

BRITTA MUSZEIKA

# Approaching Whiteness

Acknowledging Native Americans  
as Scholars of Reversal in  
19th Century Autobiographical Writings

**American Studies ★ A Monograph Series**

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To my grandfather Oskar Muszeika



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

One of the first memories I recall from childhood is being introduced to the movies and novels of Karl May. I remember being immediately fascinated by the noble Native American personified by the chief of the Apache tribe “Winnetou”. Against the signs of the time – white encroachment on native lands, the resistance of his fellow tribal members and many other Native American tribes – he believed in the equality of all races, in the good native *and* white man, in the good in humankind. From my early childhood days onwards, Native Americans caught my attention and I knew that at one point in time, I wanted to conduct a research about this group of people, shedding light on their – to a large extent – missing perspective.

Great thanks I owe to my English teacher Günter Baumann and my U.S. history teacher Thomas Cloud, who further and profoundly raised my interest in American Studies. The passion for their subjects paired with an inspiring attitude of encouraging their students to become critical thinkers, to reflectively consider past and present (cultural) encounters, and to question the world, history, and literature have been imprinted in my heart and mind. Having become a teacher myself, I now truly understand the value of their lessons and I have to thank *my* students for numerous insightful discussions, for challenging me and my subject matter, and for unconsciously further enhancing my passion for the topic of research by constantly reminding me of the importance to see and acknowledge other perspectives.

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## Abbreviations

AIS	American Indian Stories
Boyhood	Indian Boyhood
CCSS	Common Core State Standards
CRS	Critical Race Studies (CRT/CWS/TribalCrit)
CRT	Critical Race Theory
CWS	Critical Whiteness Studies
ELA	English Language Arts/Literacy
ICWA	Indian Child Welfare Act
IEA	Indian Education Act
IRA	Indian Rights Association
IRSSA	Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement
LAP	Life among the Piutes – Their Wrongs and Claims
NARF	The Native American Rights Fund
NCLB	No Child Left Behind Act
NCTR	National Research Center for Truth and Reconciliation
RCAP	Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples
RNT	Reclaiming Native Truth: A Project to Dispel America's Myths and Misconceptions
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TribalCrit	Tribal Critical Race Theory
Woods	From the Deep Woods to Civilization



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# 1 Introduction

I think it is time that we natives tell our own stories. Our culture and our history have to be told by us. We lived it, and continue to live it, and I think the anthropologists and white authors have run blindly through our ancestors' legacy and our culture for far too long. (LaPointe, *Preface* 18)

## 1.1 "The White Man's Indian"

Asking German citizens to name a famous individual of Native American origin, there are two responses you will possibly receive: "The Last of the Mohicans" (referring to Michael Mann's film version (1992) of James Fenimore Cooper's novel (1826)), or most likely, "Winnetou," chief of the Mescalero-Apache tribe (referring to German author Karl May and his western novels (1892-1910) or the film adaptations released in the 1960s). These two fictive characters determine the image, knowledge and understanding of an entire ethnic group comprised of diverse tribal cultures reducing them to: "the Indians<sup>1</sup>". Especially due to Karl May's adventure stories, we feel more

<sup>1</sup> It is highly debated among scholars how to refer to the indigenous population of America. The term "Indian" created through Columbus's belief to have reached the Indies, is regarded inappropriate as it is an "externally imposed, invented ethnic category" (Pewewardy, "To Be or Not to Be Indigenous" 73). Thus, I will only use "Indian" in quotation marks when referring to the stereotypical racial and/or cultural image of Native Americans created by Europeans. In all other cases, I will refer to Native Americans as natives, indigenous peoples, Native Americans or American Indians. Although the latter includes the politically incorrect phrase "Indian," Nancy Shoemaker notes in 2001 that "today, Native people in the United States generally

than comfortable explaining Native American cultures, we are supposedly familiar with their rituals, their traditional clothing; since Karl May we also seem to know about their hypothetical naivety, their history of alcoholism, and alleged dependence on the “White Man”<sup>2</sup>. We

accept, or even claim, ‘American Indian’ and ‘Native American’ as self-identifying labels” (4; Pewewardy, “To Be or Not to Be Indigenous” 74). First Nations, Native Canadians, indigenous peoples or aboriginals will be used for the Canadian tribes.

