
Relational Visioning: Re-considering Approaches and Alternatives to ‘Reconciliation’ in Canada

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Abstract | This paper explores various rhetorical approaches to the contemporary dialogue around reconciliation in Canada. Through a critical review of different forms of reconciliation, the author critiques these forms for their various advantages and disadvantages in efforts towards reconciliation. On the other side of these critiques, this paper gathers the reasoning and intention behind reconciliation to argue for new terminology that better expresses these sentiments. Drawing on her Indigenous language, Michif, and its culture to support this work, the author describes the concept of *relational visioning* as an approach to reconciliation in contemporary Canadian context.

Keywords | Reconciliation, Canada, Residential School Project, Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, Relational Visioning, Indigenous Relations, Rhetoric, Michif, Language, Storytelling

In the contemporary era of reconciliation in Canada, there is no shortage of perspectives on what reconciliation means or looks like. Is it an apology, a statutory holiday, financial compensation, land acknowledgements, Land Back? The list goes on. And where does it end? Is there an end date to reconciliation discourse in Canada? This paper reflects critically on these questions relative to recent scholarship critiquing the concept of reconciliation within a Canadian context and explores alternative ways of understanding reconciliation through story and language grounded in my Red River Métis perspective.

Briefly, the historical context for Canada’s relations with the Indigenous peoples of Northern Turtle Island¹ begins in earnest with the French settlement of what is now known as Quebec in 1608 (Hele). In 1670, British colonialism began claiming land around the Hudson Bay as “Rupert’s land” which included portions of what became the provinces of Quebec, Ontario, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta (Hele). In 1763, King George III issued a royal proclamation asserting the British Crown’s governance over the North American territories, which led to a huge influx of British Canadian settlers in the area (Hele). A defining characteristic of colonialism in Canada is its settler nature. Where other countries struggled against and survived extractive colonialism under the British Empire as colonial forces sought to exploit resources, the colonial project in Canada sought to claim land for British population settlement, leading to colonial dominance over land, natural resources, and of people therein where colonial efforts included forced assimilation of Indigenous peoples into the Euro-Christian way of life. This project of land settlement and control is very much ongoing in Canada’s contemporary moment; however, Canada’s current circumstances are also influenced by the publication of the 2015 Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada Report. This commission was born after the Prime Minister of Canada at the time, Stephen Harper, issued an apology in 2008 on behalf of the Canadian government for its involvement in the Residential school project.² The TRC was created in 2010 with the

¹Turtle Island is a common name for North America found within Indigenous circles through the continent. Northern Turtle Island is the author’s way of accounting for Indigenous ways of knowing the territory of Northern North America as land and waterways that existed before, during, and after the authority of the colonial state of Canada’s existence.

²The Residential School project refers to the period in Canada’s history (1880–1996 approximately), in which Indigenous children were forced to attend government-sponsored religious schools with the intention of assimilating Indigenous youth into Euro-Christian Canadian society. Perhaps the most famous quote describing the impetus behind these schools is from the former Prime Minister of Canada, John A. Macdonald: “It has been strongly pressed on myself, as the head of the Department, that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men” (*Official Report of the Debates of the House of Commons* 1108).

mandate to inform all Canadians about the history of Residential Schools and concluded with the publication of its report and the *94 Calls to Action* in 2015.³

Since the publication of the TRC's reports in 2015, Canada's relationship with Indigenous peoples of Northern Turtle Island has been fraught with state pressure to pursue reconciliation as described by the report. Scholars have taken up the issue as there has been much political controversy over the concept of reconciliation. This paper will dive into these theories, as well as present my own consideration of reconciliation informed by my Michif language framework. My theory is a practice of *Relational Visioning* that is informed by my experience as a Michif language learner. The Michif word for learning is *kishkayhta*. This project is *kishkayhta* for how to understand intentions and approaches to reconciliation discourse. Another Michif word I've recently learned is *paykiiwikay* which means to come and visit. While I am still in the early stages of language learning, in this research I feel the urge to connect these words, to find a conception of reconciliation that means to come and visit *and* learn—a sense of *kishkayhta paykiiwikay*, which could mean to gather together to learn. Michif helps me bring feelings into language that support my perspective on reconciliation to better express the intentions I believe reconciliation is supposed to uphold, and engage with it within an Indigenous epistemological framework.

Recent scholarship on reconciliation has critically examined the use of the term in the TRC's reports and activities, as well as how the term is used in speeches in contrast with state legislative actions (George, "Reconciliation and Palatable Indigeneity"; Joseph and Joseph; Corntassel, "Truth-Telling Amidst Reconciliation Discourse"). What most scholars seem to agree on is that the term 'reconciliation' is being used widely amidst dissenting viewpoints on the concept (Asch et al.; Corntassel, "Truth-Telling Amidst Reconciliation Discourse"; Stark, "Generating a Critical Resurgence Together"). No single definition seems to suit for every time and place reconciliation is invoked. Furthermore, as Nuučaañul scholar, Rachel George, describes it, competing understandings of reconciliation are creating space for a conceptualization of reconciliation that is disconnected from Indigenous understandings of justice ("Reconciliation and Palatable Indigeneity" 99). When referenced, and it is referenced often these days, the term reconciliation carries many conflicting definitions and the potential to cause further harm within and around Indigenous communities rather than reparations.

This paper will review some of these many community-driven case critiques, as well as put them in conversation with state terminology around the subject. Through this research, I develop a working definition of what reconciliation can mean, as well as the approach of *relational visioning*, which I argue articulates the *spirit* of reconciliation more accurately than the term *reconciliation* does in contemporary discourse. While I approach this work sincerely and humbly, I accept that whatever comes of it will not be perfect and rather must remain inherently unfinished. No definition, however fluid or mobile, in whatever language, will suit all circumstances and certainly not all perspectives. With that in mind, it is my intention that through a gathering of recent

³For more information on the TRC and access to its published reports, see: <https://nctr.ca/records/reports/#trc-reports>.

literature on the topic of reconciliation and a following critical reflection on common forms of reconciliation, this paper will provide some points for consideration to support further community-specific engagement with concepts of reconciliation and journeys to defining language that directly speaks to unique experiences of ongoing settler-colonialism in Canada.

