

# **The Melancholy of Extraction: Settler Sentimentality in Canada's Ahistorical Era of Economic Reconciliation**

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*Amy Fung*

The original draft of this paper was presented on September 30, 2021, which coincidentally marked the first time in history that Canadians observed the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation.

September 30 has been known as Orange Shirt Day, a day of collective grief and mourning since 2013. The Orange Shirt grassroots campaign began with Phyllis Webstad from Stswecem'c Xgat'tem First Nation, then 46 years old, who publicly shared her story for the first time at a commemoration event.<sup>1</sup> A former student at St. Joseph's Indian Residential School in William's Lake, British Columbia, she recalled how her grandmother gifted her an orange shirt for her first day of school, and how upon entering the Mission, as it was known, she was stripped of her possessions, and her shirt was taken away by school administrators, never to be seen again. The memory of that loss from over forty years ago, however seemingly insignificant to distant observers and unempathetic ears, opened up a floodgate of compounded losses (Charleyboy).

St. Joseph's first opened in 1891 and ran until 1981. During its 90-year operation, the Mission was a notorious site of ongoing child abuse including physical, sexual, and emotional violence against Indigenous youth from as young as four to sixteen years old. Dangerous living conditions, inadequate nutrition, the disappearance of students, and other forms of gross negligence by its operators, the Oblates of Mary Immaculate, a Roman Catholic missionary, were

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<sup>1</sup> Specific nations will be named in this text, otherwise, "Indigenous" will be preferred except when referring to "Aboriginal" in the Constitutional sense or "Indian" in the legal sense of the Indian Act or residential schools.

long ignored by federal government officials. Canada's then Deputy Superintendent of the Department of Indian Affairs (DIA), Duncan Campbell Scott, who made school attendance compulsory, clearly stated in 1920 at a Special Committees hearing, "I want to get rid of the Indian problem [...] our objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian Question and no Indian Department" ("Until There Is Not a Single Indian in Canada").<sup>2</sup> A few years later, Scott would make it illegal for anyone under DIA's jurisdiction to hire their own legal counsel to challenge land claims without DIA's approval. Through a multi-pronged approach of colonial interference, the Canadian government, for the majority of its 155 years of existence, has pursued an aggressive policy direction of termination against Indigenous ways of life.

Phyllis Webstad's story is unfortunately not unique. The colonial force of assimilation began long before the establishment of residential schools and continues after the last school was closed. The purpose of residential schools was to remove Indigenous children from their families and communities and instill in them ideas of Western Eurocentric supremacy. Children were taught to be ashamed of who they were and where they came from. Webstad's story goes beyond the material loss of her shirt, which was a gift and therefore a relational bond to her grandmother. She spent 300 nights in the Mission, and her mother and grandmother each spent ten years in the Indian Residential School (IRS) system along with over 150,000 First Nations, Métis, and Inuit children. The erosion of Indigenous language, knowledge, and culture was three generations deep by the time Phyllis entered the Mission as a six-year-old. The significance of Orange Shirt Day and the subsequent slogan "every child matters" resonated with other IRS survivors, intergenerational survivors, their supporters, and settlers who were long overdue in learning about the extent of their country's difficult history from the perspective of survivors.

As a result of the largest class action settlement in Canadian history, the Indian Residential School Survivors Agreement (IRSSA) established its own Truth and Reconciliation Commission to document the experiences of survivors. Alongside the momentum of the Orange Shirt Day movement, a list of 94 recommendations came out of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) Final Report, with #80 stating:

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2 Excerpt from the 1920 testimony of Duncan Campbell Scott, to the Special Parliamentary Committee of the House of Commons that was examining Scott's proposals to amend the sections of the Indian Act that focused on enfranchisement.

We call upon the federal government, in collaboration with Aboriginal peoples, to establish, as a statutory holiday, a National Day for Truth and Reconciliation to honour Survivors, their families, and communities, and ensure that public commemoration of the history and legacy of residential schools remains a vital component of the reconciliation process. (TRC 2015a, 291)

It would take another six years for the federal government to confirm September 30 as the National Day for Truth and Reconciliation. Its unanimous approval through the House of Commons came mere days after the Tk’emlúps te Secwépemc First Nation confirmed the discovery of 215 bodies, likely all of them children, in an unmarked mass grave on the site of a former residential school in Kamloops, British Columbia. Since then, over two thousand more bodies and counting have been identified across the country on the sites of former residential schools using ground penetrating radar technology. During the multi-year process of the TRC, the commissioners had requested a separate budget in excess of \$1.5 million to work on what they called “the Missing Children and Unmarked Burials Project” when they began to realize the additional scope of work needed to find unmarked graves at former residential schools, but their request was denied.<sup>3</sup> Rather than search for missing children and bring some closure to their families, the scope of the TRC became focused on multi-day events of public ceremonies and survivors’ testimonies for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to bear witness as a step toward reconciliation, which as a term has taken on the weight of colonization’s aftermath.