- 2 The term “whites” referring to a group of people defined as belonging to a certain “race” based on appearance and ideology is written with a lower case “w” in this text, following the common practice in literature dealing with Critical Race Studies (CRS). The same spelling will be used for “natives” as well as “aboriginals”. Spelling in in-text quotations may differ (aboriginals / Aborigines) according to the approach the authors chose in their works. “White” or “whiteness” will be used as a conceptual category indicating the social construction of “races,” and is not meant to be understood as a racially connoted term – although it has been used as a justification of superiority in (American) history. I do not mean to generalize or condemn “whites,” or “white America,” nor do I want to blame the (white) American people. It is not a question of guilt that today’s population faces. We cannot and are not expected to reverse history and simply erase injustices our forefathers have committed. But I agree with Tim Wise, who writes in *Dear White America* (2012) that “their legacy persists in many of today’s institutions for which we are responsible. And just as we have inherited many of the blessings and national assets of past generations, . . . we have inherited the deficits too (24). These deficits include continuous racism against people of other colors. I do not want to say that we, or (white) American people, are all racist. This, I know, is not true. I do align myself with many scholars of whiteness (such as Peggy McIntosh/Shannon Sullivan/ Linda Alcoff) that – in daily life – we are not aware of the privileges associated with being white and we also do not constantly reflect upon the lives of the non-white population. Thus, addressing “whiteness” is not about exposing the mistakes of a whole group of people, in this case, whites, but more of a call for an individual awareness of still existing racial differences and an individual responsibility (Wise, “Dear White” 23) to see and understand the past, and – at least – try to reflectively understand our own behavior and the situation of, for instance, Native Americans in the U.S. today. Just as Kwame Anthony Appiah notes in his *Color Conscious. The Political Morality of Race* (1996), “it is the task of citizens of every color to play their part in America’s long conversation about race” (Epilogue 183) and, above all, in accepting and respecting “all colors”

are, however, also accompanied by a comforting assurance that chief “Winnetou” will fight for us all – whatever skin color we might have – and that he will triumph in the eternal struggle of good versus evil. This heroic picture of the noble Native American chief paired with a seemingly profound, yet superficial knowledge of native cultures also romanticizes our perspective of a persistent stereotypical, by no means unbiased approach and depiction of the indigenous population in the United States. And indeed, Native Americans today are still subject to discriminatory portrayals (in textbooks, media, children’s books, logos, advertisements, etc.) although as Wolfgang Mieder notes in “‘The Only Good Indian is a Dead Indian’: History and Meaning of a Proverbial Stereotype” (1993), we might not be explicitly aware of such categorizations as they have become the norm.<sup>3</sup> As much as this is true for our German understanding of “the Native American,” it is this picture that persistently determines the reality of indigenous peoples in the United States as well, urgently calling for an acknowledgment of their existence, contributions and perspectives. Although a myriad of books has been written about the encounters with the indigenous population, the Native American portrayal and understanding of the mutual encounter and their depiction of the “white race,” has been left untouched up until the last century. Whether in literature or historical documents, whether on a political or social level, they are still, and have always been, more or less background actors on a successful American stage (cf. Mattioli 16). For centuries their perspective has been seen from a rather limited perspective only: the familiar Eurocentric perception of “the Indian”. This strategy of consciously or

as an essential part of American identity.

<sup>3</sup> A detailed analysis of stereotypical depictions of Native Americans today will not be part of this paper. For further studies on perpetuated negative stereotypes of Native Americans in popular American culture, see K.C. Johnson & Eck, J. T, “Eliminating Indian Stereotypes from American Society: Causes and Legal and Societal Solutions.” *American Indian Law Review*, 20, 1995/1996 or W. Mieder, “The Only Good Indian is a Dead Indian”: History and Meaning of a Proverbial Stereotype.” *The Journal of American Folklore*, 106, pp. 38-60, 1993 or C.D. Pewewardy, “Playing Indian at Halftime: The Controversy over American Indian Mascots, Logos, and Nicknames in School-Related Events.” *The Clearing House*, 77, pp. 180-185, 2004.

unconsciously pushing them to the margins of American society, literature, politics, and scholarly research has historically been a common way of approaching the supposedly inferior indigenous population.