To speak of my perspective on reconciliation, I offer here my Coming-To story. Coming-To stories are a mode of introduction in which a speaker tells the story of how they have come to the topic in question. In my experience, Coming-To stories offer the benefit of creating opportunities for relationship-building, experiences of self-affirmation, and accounts of nuance that are not common in traditional self-location practices. I first learned about Coming-To stories in Cherie Dimaline’s 2017 novel, *The Marrow Thieves*. She wrote whole chapters of Coming-To stories to share the backstories of key characters prior to the events of the novel. That characters’ histories inform their actions and relations to other characters in the central plot is a well-understood reality in literary studies. Relationality is a key Indigenous research methodology in that it is through our relations that we understand ourselves and our world. The same is true for our languages. Indigenous languages shape Indigenous perspectives on the world and are therefore essential to talk about how to engage with reconciliation. But this concept has not always translated to the world of Western academic writing where research norms value traditional imperialism, de-personalization, and objectivity. Within Indigenous research methodologies, it is assumed that our stories and languages are imbued with valuable knowledge. For these reasons, Dimaline’s concept of Coming-To stories is adapted here to a scholarly setting in which my story and Michif language learning inform and strengthen my academic claims.

When the TRC report came out in 2015, I had just entered post-secondary and had little to no idea what I hoped to gain there. I selected courses that sounded interesting and ended up in classrooms of philosophy, astronomy, history, literature, and creative writing. At the time, I had not considered the TRC report particularly relevant to my life. My family had lost our Métis status long ago and we did not have strong relations who survived Residential Schools. I am somewhat embarrassed to write that at the time, I thought little about the concept of reconciliation outside of the context of some pipeline protests I’d been a part of in high school. After I was armed with a bachelor’s degree in creative writing, I turned my attention to Gender Studies and Social Justice for my graduate research. There I began to realize that my attempts to separate myself from my academic work was only to its detriment. I practiced self-location exercises and realized the impact of my studies strengthened when I spoke using my stories and language. It was also around this time that my cousins and I were doing our ancestry research to apply for Métis citizenship. This process was a gift to work on with my family. We are lucky enough to have a cousin who met with my great-grandma, Mary Anne Swain, to record our family history before she died in 1970. This is how my cousins and I were able to learn the details of our family’s journey from Red River, through Saskatchewan, and back again to Winnipeg.

Knowing my history informs how I approach my scholarship. Knowing the names of the women who carried my family stories through generations, at times hiding their Métis identity to protect themselves from colonial authorities, informs how I carry and

share my own. Knowing how one of my ancestors, François Dauphinais, served as the Vice-President in the Provisional Government of the Assiniboia alongside Louis Riel infuses my work with a legacy of colonial resistance and political engagement with the Canadian State is both an honour and a responsibility. I am still storying my journey as both Red River Métis and a scholar as I approach the topic of reconciliation in Canada. Knowing where I come from empowers me to come to this work as Red River Métis, a student, and a scholar studying Indigenous literatures and ways forward for Canada. I am continually learning how to be a good descendant to my many ancestors and how to be a good ancestor to those who are yet to come to this life. In this spirit I offer my family names here, Swain, Breland, Grant, and Dauphinais, as a Métis practice of self-introduction to inform all my potential future relations.

The following section explores various definitions, approaches, and critiques of reconciliation in Indigenous theory and politics in a Canadian context. Some critiques focus on fleshing out the required nuances of what reconciliation entails, with its various angles and approaches, such as works from Michael Asch, John Borrows, and James Tully in their anthology, *Resurgence and Reconciliation: Indigenous-Settler Relations and Earth Teachings*. Others take critical views on the potential harms of reconciliation discourses (Regan; Corntassel, “Truth-Telling Amidst Reconciliation Discourse”; George, “Conclusion”; Corntassel et al.; Snelgrove and Wildcat). While this paper considers various approaches to reconciliation, it is important to note a general resistance to reconciliation that has been commonly tied to the requirement of further truth-telling. These scholars contend that, in reference to the TRC’s intentions, Canada as a whole has not yet completed the task of establishing truth across the country about the realities of Indigenous life surviving ongoing settler colonialism in Canada. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission is founded on the principle that there are truths to be told and heard, followed by the work of reconciliation. But in order for truth-tellings to be effective, there must be “community-centered, decolonizing action behind them” (Corntassel et al. 138). There is a history of colonial harm that needs to be reconciled within settler communities before Canada may begin the reconciliation process with Indigenous peoples in the present. I want to emphasise that there is a long history to colonial violence on Turtle Island, and it continues into our present. This is to say that in order to understand the present, we must recognize and share a collective understanding of our past. Conversations about history are important to discussions of reconciliation to build a shared understanding of the colonial history of Canada, while keeping in mind the present colonial activity in Canada that continues to harm Indigenous communities. This is what is most commonly spoken of as the *truth* in Truth and Reconciliation. This perspective stipulates that there is more “truth-telling” and perhaps *truth-hearing* required before any process of reconciliation can begin effectively in this country. In comparison with governmental statements on reconciliation and publications by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, the sheer variety of perspectives on this topic requires a thorough exploration.

According to the 2015 report from the TRC, reconciliation is “an ongoing process of establishing and maintaining a respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, “Introduction” 6). That said, different contexts, approaches, or disciplines can carry whole hosts of complications to the discussion and potential outcomes of reconciliation.