In the TRC Final report, the commission defined reconciliation as a process which must be about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, “there has to be awareness of the past, an acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, *and action to change behaviour*” (2015a, 6, my emphasis). I emphasize the last line, “an action to change behaviour” because the history of Canada’s identity as first a British dominion and now a sovereign and wealthy G7 nation grew out of its foundation as an extraction-based colony. Resource extraction has been the driving motivation for past and ongoing colonial violence, from forced

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3 For more information, see Volume 4 of *The Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada*, Canada’s Residential Schools: Missing Children and Unmarked Burials, 6.

removals via court injunctions, child welfare, and disproportionate rates of incarceration to the establishment of residential schools, whose stated goals were to assimilate Indigenous people into the settler body politic including its laws, language, and a capitalist wage economy.

In trying to parcel out the political purpose of the new national holiday and understand how reconciliation discourse has been shaped by Canada's political economy, this chapter is not building toward a working definition of reconciliation or approaching reconciliation as its end goal. Rather, I am revisiting the study completed in the years after IRSSA and before the completion of the Commission's findings by Corntassel, Chaw-win-is, and T'lakwadzi's (2009) "Indigenous Storytelling, Truth-telling, and Community Approaches to Reconciliation," where they define that

[a]t its core, reconciliation is a Western concept with religious connotations of restoring one's relationship to God. Given that reconciliation is not an Indigenous concept, our overarching goal as Indigenous peoples should not be to restore an asymmetrical relationship with the state but to restore our communities toward justice. (5)

In centering justice as the goal, the authors also highlight the responses to the Common Experience Payments (CEP), the lump sum payments administered to IRSSA survivors. The responses to CEP were varied from recipients suffering depression, substance abuse, and even committing suicide after the process of tallying years of violence and trauma into a bureaucratic calculation. Also notably, these researchers showed that cultural loss including language and ceremonies can never be replaced with remuneration, but that their culture and knowledge must become accessible again for Indigenous communities if justice is the goal.

Attempts continue to be made to share space between Indigenous and non-Indigenous nations to listen and bear witness to the truths of their intertwined histories. In both of the aforementioned definitions of reconciliation and justice, there is an understanding that this is a dynamic process that is more than payments and lip service as it requires actual change in behavior. For Tkemlúps te Secwépemc Chief Rosanne Casimir, the act of coming together to bear witness is an "integral part of history making."<sup>4</sup> Casimir spoke these words on October 18, 2021, from the PowWow Arbour, an open-air gathering space along the bend of the South Thompson River and the present home to the Kamloopa

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4 From the live address at Tk'emlúps te Secwepemc on October 18, 2021.

Pow Wow, one of the largest celebrations of Indigenous culture in Western Canada. While non-Indigenous people may observe Indigenous culture with curiosity, and even appropriation, what is important to acknowledge is how these cultural practices have survived through generations of genocidal policies. Casimir spoke about the importance of bearing witness as the Tkemlúps te Secwépemc had just hosted the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation in this circular space that connects the past to the present. Casimir's words of coming together to bear witness were directed toward Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, who sat to her right in a *mea culpa* appearance for going surfing on September 30, 2021, instead of accepting the Tk'emplúpsemc's original invitation to bear witness to the findings of unmarked graves in their territory. Trudeau's decision to take a beach holiday exemplifies how many Canadians choose to observe the first National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, as a day off, completely divorced from the intentions to remember and mourn Canada's atrocities against Indigenous communities.

In this specific context, the reconciliation discourse is limited and only capable of performative grief. Settler sentiments fall into an ahistorical cycle of denial, apologies, and denial, once again. While dedicating a national day to remember and mourn the loss of Indigenous youth as a direct result of church- and state-run residential schools, the federal government does not actually address ongoing systemic violence against Indigenous lives. I interpret this performative grief as an extension of sentimental extraction where feelings of shame and regret in ecological destruction co-exist with an interminable reliance upon its ongoing devastation. I observe a parallel and reckless abandonment of Canada's genocidal history in its seemingly progressive stance to pursue "reconciliation" without any change in policy or behavior. In establishing a national memory to remember the state's past violence toward Indigenous ways of life, there is an incongruity in the unchanged methods of the federal government's continued expansion of its economic model based on extractivism that has always been and continues to be heavily dependent on forced access to Indigenous territories.

As a form of critical discourse analysis, I am closely reading the post-TRC rhetoric surrounding "reconciliation" as a substitute to address the gravity of residential schools. I question whether this affective shorthand to focus only on the atrocities of child abuse obfuscates the larger and more insidious political and economic motivations that led to their creation by the state in the first place. The forced removal of Indigenous people from their lands and the criminalization of their ceremonies, languages, and governance structures was to

fulfill the colonial desire to secure the ‘pristine wilderness’ that has formed the backbone of Canadian identity and the fertile farmlands and rich deposits of precious minerals, lumber, and fossil fuels at the heart of its modern economy. The underlying bureaucracy to quell Indigenous resistance against colonial jurisdiction initiated the abusive system of IRS and continues to this day through the double-speak of achieving “economic reconciliation,” which will be explored in the second part of this paper.