Since the beginning of colonization, the position Native Americans obtained in society was clearly defined. Based on white supremacy and corresponding privileges, the only possible solution was one of neglecting indigenous cultures. Whether, in the proper sense, on a geographical, cultural, social, literary or political level, or symbolically understood, evading any positively-motivated confrontation – the fate of Native Americans in the past and in the future was decided. This strategy paired with an assumption of an uncivilized, backward indigenous population blocking American progress explains the deficient or missing individual, tribal and scholarly perspective until the late twentieth century (Babb 15). And indeed, until the 1970s, American history was glorified by patriotic stories of brave colonists who established a new American society from nothing, assimilating and successfully resettling Native American tribes, overcoming natural and physical obstacles on their way westward. Disregarding the fact that these Native Americans had been settling the country thousands of years before any European contact, neither their cultural, nor their political or social system deserved to be designated inferior. Some of the roundabout 500 tribes had a highly developed infrastructure (streets, trade systems) and were self-sustaining cultures which were in no need of being introduced to a culture supposedly better than their own. In European understanding, however, the New World was an uninhabited land, transforming tribal cultures into a heteronymous group marginalized in their own country. So, what seems to be a heroic settlement story, is more of an invasive extinction of native tribes in which they not only lost their political autonomy but also their rights to their ancestral land, degrading them to one of the lowest possible ranks in society.

Mythic stories about the West additionally shaped the understanding of Native American cultures. “The Indians” appear as “cultureless heathens,” “injuns,” “redskins,” or “savages,” either fighting against poor white settlers or against each other. Unfortunately, it is this idea of “the Indian” that has been imprinted in our minds and calls for an innovative, multifold approach of American history; one in which we

reread historical and literary accounts based on an inclusion of and particular focus on Native American perspectives to readjust our – to a large extent – stereotypical perception of native culture, history and identity.

### 1.1.1 “The Indian and the White Other”

Although Europeans have, indeed, been interested in the lives of the encountered “Indian Other” from the very beginning, the focus of scholarly studies has, for the most part, remained rather one-sided. At first glance, judging others based on your personal understanding of the world, your upbringing and values, is the most natural way of meeting people who are different from you. Defining cultural, political, social, and individual principles, while at the same time understanding what distinguishes us from other people or other cultures, are two inevitable steps in order to develop and reflect upon our own identity. Robin DiAngelo explains in “What Does it Mean to Be White?: Developing White Racial Literacy” (2012) that “each identities depend upon one another because each identity is defined by its opposite (or other)” (46). Thus, creating the notion of “the Other” is in a way essential to understanding yourself, your surroundings as well as those who are different from you as we only learn about our own culture by observing and interacting with others (the so-called looking-glass self<sup>4</sup>). In colonial America this concept of “Othering” was, however, misused as an instrument of imposing a racial hierarchy putting the dominant group into a supposedly superior position. As such, representations of the

<sup>4</sup> This psychological term goes back to Charles Horton Cooley’s idea of “Self” and identity,” first expressed in *Human Nature and the Social Order* (1902). In his understanding, both “Self” and identity” are based upon “the Other,” and the interaction with “the Other”. Reaching an understanding of your own Self, consequently, depends on how others judge or see us (Cooley 183). The scope of this work does not allow this concept to be analyzed in all its complexity – whether it be psychologically, philosophically or sociologically. “Other” in this work is used to identify the opposition between “civilized and superior white” and “savage inferior red” and the consequent construction of power structures resulting in a missing recognition of Native Americans throughout American history.

“different” and thus “inferior Indian” found their way into the legal system, defined their political role, their social and literary contributions.

French philosopher Michel Foucault explained this phenomenon by suggesting that being the “Other” is, and has always been, connected with power and subordination. He clarifies that a process of a “social categorization” of human beings based on knowledge and power relations “decided on status, identity, exclusion, or inclusion, [and] created a hierarchy of different races (Rabinow, *Introduction* 8). It is this apparent polarity that does not only justify assimilation policies of the nineteenth century or a resettlement of native tribes as their role as “cultureless savages” was clearly and undeniably inferior to that of the highly developed European cultures.

It likewise results in an imbalance of perspectives when it comes to the voices of American Indians. It does not come as a surprise that the necessity of studying the indigenous perspectives remained untouched until the twentieth century and that defining whiteness as a “race,” which may equally be seen as “the Other,” was indisputable. As much as this shows that these first colonists were just following a natural way of distinguishing themselves from a group unknown to them, it at the same time hints at the fatal misinterpretation of both – native and white culture – and at the missing inclusion and acceptance of those values and perspectives different to their own. This concept in itself might have further encouraged a scholarly avoidance of including the indigenous and white perspective as reaching a common understanding of the concept “race”<sup>5</sup> has been as problematic as approaching the term “whiteness”. At least today, scholars have agreed on the definition that race – when examining ethnic groups – is not a biological but a social

<sup>5</sup> There are multitudes of studies in a number of scientific fields – psychology, sociology, biology, genealogy etc. – concerning the definition of the term race. I do not want to go further into a reinterpretation or deep analysis of the development and meaning of “race” in all these scientific categories. This paper will merely focus on what “race” means for the American people, how it came into existence, and how it influenced American social life and history, with a particular focus on Native Americans. I will further elaborate on the scholarly debate on “races” in Chapter 2.1.2 “Theoretical Framework-Critical Race Theory (Tribal Critical Race Theory) and Whiteness Studies”.

construction (Kolchin 155) – a conclusion that, as this paper will prove, Native Americans had already reached in the nineteenth century.