For example, legal perspectives on reconciliation may focus on rights discourses such as land claims or self-determination or treaty negotiations, while others focus on truth-telling in response to the residential school era. That said, truth-tellings are also very much at the frontlines of Indigenous legal battles. The arenas of reconciliation overlap. The politics of reconciliation are further influenced by the history of it, the social dialogue around it, the language used to discuss it, the location of its battles, and so much more. Trying to demarcate the circumstances of reconciliation in Canada is like trying to pin down water beneath a glass. It will always seep into some other land or waterway where it will become something entirely new to what it once was underneath its initial lens. Through a consideration of common themes and goals, I have identified eight different approaches to reconciliation I see taking place in Canada today: Settler-State, Historical, Performative, Active, Land-based, Personal, Transformative, and Resurgent. These overlapping conceptions of reconciliation inform contemporary conversations and scholarship, not to determine which is correct, but rather to articulate the multitude of forms reconciliation may take, and therefore its uninhibited possibilities.

Some approaches to reconciliation seem most invested in a temporal structure, inferring a past wrong that requires a present correction, in order to progress into a neutral future. These forms include Settler-State, Historical, and Performative reconciliation. The concept of Settler-State reconciliation is based within how the settler state engages with reconciliation. Scholar Michael Asch offers a definition which identifies the essential objective to be to “reconcile our practices today with the certain knowledge that we have acted wrongly, [...] accept responsibility for the harms our actions have caused, and work to ensure that our actions and values in the future come into accord” (30). Unpacking this definition requires several steps. First, Asch makes clear he is writing from a settler perspective (29). His writing identifies settlers as a “community which originates with Europeans who began coming [to Canada] with colonization and found when they arrived that there were people already here living in political societies” (29). Understanding his own positionality informs his definitions. That is, when Asch writes “*our* practices” and “that *we* have acted wrongly,” he is speaking from his positionality within the settler community he defines just prior. This may seem like an assumed distinction in his definition, but it is worth pointing out as it offers an important framing of the work of reconciliation, namely that there has been a past harm that now requires reconciling. Given the state of ongoing settler-colonialism, this definition lacks the nuance to include ongoing colonial activities that further injustice against Indigenous peoples in Canada.

This connects to the concept of a Historical reconciliation, which is a viewpoint that actively historicizes colonial violence against Indigenous peoples, while ignoring the continued harms of ongoing settler colonialism. In his 2023 chapter, “Truth-Telling Amidst Reconciliation Discourse,” Cherokee scholar, Jeff Ganohalidoh Corntassel, pinpoints ways in which reconciliation discourse fails or distracts Indigenous peoples from generative resurgent relationships with nationhood, homeland, and the natural world. Calling these failed reconciliation approaches the “dead ends of reconciliation” Corntassel identifies the role of historicization in distracting discourses of reconciliation (149–151). The historical approach to reconciliation is a distraction because of how it frames history as something to be dealt with and then moved on from. Claims of “a sad chapter in our history,” as found in Stephen Harper’s 2008 Statement of Apology in

reference to the Indian Residential Schools, is an example signal phrase of this historical rhetoric that fails to serve future relations in this country. Cornthassel also cites the phrase “forgive and forget” in this discourse of distraction (“Truth-Telling Amidst Reconciliation Discourse” 150). This historical narrative further articulates the harms of colonialism as something that has happened in the past, rather than something that continues to harm Indigenous peoples today. This historical version of reconciliation disallows any work of making significant changes to current colonial realities.

The best response to this historicizing line of thinking comes from Lee Maracle’s reflective work on her conversations with Canadians. She writes about her discussions with a settler friend who continues to bring up the concept of forgiveness with her in reference to making peace with Indigenous peoples (Maracle 74). In this story, Maracle shares that forgiveness is a Christian belief, and while she knows her friend would not insist on her becoming a Christian, he continues to bring up the business of forgiveness. In this conversation, Maracle reflects that what her friend does not grasp is that in order to consider forgiveness as an approach to reconciliation, she would need to first accept forgiveness as a concept which would require her to convert to Christianity, as ‘forgiveness’ does not fit into her belief system (74). This response to the issue of forgiveness in the conversation on reconciliation is vital to show that when this work is brought to Indigenous peoples, it is often brought on colonial-settler terms. The direction of reconciliation in historical terms asks Indigenous peoples to come to the settler-colonial state, accept an apology, and, in turn, offer forgiveness as Christian colonial culture demands. But we cannot reconcile within settler systems of thought and ways of life. We must find our own ways forward in our cultures, beliefs, and justice systems. To speak of reconciliation and forgiveness in the same breath is to recolonize the history of colonial abuse and current Indigenous settler relations under settler dominating ideology.

Such historization of colonial harm further allows for Performative Reconciliation to take root in political discourse. Performative Reconciliation is an inactive reconciliation about words and not actions in which reconciliation can be considered a performance. This form of reconciliation is often about performing this national narrative of Canada as the benevolent state which cares for its Indigenous peoples, without taking any actions to effectively do so. Rachel George describes this as the national myth of “tolerance and benevolence of White Canadians” (“Reconciliation and Palatable Indigeneity” 144). Reconciliation as a theatrical performance of Canadian nationhood limits what transformative action is possible. It is easier to perform nationally endorsed moral values than it is to exercise individual responsibility and take transformational action, which connects to frameworks of Personal and Transformative Reconciliation, as will be discussed below. Performative Reconciliation is a kind of virtue-signaling engagement with reconciliation that at best fails to generate change and at worst, reinforces the status-quo of settler-state domination.

