming and asserting these emotional and experiential knowledges *as knowledge*, Million points to a reality and truth that settler colonialism and its attempts at elimination of Indigenous peoples, is unable to control or destroy. It is within this space, that the work of Indigenous futurity both resists erasure and expresses itself. In this way, the embodied experience and expression of emotion through the act of truth telling tracks the trauma of the embodied, physical, and ecological forms of violence that dominant settler colonial measures refuse to highlight (Weizman and Sheikh 2015, 83). Even if the settler colonial state does not track, make legible, or record the ecological/physical atrocities it has committed, they exist and persist in the emotional space of lived experience and generational trauma. This existential pain, violence, and trauma are a part of the world in and through those who experience it; it is a part of the land and affects how survivors navigate as well as relate to land.

#### 4. The Restoration/Reconciliation of Community is Land

In mapping the centrality and integral nature of felt/lived experience and emotional knowledges to the remembrance and telling of Indigenous existence, knowledge endures as an embodied practice that is situated and living in the world. The lack of attention and recognition given to this truth by dominant Western, euro-descendent legal/juridical models appears in another model of reconciliation found in the euro-descendent tradition, which is the reconciliation as citizen model. Whereas the reconciliation as liberal humanism model faced the challenge of being unable to appropriately honour difference or see the need for ecological forms of reconciliation, the reconciliation as citizen model will face similar problems in persisting to misrecognize Indigenous cultures and relating to land through resolving conflict to the end of shared citizenship. The goal of shared citizenship presumes reconcilable cultural attitudes toward land between Indigenous and dominant Western, euro-descendent paradigms and through attempting to enfold Indigenous peoples into shared Canadian citizenship asserts the dominance and political sovereignty of Canada over and above Indigenous sovereignties.

In *This is Not a Peace Pipe: Towards a Critical Indigenous Philosophy*, Dale Turner explores the ways in which Indigenous knowledges are discounted and disrespected within the context of political interactions between Indigenous peoples and the state of Canada. This has much to do with the ecological foundations of literal and cultural existence. Turner states:

The key problem of participation arises because most Aboriginal peoples still believe that their ways of understanding the world are, de facto, radically different from Western European ways of understanding the world. These differences raise tension between Aboriginal ways of knowing the world and the legal and political discourses of the state (Turner 2006, 7).

Here, we observe that systems are inscribed in landscapes and rooted in place. Thus, the removal and erasure of Indigenous systems for settler ones create a conflict at the level of

communicating and understanding the litany of injustices Indigenous peoples attempt to convey to settler states. Settler institutions function by articulating settler conceptions of place and land that maintain the difference and othering of Indigenous ones. Indigenous populations carry the burden of making their claims intelligible to settlers when they are continually asked to make their situations and perspectives 'intelligible' within the parameters of the legal and political structures/languages of the state. The conditions which make this claim of unintelligibility possible are the ecological forms of violence carried out to sever Indigenous peoples from their land, the systems related to that land, and thus, themselves. So settler colonial states claims of unintelligibility are actually symptomatic of the structure of settler colonialism itself. This can be witnessed as well in the long, well- documented history of broken treaties between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government (Turner 2006). The institution and consideration of dominant Western, euro- descendent epistemological systems as not only normative, but superior to Indigenous ones allows for the presentation of decisions to renege on treaty agreements as trivial by settler standards. This casual dismissal of treaties represents a lack of criticality when examining Indigenous cosmologies. The sacred nature of treaties is something that can only be understood through a critical engagement with Indigenous cosmologies as being at least on equal footing to euro-descendent ones and through engaging with relating to land as a fundamental tenet of Indigenous philosophy. Turner elucidates the additional epistemic injustice of this process of burdening and disrespect: *'The fact that our ways or understanding the world are not worthy of equal participation in a dialogue over the meaning and content of our rights is itself a form of inequality'* (Turner 2006, 26, emphasis mine).

Part of the inability of the state to understand or correctly track what deep reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian government means to both

parties is due to the dismissal of treaty law that allows the state of Canada to assert its sovereignty as more foundational than that of First Nations peoples.

For Aboriginal peoples, the treaties have a normative role in the contemporary relationship because they recognize rights that Aboriginal peoples possess by virtue of their unique political status, not by virtue of shared citizenship. In other words, for many Aboriginal people Aboriginal rights are political rights that predate the formation of the Canadian state, not rights that arise from post-Confederation concept of shared citizenship (Turner 2006, 44).