As a first-generation immigrant living and working in Canada, I believe there is an imperative to remember and honor the victims and survivors of Canada’s residential schools by speaking the truth of what happened in those federally mandated institutions. It is ongoing work to connect these colonial logics back to the national narratives that drive extractive economies. For many, the violence of extraction and exploitation has never stopped. In observing the oftentimes callous apathy of my fellow Canadians, I see this inability to mourn the incalculable scales of violence against Indigenous life as an expression of settler sentimentality. My definition for settler sentimentality is indebted to Judith Butler’s (2004) work on the politics of mourning. In Butler’s analysis, the assumption of whose lives are “grievable” in the aftermath of September 11 is a broader critique of the role imperialism and nationalism play in shaping our parameters for mourning. Drawing from the philosophical foundation of Foucauldian biopolitical analysis, Butler questions the political role of grief and the act of mourning as justification for inciting war and violence—that other people must die in order to pay for *our* grief. By developing a philosophical treatise to challenge whose lives count as livable and whose deaths are grievable, Butler speaks back to Foucault’s analysis of racism as one form of governmentality in determining who must live and who must die in the name of state sovereignty. Foucault originally wrote, “Racism is the indispensable precondition that allows someone to be killed, that allows others to be killed. Once the state functions in the biopower mode, racism alone can justify the murderous function of the state” (2003, 256). Expanding upon Canada’s politics of mourning, this paper will also analyze the rhetorical emergence of “economic reconciliation” as well as the bridging of two opposing epistemologies toward remembrance and responsibility. Tracing how Canada chooses to officially recognize its own violent past when the violence has never stopped, the scope of this analysis takes aim at this hypocrisy of reconciliation discourse that ultimately benefits the settler state above all else.

## The Melancholy of Extraction

It is near impossible to speak about melancholy without referring to Sigmund Freud, but ‘the melancholy of extraction’ is less about the Freudian subject or ego tinged with sadness or regret than it is a description of the pathological inability to move on from an idealized past. In my reading, Canada’s extractive economy is unable to let go of its idealized past as a white British colony. As one of the settler Commonwealth colonies, along with Australia and South Africa, Canada also actively enforced exclusionary immigration policies against racialized people to protect its character as a “white nation” (Hage). The establishment of white supremacy as the law of the land determined who could live and prosper, which included the project of assimilating Indigenous communities while simultaneously limiting and containing non-white communities from settling. Even to this day, Canada continues to uphold the Doctrine of Discovery as its legal standing over Indigenous land. To affirm 15<sup>th</sup> century Papal Bulls as the reason for settler jurisdiction is to actively glorify European colonization over existing Indigenous laws and protocols. The melancholy of extraction is therefore an analytical framework that interprets Canada’s recognition of its colonial violence against Indigenous communities and its simultaneous refusal to stop pursuing its colonial agenda as a result of the nation’s idealization of its past as a white British colony.

In what Sara Ahmed calls “affective economies,” where feelings are not only psychological or emotional but are also socially and politically produced and circulated as identities, the identity of Canadians is bound to settler colonial access to Indigenous territories. This access is rooted in entitlement, white supremacy, and heteropatriarchy. One only has to be reminded of the mythos of explorers and homesteaders being relevant to today’s laborers in oil and gas industries, logging, and mining to get a sense of the connection between national identities and its foundation in settler colonialism.

As an example of this behavior of recognizing the harm but refusing to change, Canada is projecting more oil and gas extraction in 2050 than in 2019. Despite global trends in the past decade of moving away from fossil fuels and international regulations such as the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) re-centering the rights of Indigenous people, Canadian policies remain tethered to colonial logics of extraction. The latest economic projections forecast an increase in Canadian fossil fuel production while its geopolitical allies in the G7 are moving to eliminate its use altogether.

This makes Canada the only country in the alliance to increase its carbon emissions since signing the Paris Agreement (Perez).

As another example of unchanged behavior, at the 2021 Climate Change Conference (COP26) in Glasgow, Trudeau made a Freudian slip when he referred to Canada as “a major oil and gas producing company” instead of “country.” Either way, as country or company, Canada repeatedly demonstrated that it refuses to shift away from fossil fuels and other carbon-heavy economies, which relies on undermining Aboriginal title as defined by the Supreme Court ruling of *Delgamuuk vs. British Columbia*, in 1997, as well as infringing on Aboriginal and treaty rights as recognized and affirmed by Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution. In fact, this slip of the tongue proved more accurate than not, as former Conservative leader Erin O’Toole also repeatedly stated that in order to shift into a green economy, Canada must maximize its potential revenues from fossil fuels first (Tasker). The logic offered by the political leadership in Canada is that for any step the country makes towards a green economy, Canadians are to expect more, and not less, of fossil fuel extraction. This inability to imagine moving away from fossil fuels and other carbon-heavy economies directly relates to ongoing colonial violence through extraction and assimilation. As political leaders pay lip service to reconciliation, the ahistorical remembrance of colonial violence allows them to pursue the status quo rather than take concrete actions such as policy changes, bearing witness, and mending broken treaties.