The powerful effect and construction of political narratives of reconciliation cannot be overstated. Performative Reconciliation is enabled by a diminished sense or monitoring of accountability. At the national level, Canada has shifted away from accountability in narratives of reconciliation, instead favouring collective narratives of grief over actions of redress. Political theory on this issue explains:

The mortalist humanist idea that we should dwell longer in grief or forge in grief new solidarities, or find in grievability a new social ontology of equality, informs the recent move away from a justice of accountability in (post)conflictual politics and toward truth and reconciliation commissions that focus, rather, on forgiveness for or acceptance of those who confess their crimes and recount what happened to their victims. Shared suffering, publicly acknowledged, provides the basis of a new order. (Honig 26)

The shared suffering witnessed through the work of the TRC provides the opportunity for the Canadian nation to publicly acknowledge grief, which performs the intention of reconciliation without focusing on justice for or accountability to Indigenous communities. When accompanied by the historical rhetoric of these harms, which is essential to the performance, this public grief creates a new order in which the response to crimes and harms of the “past” is performed out of a reconciliatory ideology that is followed by zero accountability. This makes possible phrases like “dark chapter in Canadian history”⁴ to describe the residential school system. Corntassel writes that “reconciliation without meaningful restitution merely reinscribes the status quo without holding anyone accountable for ongoing injustices” (“Re-envisioning Resurgence” 93). Performative reconciliation is then a tool to reinforce colonial power through the rhetorical invocation of reconciliatory intentions. This is made evident by the lack of progress made on the *94 Calls to Action*. Included in the 2015 summary report of their findings from over 6,000 statements from residential school survivors and their families, the TRC states 94 Calls to Action,⁵ organized into explicit tasks for various responsible parties to complete as a means of Active Reconciliation. Active Reconciliation is perhaps the antithesis to Performative Reconciliation. However, a 2023 status report tracking progress on these calls in Canada found that since its release in June 2015, only 13 calls out of 94 have been completed (Jewell and Moseby). With no consequences established for failure to act on these calls, Canadian nationalism can continue to perform interest in reconciliation without creating any changes to the state of settler colonialism in Canada.

Another way of approaching the questions of reconciliation is to consider the key actors in the area. Much of the discourse on reconciliation acknowledges its frame as a relationship between Indigenous peoples and the Federal Government of Canada or other

⁴This phrase is common political rhetoric in reference to Canada’s complicity in Indian Residential Schools.

⁵These Calls to Action are part of the report the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada published in the 2015 report of their findings over an investigation into the legacy and continued harms created by the Residential School system in Canada. The Calls to Action are organized under broad categories of Legacy and Reconciliation, in which subcategories such as Child Welfare, Education, Health, and Justice help to organize these 94 Calls according to the responsible parties. For example, under the Legacy, Education, number 11 reads: “We call upon the federal government to provide adequate funding to end the backlog of First Nations students seeking a post-secondary education” (2). Under Reconciliation, Museums and Archives, the report writes: “67. We call upon the federal government to provide funding to the Canadian Museums Association to undertake, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, a national review of museum policies and best practices to determine the level of compliance with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and to make recommendations” (8). This report contains all 94 Calls to Action prescribed by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada to address the need for the truth about Indigenous peoples in Canada to be known, and for reconciliation to be achieved in Canada’s future. For a full list of the 94 Calls to Action, see, https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf.

settler institutional authorities such as Christian churches. In the piece “Reconciliation Here on Earth,” James Tully, however, frames the work of reconciliation through our (human’s) relationship with the land, seeding a form of Land-based Reconciliation. Tully employs a rhetoric of relationality to make an argument that reconciliation comes down to two connected projects that are our relationships with each other and our relationships with the living earth, further arguing that attempts to tackle these projects independently from one another will never succeed (89). Tully’s perspective informs the interconnection of multiple forms of reconciliation, that reconciliation does not happen in one place, at one time, but rather that it is a slow, collaborative process integrating multiple positionalities including Indigenous, Non-Indigenous, and non-human life.

Anishinaabe and Ojibway scholar John Burrows agrees with Tully’s requirement of reconciliation with the living Earth adding that “the revitalization of Indigenous peoples’ relationships with the rocks, waters, insects, plants, birds, animals, and other forms of life around us” are key to Indigenous peoples’ reconciliation with others (50). Burrows’s writing here harkens back to Land Back as well; the relationships between Indigenous peoples and their land must be restored through Indigenous stewardship of the land. Land Back is an Indigenous-led initiative that works to return stewardship of land back to Indigenous peoples. Land Back is a clear and active way to work towards reconciliation. Speaking to waters, insects, plants, and animals expands notions of Land Back to include Water Back. The many interconnected systems of life that traverse land and water inform Indigenous knowledge systems and ways of being (Leonard et al. 375) and therefore must be considered in conversations of reconciliation. It is the lands and waterways and every form of life therein that Indigenous epistemologies come from, and responsibilities extend to, such that Land-based Reconciliation is about restoring those relationships to every aspect of life within traditional territories.

The integrated framework of Land-based reconciliation strongly converges with notions of Active Reconciliation. A common critique of reconciliation is that there is a lack of action beyond the rhetorical dialogue, that reconciliation is only about words. In response to this, there is a conception of *active reconciliation* or *reconciliAction* as it’s called in the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation’s educational programming (“ReconciliACTION Plans”). Active Reconciliation tries to name specific actions that work towards reconciliation, as a way to move our focus beyond what we say to concentrate on what we do. Bob and Cynthia Joseph offer a distinct definition of Active Reconciliation in Canada that means to honor treaties and acknowledge and respect Aboriginal Rights and Title (4). Active Reconciliation by this definition would encapsulate the return of lands and/or the acceptance and adherence to Indigenous models of self-government (Joseph and Joseph 4). By grounding Active Reconciliation in acts of adherence to Indigenous land authority and sovereignty, Active Reconciliation is closely tied to Land Back.