A similarly challenging problem was to accept that the idea of studying diverse ethnic groups includes white culture as a subject matter as well. The idea of white as being equivalent to human, thus reducing any non-white cultures to a lower position in society, had already been prevalent in 1492 and has since determined the understanding, depiction of and research on native cultures. It also explains the hesitant inclusion of a critical and reflective study of white culture until the emergence of Critical Whiteness Studies (CWS) during the 1960s.

In hindsight, and even when considering today’s situation, it seems ridiculous that white people need to be explicitly directed towards their “whiteness” as this is the – almost only – basis for their supremacy. Being white, as Peggy McIntosh argues in her article “White Privilege and Male Privilege: A Personal Account of Coming to see Correspondences through Work in Women’s Studies” (1988), is always unconsciously accompanied by a number of privileges, which “are similarly denied and protected” (291). This set of unconscious privileges “confers dominance, gives permission to control, because of one’s race or sex” (296). Following this line of argument, it is not sufficient to only consider and critically examine whites from a white perspective. This is what, for instance, James Weldon Johnson supports in his novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man* (1912) as well when he writes that “colored people of this country know and understand the white people better than the white people know and understand them” (Johnson 10). In the light of insufficient and persistently false images of Native Americans, this statement becomes even more significant. Acknowledging indigenous perspectives may insofar not only alter the approach towards and interest in their cultures, but may after all shed light on whiteness studies as well.

While Valerie Babb claims in *Whiteness Visible: The Meaning of Whiteness in American Literature and Culture* (1998) that understanding whiteness calls for an extension of the term as not only a color of skin but an ideology deeply manifested in American self-understanding and identity (44), I argue that we have to expand this idea even further. Accepting Native Americans as scholars of whiteness profoundly changes our approach towards both white and indigenous culture. We can only understand whiteness in its fullest extent when considering it

from a native perspective, if white people are not only the focus of scholarly studies conducted by *white* people but if they become a subject matter in authentic historical texts – literary or non-literary – written by *Native Americans*. Examining whiteness from this new angle, consequently, extends the principles of Whiteness Studies resulting in an awareness of the outstanding perspective of Native American culture; while at the same time countering the idea of whiteness being a “racial and cultural ideal” (Babb 93).

### 1.1.2 Along the Stony Road towards Reconciliation

Based on a reversal of perspectives, this paper focuses on this – to a large extent – neglected indigenous side of the story to revise the at times false, at times fragmentary depiction of native identity. Native American texts are understood as a platform of an intercultural encounter, in which “race” disappears as a relevant category. Rather, the objective is to propose the necessity of a change of perspectives, which positively impacts self and external perceptions of both cultural groups. The “noble but inferior savage” turns into a “scholar of reversal,” who does not only critically reflect upon his own culture, but who also shows a profound understanding of and interest in white culture. These Native American authors’ attempt of reducing the distance of two supposedly different (ethnic) groups, provides the chance to come to terms with the past, laying the basis for a possible reconciliation.

The basis for anthropological reconciliation between groups living within one country can be traced back to the mid-twentieth century in which the political mindset of people began to change into a democratic one based on liberal ideals, reaching its height with the abolition of apartheid in South Africa in 1994 (Richard A. Wilson 365). The remaining question on how to deal with the past and with the victims of political suppression eventually initiated the foundation of around twenty “Truth Commissions” from 1974 until 1994, with the ultimate aim of rebuilding a nation based on a mutual recognition of the past as well as on an equal status of ethnic groups within today’s society. As positive as these steps echo, especially against the backdrop of an ending oppression, Richard Ashbey Wilson (in *Anthropological Studies of National Reconciliation Processes*, 2003) also points towards the

challenges of such commissions. Taking the South African Commission’s final report (October 31, 1998) as an example, he criticizes that the accounts of minority voices collected at the same time exclude many stories of victims and turn “the unique individual psyches . . . into the melting pot of a new official ‘collective memory’” (366).