By critically analyzing the affective dimensions surrounding the federal government’s discourse of reconciliation including National Day for Truth and Reconciliation, I am scrutinizing the settler impulse for sentimental gestures and holding these intentions in remembrance of past and ongoing violence. Canada continues to press forward assimilative policies against Indigenous communities that extinguish Aboriginal title, neutralize constitutional status, and dismantle treaties through the development of alternative legal agreements (Diabo; Collis 9). Starting from the position that settler violence is an economic project against Indigenous communities and territories because “colonialism and capitalism are based on extracting and assimilating” (Simpson 75), I question the capacity of settler sentiments to acknowledge the harm of colonialism as long as a dependency on the extractive processes of reducing everything into exploitable resources is maintained.

## Long Memory as Method

Using a methodology of a long memory approaches Canadian history as always being in relation to Indigenous history, I begin with the acknowledgement of this complicated new national holiday because the affectively powerful gesture of remembering Canada's genocidal history cannot be separated from the state's ongoing colonial policies to erode and evade Indigenous self-determination. More specifically, I am analyzing the narrative transformation of anti-racism, liberation, and mutual dignity into a neoliberal discourse of political and economic inclusion under so-called politically progressive rhetoric. I am defining neoliberalism via Jodi Melamed's definition of neoliberal multiculturalism, where the freedom of commerce has been collapsed with social freedoms to the point where economic rights become the most fundamental civil right for equality (16).

While there are national debates about the veracity of calling residential schools a "genocide," there remains a pressing agenda of militarized invasions into unceded and occupied Indigenous territory to uphold corporate interests.<sup>5</sup> The inherent rights of Indigenous jurisdiction includes immemorial rights over traditional territories including people, land, and what has been termed "resources" under the logic of settler colonialism.<sup>6</sup> My method of understanding the contradictions of Canada's socially progressive liberal rhetoric such as creating a statutory holiday to honor truth and reconciliation is to put them in relation to ongoing actions of extraction. By looking at the ideological differences between the Canadian government's words and actions, specifically this new national holiday and how reconciliation has been transformed into a discourse on economic reconciliation, I am closely reading the role of settler sentiments in political discourses and questioning the politics of mourning that only reinforce the jurisdiction of the colonial state.

5 The refusal to admit colonial violence towards Indigenous communities as genocide has been widely debated in Canadian press and politics, but more disturbingly an open letter dated August 9, 2021, against the Canadian Historical Association's Canada Day Statement of 2021 by academics has entered the fray. The open letter was signed by a long list of Canadian historians and appeared on the blog of the *Dorchester Review*, a self-described "non-partisan" history journal with right-wing tendencies on August 9, 2021. A further rebuttal appeared on Shekon Neechie, an Indigenous history site, a few days later on August 11.

6 Settler logic defines nature as private property, or resources in the form of water, trees, minerals, oil, gas, etc.

Understanding ongoing racism as a function of globalization, Achilles Mbembe's "necropolitics" has also informed how I understand settler sentimentality through a contemporary anti-colonial lens. For Mbembe, the role of violence cannot be understated in the making of a modern sovereign nation. Indeed, he writes the "ultimate expression of sovereignty largely resides in the power and capacity to dictate who is able to live and who must die" (66). In all of the G7 nations, sovereignty has been historically defined as the right to kill, where "the violence of civilization" is all but swept under the carpet (11). The circumstances in Canada are no different. Read together with Butler's philosophy on the politics of mourning, the concept of "necropolitics" creates a useful, though not always commensurable parallel for my own analysis of the politics of mourning in a settler colonial context. For the purposes of this essay, I define settler sentimentality in the Canadian context as a means of justifying past and ongoing violence against Indigenous lives in the name of securing the settler state's economic sovereignty. Turning towards an expansive remembrance of what is being grieved, how this loss is accounted for, and whom this remembrance serves, my analysis of the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation explores the initial loss as a complex site of remembrance that began in grassroots advocacy away from state recognition, before it was repurposed into a discourse of economic reconciliation.

## The Rhetorical Turn to Economic Reconciliation

The appearance of "economic reconciliation" in mainstream political discourse has been years in the making.<sup>7</sup> Bridging capitalist extraction and progressive liberalism, the term "economic reconciliation" has been used in the context of 'achieving' reconciliation with Indigenous peoples as a palatable and profitable venture for all Canadians.

The earliest public use of the phrase "economic reconciliation" I could trace appeared in 2015 by a BC-based organization called Reconciliation Canada. In

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<sup>7</sup> Examples of "economic reconciliation" include Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson claiming Tewin, a land development project, with the controversial Algonquins of Ontario as a form of reconciliation. See Shady Hafez (2021) and Kate Porter (2021). More notably, with "reconciliation" as a priority for most voters in the federal election of 2021, Liberal and Conservative leaders Justin Trudeau and Erin O'Toole referred to "economic reconciliation" as the way forward. See Stephanie Taylor (2021) and the op-ed by Dawn Madahbee Leach and Chief Terrance Paul (2016).

its 2015 “Impact Report,” the same year the organization was registered as a charitable organization, Reconciliation Canada notes that in partnership with Vancouver Island University, a series of dialogues on “economic reconciliation” were developed and facilitated to engage senior level business and First Nations leaders. This included former Assembly of First Nations (AFN) national chief Shawn Alteo, who was handpicked by outgoing BC Premier Christy Clark to promote dialogues between business, government, and Indigenous peoples (Shaw). Alteo was listed as the Chair of the Reconciliation Canada board in its 2015 “Impact Report” and according to its financial highlights section, the organization spent \$87,413 to develop the program and over \$43,790 on dialogue workshops in partnership with VIU’s Centre for Pre-Confederation Treaties, who employed Alteo as their first Speaker for Indigenous Dialogue (26).