Within Active Reconciliation, I must also return to the TRC’s 94 Calls to Action included in their 2015 summary report of their findings from over 6,000 statements from residential school survivors and their families (Joseph 130–131). While these 94 Calls to Action are organized into explicit tasks for various responsible parties to complete as a means of Active Reconciliation, they are merely recommendations that the parties identified to enact them are free to ignore if they so wish. As per Jewell and Moseby’s

2023 report, 81 out of 94 actions are yet to be completed since 2015. It is therefore easy to conclude that despite clear actionable directives, there is currently minimal action being taken on most reconciliation initiatives in this country.

Perhaps for this reason, I find myself as a scholar, particularly interested in the idea of Personal Reconciliation. While we reconcile with each other as humans and the systems of life in our territories, reconciliation also takes place within the self. Sarah Robinson has created a “Truth and Reconciliation” personal action plan that guides readers through stages to engage in reconciliation action: Explore, Discover, Speak, Watch, Ally, Participate, Check Your Privilege, Read, and Train. In each stage, Robinson offers links to various supports and resources through which to engage with reconciliation. The process of personal reconciliation requires an inward look at who we are in relation to reconciliation and colonialism. To learn more about various Indigenous concerns, especially for settler Canadians, means learning about one’s country through a different lens, a different set of experiences, which connects to Historical Reconciliation as we need to reconsider our view on Canada’s history as a country. To engage in this learning process is to hold contrasting, sometimes opposing views of Canadian nationalism and experiences, that must be reconciled within one’s own experience to inform meaningful reconciliation work beyond oneself. For example, Canada has a national narrative of ‘being nice.’ On the world stage, Canada is largely thought of alongside hockey, moose, maple syrup, and saying ‘sorry.’ Canadians who feel proud of such an international reputation might be unpleasantly surprised, for example, to hear truth-telling from survivors of residential schools, who hold a very contrary experience of Canada. When the TRC spent six years collecting statements from survivors of residential schools, they were collecting truths about Canada’s not-so-distant past. In the process of truth-sharing, survivors did labour to speak truth about history that many settlers did not want to hear or accept. Settlers, now having heard survivors speak these truths, must determine what reconciliation means to them personally as they reconsider their own histories and experiences in Canada.

Rachel George explains in her chapter on “Reconciliation and Palatable Indigeneity,” how the Canadian narrative of multiculturalism and tolerance has created a national myth of Canada as the land of benevolence, a myth that functions to maintain settler colonial power (128–129). How might Canadians who identify with such a national myth reconcile it with the truth-tellings shared by Residential School survivors? This is the work of Personal Reconciliation. But Personal Reconciliation is not only for settler Canadians. One example of Personal Reconciliation within my Métis perspective is the need to reconcile Christian faith with the legacy of residential schools. Many Métis incorporate some form of Christian faith into their spirituality, although by no means all. Holding this faith can be complicated when acknowledging the role of the Catholic Church in the residential school system that used violent and sometimes deadly means to force Indigenous peoples to assimilate into Christian Canadianism. It is a task of Personal Reconciliation to find ways to hold the complexities of both these violent realities and a faith in Christianity at the same time, that is to reconcile one’s beliefs within a faith associated with so many faith-based crimes.

The Government of Canada describes reconciliation as a “transformative” process that reconciles “the pre-existence of Indigenous peoples and their rights and the

assertion of sovereignty of the Crown, including inherent rights, title, and jurisdiction” (“Principles”). What is not specified here is what is being transformed, or rather the directionality of that transformation. Reconciliation is a process of transforming what into what? The other problem with the above quote is that it reinforces the *sovereignty of the Crown*. In reference to Transformational Reconciliation, Corntassel identifies a shortfall of reconciliation in how it attempts to pursue a return to a previous mythical state of cooperation between Indigenous peoples and settlers (“Truth-Telling Amidst Reconciliation Discourse,” 150). If reconciliation connotes a return to a previous harmonious relationship, and that harmonious relationship never existed, then the conclusion is that reconciliation is based on a false premise. The Canadian Government’s approach to Transformational reconciliation connects to Historical Reconciliation as well in that there is a shared desire to look to history for answers between these two forms of reconciliation. Burrows and Tully offer a definition of Transformational Reconciliation as being “grounded in Indigenous traditions of *regenerating* healthy and sustainable, gift-reciprocity relationships” (7).⁶ If Transformational reconciliation is a regeneration of these Indigenous values, perhaps there is a helpful link between Transformational and Historical reconciliation, but only insofar as Transformational reconciliation moves beyond normative conceptions of Historical states of relations between Indigenous and settler peoples to focus on a regeneration of our cultures, legal systems, and concepts of justice. This perspective on Transformational reconciliation could be an improved approach, in which, rather than creating a rhetoric of returning to a previous mythical state of harmony between settlers and Indigenous peoples, Indigenous communities are supported in their transformations to a renewal of traditional ways of life.

This brings me to the final form of reconciliation that I see in practice, which is Resurgent Reconciliation. Resurgence can be defined as “a force for reclaiming and reconnecting with traditional territories by means of Indigenous ways of knowing and being” (Burrows and Tully 4). Conversations of Indigenous resurgence are often linked to discussions about reconciliation, both critically and favourably (Burrows and Tully; Corntassel “Truth-Telling Amidst Reconciliation Discourse”; Starblanket and Stark). There is a strong connection between concepts of reconciliation and resurgence. As Turtle Mountain Ojibway scholar, Heidi Kiiwetepinesiiik Stark writes, much of “our framing and calls for Indigenous resurgence [are] being shaped and affected by nation-state interest in the project of reconciliation” (“Generating a Critical Resurgence Together” 3). Where some discourses seem to prefer resurgence instead of reconciliation, I think of resurgence as a generative response to the failures of reconciliation discourses. Burrows and Tully further describe the relationality between resurgence and reconciliation as a combined concept of the two, in which resurgence and reconciliation feed each other, describing the relationship between the two as a form of “gift-reciprocity” (5). They explain that “despite the significant growth of resurgence-reconciliation networks and frameworks” there continues vast debate over the meaning and use of the terms resurgence and reconciliation (Burrows and Tully 5–6). I agree that

⁶Reciprocity is a foundational value to many Indigenous cultures and is especially important in relationship building with those outside their communities. Reciprocal gift-giving is a form of relationship and trust building between sovereign entities.

there are benefits to thinking about a discourse of resurgence *and* reconciliation rather than a juxtaposition politics of resurgence *instead of* reconciliation.