This passage is essential to understanding that for Indigenous peoples the ‘sovereignty’ of the state of Canada is predicated on a recognition then erasure of Indigenous nations and sovereignties. This erasure is based primarily on the simultaneous ignoring and erasure of the Indigenous cosmologies and philosophies that informed their understandings of treaty agreements and relationships to land, in the first place. The constant assertion of the legitimacy of the sovereignty of Canada elides and erases the practices of Indigenous land seizure that make that expression of legitimate sovereignty by Canada possible. A critical distinction between Indigenous and euro-descendent settler perspectives on land is the difference between ownership of land and belonging of/to land. Indigenous philosophies largely view land in a reciprocal, relational manner such that ideas around land ownership are not the primary way in which land is conceived or experienced (Indigenous Peoples Earth Charter 1992, Sections 71, 77, 97). So to view the loss of land or territory as merely the loss of potential capital or loss of a commodity is also harmful. Injustice in many Indigenous communities is tied up with a correct balance of relationships and the existence/maintenance of right relations.

Notions of belonging and relationality permeate Indigenous philosophies and cosmologies. The positioning of relationality as the central node that connects and guides our interactions in the world requires an understanding of the importance of creation. Harm and

injustice, then, become the ways in which we are out of balance or badly related to creation and all of our relations amongst creation.

An Anishnaabe understanding of environmental justice considers relationships not only among people but also among *all our relations* (including all living things and our ancestors). Environmental *in*-justice, then, is not only inflicted by dominant society upon Aboriginal peoples, people of colour, and people in low-income neighbourhoods but also upon Creation itself (D. McGregor 2009, 28).

This point is fundamental to understanding why and how Indigenous philosophies are positioned differently from other dominant, Western euro-descendent paradigms of injustice/harm and reconciliation that rely on the separation of what happens in the ‘human’ world and what happens in the ‘natural’ world. In this case, environmental injustice is not just the harm dominant society inflicts on certain marginal and vulnerable populations, but also the injustices being inflicted upon creation itself. Since creation and everything within it is related and related in a dependent and deep way, harming one part of it affects the entire system and web of relationships, making relating to land a principle foundational to repair. By engaging with this perspective and way of being in the world, we quickly see the inadequacy of models of reconciliation that view harm as an isolated incident divorced from relationality, as well as relating to land. Reliance on these incomplete models will not produce long-lasting, effective, or satisfactory solutions for all parties involved. As seen throughout the argumentation of this paper so far, divorcing the ecological dimensions of harm from the human dimensions is problematic and will negatively affect models of reconciliation that rely on that distinction for Indigenous peoples. Approaching ourselves and the natural world as all a part of creation with dynamic, shifting, and unique gifts and responsibilities to each other motivates a very different way of relating to our shared world which emphasizes the importance of relating to land as well as how our own cultural backgrounds might cause us to value the environment differently (Bhattacharyya and Larson 2014). Considering these differences in cultural and environmental values opens the space for

engaging in deeper forms of reconciliation and cross-cultural, ethical collaboration. For example, examining an Indigenous vantage point and understanding of land, decentres the euro-descendent instrumental value of the environment as primarily commodity or resource from its asserted place of privilege within eurocentric culture, so that alternatives to this conception of land can be seen, honoured, and incorporated into transcultural reconciliation models.

In this section, I have examined how the dominant Western euro-descendent model of reconciliation as shared citizenship exhibits a similar inability to divest from the dominance of euro-descendent values, which make it an inappropriately oriented model for deep reconciliation amongst settler-Indigenous contexts in North America. This is due primarily to the settler colonial commitments intact in this model that require shared citizenship based on assimilation to euro-descendent logics and which can still not open the space for accounting, acknowledging and remedying the sites of ecological violence foundational to settler domination, legitimacy, and futurity. However, the possibility for improved and deep models of reconciliation exists when Indigenous philosophies and cultural values are seen, honoured, and incorporated. This can be witnessed in the following co-management case study where settler and Indigenous communities collaborated to restore relations with Nmé (lake sturgeon) in the Manistee Watershed, a case study to which this paper now turns.

## 5. Co-Management Models of Reconciliation

The centralizing of ecological forms of harm and violence in situations that call for deep reconciliation can be found in the important work of co-management projects requiring the collaboration of settler and Indigenous groups. These exchanges rely on non-dominative ways of relating that necessitate the discomfort of difficult conversations essential for coalition building and transcultural understanding. This section will examine the Nmé (lake

sturgeon) case study as an example of processes of reconciliation that prioritize the repair of violent ecological relations to the true betterment of settler-Indigenous relations.