The following year in 2016, another federally funded group, the National Indigenous Economic Development Board (NIEDB), released its report, “Reconciliation: Growing Canada’s Economy by \$27.7 Billion” (Fiscal Realities Economists).<sup>8</sup> As a summary, the report suggests that there are significant financial gains to be made by reconciliation. Dawn Madahbee Leach, Vice-Chairperson of NIEDB, and Chief Terrance Paul, a member at large and CEO of the Waubetek Business Development Cooperation (for which Madahbee Leach also serves as General Manager), also co-authored an op-ed in the *Ottawa Citizen* titled “How helping Indigenous communities can boost the economy.” The latter distilled the contents of the 2016 report on the potential benefits of economic reconciliation for a general mainstream readership in the nation’s capital. From there, NIEDB hosted a three-part series to further develop what would become the contents of its 2019 *Indigenous Economic Reconciliation*. Four key areas are highlighted in the 2019 report as topics of ongoing discussions to be had with ministers and government officials, including “procurement, access to capital, capacity development, and wealth sharing” (9). I want to highlight that under wealth sharing, the recommendations endorse traditional economies and participation in environmental stewardship, but they also focus on expanding settler economies, namely, “to increase equity positions and involvement of Indigenous peoples in resource development” (*ibid.*). From a policy perspective, increasing Indigenous equity in extractive economies that have poisoned waterways and food sources and been the root

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<sup>8</sup> It may be worth noting that NIEDB also falls directly under the responsibilities of the Minister of Indigenous Services, whose department also funded the printing of the 2015 “Impact Report” from Reconciliation Canada.

cause of systemic violence against Indigenous nations does not signal that there is going to be any change to behavior in this particular path of economic reconciliation. Instead, Canada continues to pursue an assimilative direction, even in its approach to reconciliation.

As a counter policy direction, I turn to the Yellowhead Institute, an Indigenous-led think tank started in honor of the late great Secwepemc leader Art Manuel. Their most recent Red Paper, *Cash Back*, considers that economic restoration must go beyond talk and payments, but includes: “Redress for suppressing Indigenous values, Compensation for land theft based on principles of Indigenous laws and mechanisms of justice, and Restitution of Indigenous economies that challenge the exploitation of global capitalism” (14). The report also references Glen Coulthard’s article “For Our Nations to Live, Capitalism Must Die,” where he makes an argument against wealth sharing under the uneven power dynamic of settler colonial capitalism. Even if it provides short-term financial aid, this type of wealth sharing hooks people into “predatory economies that undermine the deep reciprocity of Indigenous economies” (Yellowhead Institute 60). At the same time, Coulthard notes that the choice to challenge settler colonial economies proves to be a difficult decision between improving socio-economic conditions through available revenues from extraction or exercising independence from the state. However, as exemplified by ongoing injunctions and paramilitarized operations against land defenders exercising their rights to protect their territories from destructive extraction, the definition of Indigenous economies is being narrowly defined by the state.<sup>9</sup>

The sowing and nurturing of the idea of “economic reconciliation” to promote Indigenous people’s access to resource wealth reveals an epistemological divide. The Canadian state understands wealth in strictly capitalist terms of privatization of land and resources and its accumulation for monetary wealth. Indigenous laws that disallow individual ownership of non-human life including land and water and all living beings have been treated as dangerous, uncivi-

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9 There are several Indigenous land defense groups who actively refuse assimilation, such as Tiny House Warriors (resisting the expansion of the Trans Mountain Pipeline), Land Back Lane (holding up Six Nations governance), Gidimt'en and Unist'ot'en clans (who are actively defending Wet'suwet'en life from the Coastal GasLink pipeline). These defenders are criminalized for practicing and remembering their rights to live on their land. That their resistance is met with state violence demonstrates Canada's unwillingness to shift away from carbon-heavy economies while pledging reconciliation is pathologically colonial.

lized, and therefore criminal under Canadian law. The settler colonial economy and its legal system has never honored the Indigenous legal provision that humans are also “Earth-Bound,” which speaks to how human beings have been and will always remain tied to the health and abundance of the natural world we live in (Borrows 2018).