Stark further problematizes the relationship between resurgence and reconciliation by explaining how contrasting resurgent reconciliation with “rejectionist-resurgence” forecloses the transformational work for generative refusal which is fundamental to resurgence (Stark, “Generating a Critical Resurgence Together” 4). Resurgence work heavily incorporates a strong politics of generative refusal and rejection of politics of Indigenous recognition within the settler state.⁷ The work of resurgence is a revival of Indigenous political, spiritual, legal, economic, and education systems that does not need reconciliation, and in fact Indigenous resurgence may support an alternative and effective mode of approaching the conversation of reconciliation that has yet to be developed. Combining resurgence with reconciliation can propose a challenging combination of initiatives and priorities that come from differing directions with differing purposes. Stark offers one possible definition of resurgent reconciliation as a perspective that strives to live more holistically and pursues provocative but constructive approaches while rejecting isolationism (4). Taking a resurgent approach to reconciliation then means to engage generative acts of refusal and inclusion simultaneously, while embracing a holistic worldview. This framing connects with reconceptualizations of reconciliation that take away the present singularity of the term and replace it with a continual process of actions engaged with a multitude of perspectives.

Scholars and collaborators at the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation, Aimée Craft and Paulette Regan, argue that “[r]econciliation is not only an ultimate goal but a decolonizing process of journeying in ways that embody everyday acts of resistance, resurgence, and solidarity, coupled with renewed commitments to justice, dialogue, and relationship building” (xi). In contrast to the Historical, Settler, and even some views of Transformational Reconciliation which encourage rhetorical approaches to reconciliation that favour a beginning middle, and end process to achieve reconciliation, Resurgent Reconciliation embraces a continual process of growth, rediscovery, and regeneration with no end date. Contextualizing our approaches to resurgence and reconciliation in collaboration with each other is essential to productive scholarship and progress on this topic. Telling our stories of resurgence can be a useful act to engaging in this form of reconciliation, which is still being defined in contemporary literature and practice.

Looking at this collection of diverse perspectives on reconciliation, it strikes me as a snapshot of many positionalities, all influenced by their own narratives of time and place. There is a temporality to rhetorics about reconciliation influenced by many diverse circumstances. Reconciliation may mean something different today than it did in 2015 when the TRC report was published, or in 2008 when Stephen Harper offered an apology to residential school survivors on behalf of the Canadian government, or in 1998 when Canada released a Statement of Reconciliation in response to the Royal Commission on

⁷While unpacking the politics of refusal in relation to reconciliation discourse is beyond the scope of this paper, it is important to note the literature dedicated to resurgence independent of reconciliation and that further rejects reconciliation politics. See, Simpson, Audra. “Ethnographic Refusal.” *Mohawk Interruptus: Political Life Across the Borders of Settler States*. Duke UP, 2014, pp. 95–114; Coulthard, Glen. *Red Skin White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition*. U of Minnesota P, 2014; Simpson, L. B.

Aboriginal Peoples' report. The same could be said in comparison to 2020 when police arrested Wet'suwet'en Nation land defenders resisting the Coastal GasLink pipeline project invading their territory,⁸ or in 1990 in the wake of the Kanesatake Resistance (sometimes referred to as the Oka Crisis).⁹ These political events did not happen within a vacuum, isolated from other histories and influences in diverse communities within and beyond Canada's borders. It has long been understood that "Reconciliation speaks to the past, present, and future of Aboriginal-state relations in Canada" (Murphy 251). Informed by our pasts, acted on in our presents, and visioned for our futures, reconciliation is inherently temporally contingent. The story we tell of our past, deeply informs our present actions, and our visions of the future. In the journey of reconciliation in Canada, we must consider the story of where we come from—each of us as we come to the work of personal reconciliation—as our past informs our present actions. As Lee Maracle points out the lack of the concept of 'forgiveness' in her Stó:lō culture (74), so too does Rachel George reflect that her Indigenous language, Nuu-chah-nulth, has no word for reconciliation ("Reconciliation and Palatable Indigeneity" 148). The language of reconciliation is a vital consideration if we are to move forward in this work. For this reason, the language we use to discuss reconciliation and Indigenous futures matters, and while thus far rhetorics of reconciliation can be informative, I argue we must search for better language to speak to our dreams for ourselves and our communities.

At this point in these reflections, I am reminded that each Indigenous nation and community has its own unique wants and needs from reconciliation. The diversity of the issue is vast and ever unfolding. To come up with a modality of reconciliation that works across all communities is to erase complex differences of lands, histories, treaties, and relationships therein. For this reason, I resist claiming any universality to these reflections and instead embrace the process of individual determination in the course of reconciliation. How I have come to conceptualize what reconciliation means to me will not suit for all others, nor should it. Blackfoot scholar, Leroy Little Bear, writes that "one of the problems with colonialism is that it tries to maintain a singular social order by means of force and law, suppressing the diversity of human worldviews" (77). Let us not repeat the errors of colonialism in search for a singular definition of reconciliation. How we tell the story of reconciliation, and the language we use, feeds our actions on this journey. With that in mind, the following section articulates my own understandings of how I mean to speak to the concept of reconciliation in my professional work and

⁸The Wet'suwet'en land defence is a resistance to an invading Coastal Gaslink pipeline project that began construction in January 2019 through the Wet'suwet'en territory in British Columbia, posing a risk to the land and people of that area. The Wet'suwet'en First Nation's land defense and fight for sovereignty gathered extreme public attention in 2020 when protests spread across Canada. In the Winter of 2020, Wet'suwet'en hereditary chiefs issued Coastal Gaslink an eviction notice, asserting their jurisdiction over the land. However, after several arrests of land defenders resulted in police charges of violating provincial injunction terms, construction on the pipeline continued and five land defenders pleaded guilty to the charges in 2022. Construction of Coastal Gaslink was completed in 2023. For further reading, see, Shah, Shreya. "Wet'suwet'en Explained." *The Indigenous Foundation*. www.theindigenousfoundation.org/articles/wetsuweten-explained.