The Nmé (lake sturgeon) restoration project illustrates what deep reconciliation can look like when transcultural cooperation is done well. This project prioritises how the physical/ecological effects of settler colonialism are integral to the formation of violent relations in need of reconciliation. The Nmé restoration project is an attempt to restore the Nmé (lake sturgeon) population in the Big Manistee Watershed. The Manistee River is located in part of the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians' territory, an Anishinaabe nation in the Great Lakes region, commonly referred to as Northern Michigan. The native fish population, Nmé, as they are called in the Tribe's language (Anishinaabemowin), has experienced a significant decrease in their numbers within the Manistee Watershed. Nmé thrived in pre-colonization settings within the Great Lakes basin and 'served as a substantial source of food, an indicator species for monitoring the environment, and a clan identity' (Holtgren, Ogren, and Whyte 2015). However, with the introduction of settlers and settler colonialism, the viability and stability of Nmé populations decreased and was put in danger. The Anishibek relationship to Nmé and the subsequent cultural, political, social, and biological systems constructed to ensure the health and stability of Nmé populations are guided by a perspective and valuing of Nmé as relatives. A reconciliation project that takes this into account needs to decentre euro-descendent values that could other this understanding of Nmé and the difference in how Indigenous peoples' conceptualise relating to land. Participation of Indigenous partners in a reconciliation project needs to go beyond Indigenous presence to make space for the differing environmental values informed by Indigenous ways of being especially relating to land (Paulson et al. 2012) The acknowledgement of the ecological harm carried out through settler colonialism allows for the understanding of the linked nature of Nmé's ecological integrity and Indigenous survival and flourishing.

The collaboration of tribes (Anishaabek) in the area of the Manistee Water Shed and settlers enables both parties to confront the system of harms that have led to the Nmé's situation and how that situation affects members of each party differently. The seeing and acknowledgement of Nmé as more than an othered biological species, but as relative, through deep reconciliation, opens the space of alternative epistemological frameworks, as well as understandings of harm and repair. Restoration in this case is not just about helping the Nmé population to flourish in terms of their population numbers, but also working to restore relationships between people and Nmé, as well as tribes and settlers, such that this problem will not occur again. What I mean by this is that restoring one relationship in what can be viewed as a relatively, singular case (fish population) requires a whole series of other relations and relationships to be made right that fundamentally transforms landscapes and ecosystems at the same time. One of the key aspects of this restoration project was the focus on the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians' relation to Nmé whom they view as relatives. The nature of this connection to Nmé requires certain sacred responsibilities to Nmé such that simply restoring their populations is beneficial, but not nearly a complete restoration of that relationship. A huge part of what makes the entirety of this restored relationship possible is an understanding and facilitation of the lifeways that make this practice of honouring the Little River Band of Ottawa Indians' responsibilities to Nmé possible. Marty Holtgren states that the goal of the project is to:

[R]estore the harmony and connectivity between Nmé and the Anishinaabek and bring them both back to the river... Bringing the sturgeon back to the river was an obvious biological element; however, restoring harmony between sturgeon and people was steeped in the cultural and social realm. Each meeting began with a ceremony, and the conversation was held over a feast (Holtgren 2013, 136).

Thus, the true honouring of Indigenous lifeways as well as their disruption through settler historical context create space for the possibility of deep reconciliation grounded in the principle of relating to land.

In this paper I have offered analysis to make an initial case for why it is tremendously problematic for Indigenous peoples, and others, whose history involves colonial seizure and degradation of land, to be part of political reconciliation processes that are not geared appropriately toward necessary expressions of this ecological violence when the heart of violent relations between two societies is centred in land-based conflicts. The absence of these ecological understandings of harm in dominant Western, euro-descendent models of reconciliation is indicative of a paradigm that is still compromised in its ability to divest from settler colonial logics and practices. The settler colonial elements of dominant Western, euro-descendent models of reconciliation was explored in both TRC models where reconciliation is constructed as liberal humanism and in settler legal-judicial models where reconciliation is constructed as shared citizenship. I ultimately argued that these models are undesirable because they fail to decentre settler colonial commitments and euro-descendent values and they also fail to seriously recognize, honour, and incorporate Indigenous cosmologies and philosophies grounded in the principle of relating to land. The allegiance to euro-descendent cultural values that erase and do not acknowledge ecological violence and the importance of relating to land make these reconciliation models ill equipped toward sustainable and equitable reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. Finally, I argue that the possibility for deep reconciliation exists in transcultural, co-management styles of reconciliation such as those involved in acknowledging and repairing the web of relations involved in restoring *Nmé*. As these transcultural, co-management styles of deep reconciliation centre Indigenous cultural and environmental values, especially relating to land and the recognition of ecological violence, as foundational to justice.

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