## Two Worlds Colliding

To remember the truth is to acknowledge the hypocrisy of Canada’s continuing attempts to assimilate Indigenous people and communities into extraction-based economies as the policy direction for reconciliation. Shifting reconciliation discourse into a neocolonial method of shared stakes in extraction-based projects, Canada’s politics of mourning is smoke and mirrors for ongoing economic assimilation. In the few short years since the TRC issued its Final Report, the term “reconciliation” has already become a derisive concept amongst long-standing grassroots organizers and the next wave of youth-led movements (Ballingall; Hale). A core issue that arose from Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission was the chasm between two distinctly different ontologies, histories, public memories, and thus, two vastly different ideologies underpinning the narrative of this place called Canada. While the living conditions on reserves were never adequately funded by the federal government and children from these communities were being indoctrinated and severely abused in residential schools, the majority of the growing settler society directly benefited from this violent “clearing” of land. In order to make room for the arrival of European settlers across the interior, Canada actively targeted the herds of bison, a primary traditional food source, to the brink of extinction, forcing “the original inhabitants of the region into an increasingly desperate situation” (Daschuk 79). The starvation of communities led to the signing of the numbered treaties between First Nations and the Crown, a legal obstacle for Canada to proceed, but whose fiduciary responsibilities have atrophied. Canada pushed and segregated Indigenous communities away from white settlers, who were given large tracts of land to farm, and their growing households, and enforced this separation through the creation of the North-West Mounted Police, today’s Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP). In choosing to disconnect the violence of IRS from the state’s desire for settler expansion, this ahistorical remembrance of Indigenous life falls short of taking responsibility for the scope of cause and effect when existing governance

systems, legal protocols, and non-capitalist economies are criminalized and wholly replaced with European institutions. At the base of Canada's genocide is the core belief in Crown jurisdiction superseding Indigenous jurisdiction. This is the fundamental definition of settler colonialism where existing Indigenous legal, social, and economic authority are replaced with imported traditions from the settlers' origins (Stasiulis/Jhappan).

Canada's sovereignty is modeled upon its British predecessors which privileges Eurocentric viewpoints of private property. This approach to mastering the land through agrarian principles stands in opposition to what Shiri Pasternak calls "an ontology of care" (6). Canada existed in this type of "uneasy legal pluralism" where Indigenous networks of relational kinship as governance structures were vital to the establishment of trade and European survival prior to the formation of settler laws and the criminalization of these same Indigenous governance systems that allowed settlers to thrive. "As the stakes of territorial control began to override the values and necessity of legal multiplicity," the shift from legal pluralism to only colonial authority required the denigration of Indigenous justice and kinship systems (Pasternak 13).

Another important factor in regards to Indigenous stewardship in their own territories is what Tewa scholar Gregory Cajete calls the "ensoulment of nature" (qtd. in Alfred/Corntassel 609). Contrasted with Eurocentric worldviews rooted in Newtonian-Cartesian perspectives, Indigenous worldviews "understood that all entities of nature—plants, animals, stones, trees, mountains, rivers, lakes and a host of other living entities—embodied relationships that must be honored" (609). In this model of relational ontology, there is an ethical duty to care for every aspect of life within your kinship network because survival is dependent on it. In this relational model, it is also unethical to own, sell, and exploit your kin for individual profit. Keeping this epistemological and ontological difference in mind, it becomes evident how settler sentimentality and its capacity for grief are limited under white colonial supremacy.

Canadian cultural politics and identity are rooted in who the nation defined as a British subject. Under the British North American Act, the British subject explicitly did not include Indigenous people, racialized people, or even other British subjects if they came from colonies such as India or the West Indies. The white family homestead would construct a powerful mythology, especially one of man conquering nature that affirmed social notions of belonging, stability, and entitlement. This highly valued settler narrative has been entrenched into the cultural imaginary through the iconic paintings of

early 20<sup>th</sup> century white Anglo-Saxon artists including The Group of Seven and Emily Carr. In their vividly modern paintings depicting vast tracts of 'empty' wilderness, Canada was visually and metaphorically portrayed as a site to be explored and developed (Watson). As a visual re-enactment of *terra nullius*, these settler mythologies are made possible only through the violent erasure and containment of Indigenous communities, a violence that has been both material and structural. Treaties, wampum belts, and covenant chains are more than acknowledgements and certainly more than museum artifacts. They are legal records of alliances, agreements, and diplomacy consensually agreed upon between various Indigenous nations such as the Anishinaabe and Haudenosaunee and their European counterparts to share the land peacefully (Borrows 1997; Alfred; Henderson).

Reserves and residential schools both physically, socially, politically, and economically segregated Indigenous communities from the development of settlements throughout the late 1800s and 1900s as immigration boomed and formed a new settler society. Canadian immigration up until the 1960s was largely composed of Western European subjects; white agrarian settlers were deemed by political leaders and immigration officers to be more assimilable to Canadian society. The creation of this predominantly white settler class was further enforced through exclusionary legislations and clauses aimed at Asians as well as hostile anti-Black measures that did not equate legal acceptance with social acceptance (Thobani; Walker; McKittrick). Only in the post-World War II order of global human rights did Canada begin to shift its blatantly racist and exclusionary immigration policies and adjust to the newly developed United Nations Refugee Convention of 1951. That same year, amendments were finally made to the Indian Act to decriminalize traditional ceremonies such as pow-wows and potlatches as well as the hiring of independent legal counsel by Indigenous individuals and communities to address land disputes against the Crown.