⁹The Kanesatake Resistance was a months-long Mohawk-led protest against the expansion and further development of a golf course and resort onto their territory including a Kanyen'kehà:ka burial ground that took place in the late summer of 1990. For further reading, see, Bruin, Tabitha de. "Kanesatake Resistance (Oka Crisis)." *The Canadian Encyclopedia*, 11 Jul. 2013, www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/oka-crisis.

personal values. What follows is an offering of a vision that centres language and story in a relational approach to reconciliation.

Without going deeply into the etymology of the term reconciliation, the language itself can be critiqued for its misassumptions. Historical Reconciliation inaccurately presupposes a harmonious relation between colonizers and Indigenous communities before colonial wrong-doings, and we must now reconcile these past wrongs and restore the previously peaceful relationship to its former status. However, as discussed above, such a relationship has never existed, and so the question follows, to what end are we reconciling? We are not *re*-establishing a previous way of living together. We are working to find a new one across tensions of co-existence. Reconciliation, from a linguistic perspective, is not accurately capturing the process or intention of what reconciliation is supposed to be and do in Canada. Reconciliation is standing in place for the process of moving forward together in a good way that builds relationships of respect and reciprocity. So, if not “reconciliation,” what term could speak to the story we are telling about Indigenous peoples in Canada?

One way of responding to this is to remove the “re” from reconciliation. Gina Starblanket and Heidi Stark articulate the “*conciliatory* potential of relations when they are inhabited in a healthy and forward looking way” (Starblanket and Stark 177; emphasis added). Starblanket and Stark’s writing speaks to an effort of conciliation, not reconciliation. To be conciliatory means to intend towards goodwill and reduce hostility. In this manner, *reconciliation* could be reconstructed more accurately to be *conciliation* between Indigenous peoples and the Canadian State. We are not returning to a previous state of harmonious relations, but we are working to create a good relationship; not repairing a damaged thing but making a new one.

When we speak of reconciliation, we are speaking across time and relations into the future. What kind of future is possible in Canada? Continued settler-colonialism perpetuates harm through the continued removal of Indigenous peoples from their rights and responsibilities to their relations with the land, waterways, and neighboring Nations, both human and non-human. These relationships are foundational to any conversation or narrative about reconciliation in Canada and therefore, the relational nature of the concept of reconciliation must be carried into future conceptualizations of it. To engage in what is commonly referred to as “reconciliation” is really to engage in the possibility of making futures beyond our current projections of settler-colonialism. Making these futures is a slow progress and it must be done collaboratively. *Indigenous-led future making* is how I reimagine the intention of reconciliation to be, and it is the only way into a future for all our people. In practice, this would look like Indigenous-led initiatives collaborating across communities of settler backgrounds and newcomers in Canada, where Indigenous communities make futures of possibility through everyday actions.

While learning to reconceptualize reconciliation and find new language to better encapsulate the intention of this work, I feel encouraged to bring in my own Michif language learning. Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, writes about the importance of researching within concepts and language specific to one’s culture (133). For Simpson, it is through working within Nishnaabeg thought that she finds the potential of resurgence work. In so doing, she is able to uncover language and

concepts to speak to her experiences in ways that English could not cover. As discussed in the cases of Lee Maracle and the concept of forgiveness, and Rachel George and the term reconciliation, Indigenous languages and cultures differ from settler-colonial English perspectives. Finding ways forward in our Indigenous languages, using the stories and teachings of our cultures, is vital for reconceptualizations of reconciliation. We need Indigenous language to speak to Indigenous concerns. Corntassel also speaks of how aspects of indigeneity cannot be separated out from each other, that our people, our lands, our communities cannot be thought of separately from our traditions, cultures, and languages (“Truth-Telling Amidst Reconciliation Discourse” 149). I take that to mean that we must bring our whole selves, including our languages, to the work of reconciliation if we are to find a good way to approach it.

Among Michif speakers, there’s a common idea that is conveyed to new language learners; it is that when we learn the Michif language, we will realize much of the Cree influence in the language is in verbs. I take this to mean that our Indigenous culture—our ways of being and moving in the world—is informed and articulated through actions. It is through the ‘doing’ that we live and speak of life. This connects to an earlier topic about Active Reconciliation, in that there is a call for action, as is common in the language itself. Two Michif words that I’ve shared before that speak to the action-orientation of the language are *paykiiwikay*, which means to come and visit, and *kishkayhta*, which means to learn. The gathering of perspectives on reconciliation explored in this paper then is a kind of *kishkayhta paykiiwikay*, learning through coming together to visit. Through the language, there is a way to tell the story of reconciliation through actions.

Another Michif word I have been very inspired by is *Pawaatamihk*,¹⁰ which is both Michif and Cree, and means collective dreaming. This is my wish for the idea of reconciliation, that it be about visioning together. Sometimes I let myself dream of people sitting around a fire. They are in the company of some animal relations and have food to nourish themselves. They are joined by a newcomer, a visitor. The visitor asks them all sorts of questions as to how they have lived well in this area. The people tell the story of the land, the boats, and the schools, of the apologies, the acknowledgments, and reports. All of this is spoken into the fire and when the visitor leans back in shock, they ask how all of that could ever have been resolved to the peace around the fire? At this, the people share a look. The warm glow lights their faces and they see each other as hard-won kin. This is not an end to the story, but a dream for some future time. While I actively resist idealizing the work itself, my dreams of hope for future relations between Nations and communities of settlers and Indigenous peoples are the driving intention behind my research. Hawaiian activist, Poka Laenui, writes that dreaming is the most crucial phase of decolonization, “where the full panorama of possibilities [is] expressed, considered through debate, consultation, and building dreams on further dreams which eventually becomes the flooring for the creation of a new social order” (Laenui 154). *Pawaatamihk* is the work of building the flooring for further dreams of our future.

The act of dreaming for the future with all our relations is a practice of storytelling. With language, we share our stories. A story that I received when writing

¹⁰*Pawaatamihk* is also the name of a new Métis scholarly journal committed to showcasing Métis thought both within academia and community. See, <https://pawaatamihk.uwinnipeg.ca/>.

this paper comes from a Southern Tutchone and Tlinget singer, Diyet von Lieshout, during a performance with her band, Diyet & the Love Soldiers. Diyet weaves stories of her family and her life in her songs. One story she shared was about her great-grandmother, passed down to her from her grandmother. This story shared how Diyet’s great-grandmother was brought by her family to the far away village of her great-grandfather to be married. Along the journey, Diyet says her great-grandmother had lots of time to think about this coming marriage, about what she would do if she did not like the man her family had chosen for her. When they arrived at the village, the community had set up a ceremonial blanket with a part in it hanging down from the roof of the longhouse. The ceremony of walking through the part in the blanket meant to make peace, make a new union. For Diyet’s ancestors, this made peace with the new members joining their family. And Diyet’s great-grandmother made peace within herself, peace with the choices left to her, peace with her visions for the future they would make together.

This story of the peace-making blanket inspires how I think about reconciliation. There is a *making* required in what I mean when I consider the term reconciliation, a making of the future possibilities of relations between Indigenous Peoples and settlers in Canada. This *making* takes place with each other, with the land, within Indigenous communities, within Indigenous settler relations, and within each of us as individuals. It is about making peace, making sustainable futures, and making relationships, and holding ourselves accountable to those relationships. The search for terminology to better encompass all these ideas is the driving force behind these reflections. As I search for language which speaks to these intentions, I have found many considerations of reconciliation that I hold in appreciation. I have found Michif words that speak to my orientation to this work, and these ground me. But I must also make this idea relatable. Therefore, I consider the following translation of *pawaatamihk*, of the making of the *kishkkayhta paykiiwikay*. Collective dreaming, gathering, and learning together speaks to *relational visioning*.

While the term relational visioning has previously been discussed in the context of sustainability research responding to increasingly challenging climate change issues from a Norwegian perspective (Nerland et al.), I propose to use it in relation to reconciliation in Canada. Through a visioning workshop in Norway in April 2023, researchers Nerland et al. investigated the role of relationship-building between stakeholders to achieve transformative action towards sustainable futures (5). Their analysis identified three key elements required to enact transformational relational visioning: shared values, deep listening, and clearly defined direction (7–8). My own research to consider the language and rhetoric used to engage with reconciliation in Canada also led me to the idea of relational visioning, which I understand as a common practise to explore and envision future developments of our dreams with the purpose of bringing them into reality, the work of building futures based in a relationality paradigm. Nerland et al. conducted a visioning workshop that aimed to investigate how participants related to “themselves, to other humans and to nature” and how their workshop could “change these relationships” (2). Their research supports the application of relational visioning as a productive exercise in imagining how our future may develop and uncovering the actions required along the way to force transformational change.

Based on my own experience in visioning circles, my experience as a Métis person taking part in visioning practices informs my perspective that when this work is done in relation, we enter spaces of possibility and multitudes beyond what we can vision alone. From an Indigenous perspective in Canada, relational visioning is about bringing together all our relations into a collaborative process of future making. *All my relations* is a common phrase among many Indigenous communities. One of my favourite teachings of this phrase comes from the Cree Literacy Network which describes it as a “recognition of unity with the universe, of harmony, of balance, and of the invisible bridge that unites the diversity of our lives” (Ogg). If we can vision with all our relations, including with the land, water, plants, and animals, then we are imagining futures that recognize and uphold harmony and balance within our diversity as peoples of Canada while we “facilitate transformative actions” (Nerland et al. 2) towards reconciliation.

I recently attended a visioning circle of Indigenous graduate students to imagine what kinds of support we wanted to see come into reality for us and for future students. In this process, we spoke about our experiences and shared possible solutions that could address some of our challenges. While the organizers had prepared specific questions to ask for feedback, we didn’t get to them. We spent all our time visioning how we wished our educational supports could look, feel, and sound to us. What we didn’t realize we were doing at the time is relational visioning in how we were only able to come up with possible visions for the future through our discussions with each other. We came up with ideas together I never would have thought of alone in this process.

When I hear the term *reconciliation*, it calls to mind many different worries and frustrations, but it also sparks ideas of possibility and relationality. It makes me think of hard work and most definitively of collaborative work. Despite clear definitions of the term, it is used widely to varying ends. To speak meaningfully about reconciliation requires a restatement of the contextually specific parameters of its use, and even then, the resulting communication is heavily weighed down by discourses and histories of the term that vary across audiences. To engage with the term reconciliation requires an acknowledgement of many discourses, critiques, and perspectives and should not be used lightly. My own findings show me that I have a very specific vision for what reconciliation could be, what I want it to be, that does not align with much of the above gathered discourse around the term. When I speak of reconciliation, I mean collaborative visioning of futures in relation with each other that serve our people. When I speak of reconciliation, I speak of future-making as a collaborative effort of language and story, rooted in Indigenous frameworks of relationality, balance, and reciprocity to inform a process of relational visioning.



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