An analysis of powerful narratives such as national identities requires us to understand that it is "emotions that keep us invested in relationships of power" (Ahmed 2). In a settler colonial context, white supremacy was built into the laws and governments to uphold Eurocentric systems as morally superior. Canadians who emote regret or shame over past events of violence often still expect their settler colonial governments and officials to rectify the situation. The deferral of responsibility to government leaders not only upholds white supremacist power structures, but it also tries to hold onto the fantasy of

Canada's international reputation as a progressive democracy and defender of human rights.

The decimation of Indigenous cultures is now understood as an act of genocide by international standards, but in settler logic, settlers believed it was a charitable act by Church and state to create a labor pool for menial work to perpetuate income disparity. Residential schools were created following the Indian Act of 1876, which included the development of the reserves system that confined First Nations people to fractions of land largely removed from burgeoning urban centers, as well as the creation of the pass system that controlled their movements requiring the permission of government officials to leave their reserves. These 'schools' were designed by Egerton Ryerson, a Methodist minister and founder of Ontario's public education system, and John A. Macdonald, Canada's first Prime Minister, to instill Christian values as the *de facto* identity of a white settler nation. The Indian Act was also constructed on heteropatriarchal understandings of governance and lineage, which imposed a further layer of violence against traditional governance structures and leadership positions held by women and non-binary persons. The layers of extraction of lives, of labor, and of resources are intertwined histories that cannot be easily undone with words alone.

Building from Ahmed's concept of intensification, or how pain renders certain bodies legible and other bodies as less than human, the case of Canada's National Day for Truth and Reconciliation reveals the ways Indigenous pain has been instrumentalized by settler authorities (92). The ahistorical focus on abused youth outside of any socio-political context becomes the locus of politicized mourning. In centralizing and fetishizing this particular pain of a group that cannot speak back and is not perceived as a threat, settler emotions can project compassion and a moral benevolence for past wrongs while remaining disconnected to the present realities of resistance, often led by Indigenous youth who are demanding justice and who are in turn criminalized and targeted as terrorists against the state. The politics of mourning, especially in settler colonialism, "does not produce universalism or homogenous groups of bodies together in their pain," but it "produces unevenness" (Ahmed 22). It is this unevenness that propels the narrative of settler supremacy, even if expressed as sentimental sorrow, where Indigenous trauma can be consumed comfortably from a distance by the dominant majority because it supposedly belongs out of sight and out of time.

The emotional gravitas of painful narratives is what keeps power in its place. The circulation of trauma and pain, as opposed to willful resistance,

helps fuel settler-centric narratives by reinforcing uneven relationships of power. The preference for a narrative rooted only in Indigenous pain rather than witnessing living communities defending themselves and their kinship networks by practicing cultural regeneration equals a denial of Indigenous life and strength. By privileging narratives of settler compassion over Indigenous joy, Canada, as a liberal state, can be free to remember and mourn on designated holidays while living every day based on extraction and assimilation.

Following critical Indigenous studies scholars and thinkers including Leroy Little Bear, Glen Coulthard, Leanne Simpson and the Yellowhead Institute's *Land Back* report, the centrality of land to Indigenous life, culture, language, and knowledge cannot be overstated. Coulthard and Simpson, specifically refer to this connection as "grounded normativity," a form of place-based solidarity based on the inherent intelligence of living in relation to non-human life forms that is so central to many Indigenous ways of knowing. Speaking back to the over-reliance of Western academic traditions, they write:

In the context of Indigenous peoples' struggles in Canada and elsewhere, this has historically resulted in not only in a very shallow solidarity with respect to Indigenous claims and struggles (when it can even be said to exist) but more often than not a call on Indigenous peoples to forcefully align their interests and identities in ways that contribute to our own dispossession and erasure. (252)

I interpret their use of "shallow" as a critique of Marxism and other Western traditions of thought including settler colonialism. Western academia's penchant for delegitimizing non-Western epistemologies and methodologies, especially in regards to Indigenous worldviews, has had a long history in Canada of devaluing Indigenous knowledge as marginal at best (Kovach; Battiste). This strategy of elimination on the part of Canada is premised on alleviating its own legal obligations to First Nations as enshrined in the Indian Act, a divisive piece of legislation that legally acknowledges Canada's fiduciary duty towards First Nations. Through various strategies, from forced enfranchisement to misogynistic clauses against women and their children who marry non-status men, Canada has actively tried to diminish the number of legally recognized First Nations people through assimilative coercion into the colonial state. This is what I believe Coulthard and Simpson mean by "erasure," whereby the expectation is for Indigenous people to become more like settlers culturally, politically, and economically rather than be self-determining. Through ahistorical

mourning and rhetorical strategies such as promoting “economic reconciliation,” the settler state continues to privilege colonial jurisdiction as the only rule of law.

There has always been a before and an after to colonial capitalist law. Indigenous diplomacy and governance systems long predate contact and continue to be in operation. Though there is no pan-Indigenous legal order, individual nations, alliances, and confederacies regularly practiced diplomacy with one another. Nation-to-nation diplomacy and the concept of reciprocity have been established through an extensive history of Indigenous governance protocols (Regan). Informing the earliest treaties signed between European colonies and First Nations, multiple Indigenous and non-Indigenous representatives mutually agreed upon sharing the land based on Indigenous principles of diplomacy. This was not a one-time event but standard practice, including the gathering of over 40 Indigenous nations with over 1,300 ambassadors at the Great Peace of Montreal in 1701, the signing of the Royal Proclamation issued by King George III in 1763 and the subsequent Treaty of Niagara in 1764 between multiple Indigenous representatives and the British Crown, allowing further settlement only through an agreement that Indigenous jurisdiction would be respected. Early colonists understood that the only way to move forward was to respect existing Indigenous governance, but every subsequent settler government has repeatedly and systematically broken these legally binding agreements to pursue extractive development projects.

The centering of Indigenous diplomacy and governance is foundational for counteracting Canada’s zealous ambition to be a global energy provider. Combined with the intensity of state surveillance and criminalization of Indigenous and allied resistance, the nature of an extraction-based economy requires the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous territory through militarized invasions. In the wake of the National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, from its grassroots advocacy to bear witness to its politicized focus on economic reconciliation, this paper has critically reflected on the contradictory nature of national efforts to mourn past wrongs against Indigenous life, while continuing to repeat the same colonial logics. Returning to the enigmatic power of grief and accepting that one will be changed, possibly forever, by the transformative power of loss, I believe the original intention of establishing a national holiday to reflect on truth and reconciliation must include acknowledging the entanglements of extraction, capital, and violence within a long memory of mourning.

## Conclusion

Only in the past decade has the scale of IRS violence been widely known, let alone acknowledged, by most Canadians. The large numbers of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people across Canada wearing orange, putting up signs in their street-facing windows, and participating in events to recognize and raise awareness about the history and legacies of the residential school system in Canada are still a recent phenomenon. With the conclusion of the TRC's findings in 2014, the narrative of abused and neglected Indigenous children has become the focal point of reconciliation, which, for some, meant bearing witness on a shared journey of healing. The willingness to witness and understand history from the perspective of those who have been most harmed is in and of itself not the completion of restitution, but only the first step. The power of emotions, not merely as circulating affects, but as social and politically-sanctioned modes of biopower, illustrates how nations shape their cultural identities. In Canada, the rhetorical expression of grief and desire for reconciliation have been adopted by political leaders and federal legislation, but the contradictions between words spoken and actions taken to address irreparable losses require deeper scrutiny.

The National Day of Truth and Reconciliation, when read through the long memory of mourning, fails to contextualize past dehumanization tactics as part and parcel of ongoing federal policies. Mourning colonial violence is impossible when the violence of settler colonialism has never stopped. This analysis critiques the hypocrisy in the politics of mourning where Canada can pedal its soft power as a global human rights defender by establishing a national holiday for truth and reconciliation for the dead while continuing to oppose the living rights of Indigenous jurisdiction. Tracking the discursive use of reconciliation as an assimilative tool in the decade after the TRC's Final Report and recommendations, I have articulated how the rhetorical shift went from mutual healing based in bearing witness to an overtly economic focus to encourage First Nations job creation through the expansion of oil and gas extraction. According to the Yellowhead Institute, Canada's claim to Indigenous territories can be understood at best as a "paper empire" based on one of the largest land grabs in global history.<sup>10</sup> At the end of the day, "colonization is an eco-

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<sup>10</sup> Demarcating the entire Hudson Bay watershed in 1869 as Rupert's Land for the use of trade under a Royal Charter issued by King George II, the subsequent sale of Rupert's Land, a vast territory that was never settled or even negotiated for, only adorned

nomic project based in land theft" and it continues to be a power dynamic that enriches the settler state through ongoing extraction economies (Yellowhead Institute 5)

In its attempts thus far to reconcile with its genocidal past, Canada appears unable to move on from its colonial foundations. Despite ongoing resistance that demand the honoring of treaties and Indigenous jurisdictions to be respected, the federal government continues to operate from a colonial position of domination, from domesticating a version of the United Nations Declaration of Indigenous Peoples to failing its international commitments to reduce carbon emissions. Federal decision-making against Indigenous nations reveals a domestic priority to secure the settler narrative at all costs. The continued negation of Indigenous laws and practices in favor of colonial authorities and recognition perpetuates an uneven relationship where terms of reconciliation and mourning are defined only by settler standards. In understanding the trajectory of settler expansion to economic sovereignty through extraction, let us not forget why Canada needed to establish a Truth and Reconciliation Commission in the first place.

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with trading posts, gave way to the Dominion of Canada with a land title spanning 1.2 billion acres of land. Canadian Rail companies acquired 56 million acres. Hudson Bay Company retained 7 million acres, but the consolidation of all First Nations reserves would fit into a mere 3 million acres, accounting for .5% of Canada's total land mass. See Yellowhead Institute's *Cash Back*.

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