In South Africa, indeed, this statement proves to be true considering the fact that the situation for the black majority has not significantly changed after the release of the final paper of the Commission, especially when it comes to the attitude of a large part of the white African minority towards the black population. This, as Richard A. Wilson explains, might be rooted in the fact that reconciliation in South Africa does not aim at a “victim–offender mediation” (367), but instead declares that the purpose behind this commission was that “[t]he nation-state is to be reconciled with itself” (367).

Turning to North America, we admittedly observe a similar difficulty of implementing reconciliation, bearing in mind that it took the Canadian government until 2008 to apologize<sup>6</sup> and that the United States

<sup>6</sup> Starting in 2006 with the *Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement* (IRSSA), the Canadian government realized the significance of a reconciliation process for the country’s future. On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper officially apologized for the practices enforced at Indian residential boarding schools. On the “Day of Apology,” Harper stated that the policy of residential schools “has had a lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language” (Statement of Apology or TRC 370) and continued that “[t]he Government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the Aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly” (TRC 371). Although first attempts to apologize date back to the 1980s, in which church officials admitted to the mistakes made in religiously-run boarding schools, an official apology by the government had a more lasting effect (TRC 211) and raised a public awareness of, and interest in, First Nations paired with a desire on both sides to start working towards a reconciliation. The importance of Canada’s native nations was first mentioned by the Canadian government itself within the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* (RCAP) in 1996 asking for a renewal and especially improvement of the relationship between Canada and its First Nations. And indeed, The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples was founded in 1991 to address the current state of First Nations, especially regarding their connection to the Canadian government but also society in general. The final paper issued by the government in 1996 addressed a

still remains in a state of avoidance resulting in a “sense of belatedness” (Banerjee 9) as “an apology<sup>7</sup> by the President of the United States for the wrongs and abuse inflicted on Native communities is yet to come” (9). Like South Africa, the Canadian government reopened the chapter on aboriginal history by initiating the establishment of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in 2015 (TRC).

Despite this meaningful step into a reconciled future, it has not yet taken the promised and desired effect in the renewal of the relationship when it comes to public opinion and mindset. As outlined in the final report of the TRC (2015)<sup>8</sup>, conciliatory processes demand a number of

number of measures that were to be taken in the next twenty years in order to improve the status of Canada’s indigenous population. Indeed, the purpose of the statements, as well as the steps towards self-governing aboriginal tribal communities asking for an awareness within the population, resemble in many ways the final report of the TRC. But, although a number of research centers were built after the report had been released and the necessity of preserving and acknowledging native culture became more urgent, it took another twenty years to again address the state of indigenous Canadians in both the past and the present. Even though the TRC states that “much of what the Royal Commission had to say has been ignored by the government [and] a majority of its recommendations were never implemented” (6), it set the foundation for a mind-changing process unleashing the necessity to reconsider the situation for Native Canadians in the present as well as in the past. The various attempts of readdressing the condition of the indigenous Canadian population were based on an increasing awareness towards First Nations accompanied by a desire of uncovering the truth especially about practices at residential schools.

<sup>7</sup> Although in 2009, president Barack Obama “apologizes on behalf of the people of the United States to all Native Peoples for the many instances of violence, maltreatment, and neglect inflicted on Native Peoples by citizens of the United States;” and “expresses its regret for the ramifications of former wrongs,” (S.J.Res.14 – “A joint resolution to acknowledge a long history of official depredations and ill-conceived policies by the Federal Government regarding Indian tribes and offer an apology to all Native Peoples on behalf of the United States,” released by the 111th Congress; accessed 25 January 2020), this statement did not result in any profound changes for the indigenous population, nor has it ever been made public as an official statement by the White House (Capriccioso, *Indian Country Today*, 2010).

<sup>8</sup> The Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2008) and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation (2015) were founded as a reaction to the IRSSA

different ways of coping with past and present problems in a divided society in which both groups still live side by side. Neither Canada or the United States, nor any other country in the world, is asked to reverse history – this, we know, is impossible. But, what is possible, is to learn from the mistakes made by our ancestors and to acknowledge the mutual responsibility we share in creating a country’s identity and a world in which we respectfully live with one other – especially if we are citizens of one country. Therefore, it is not about closing a sad chapter of the past, but more of a cautious look at a yet unwritten chapter which gives natives, as well as Canadians or U.S. Americans, the chance to accept the past and to learn from one another and consequently reach a more unified national identity by writing this chapter together. However, a system that has established itself for hundreds of years in the political and social organization of a state and consequently in the minds of the people – the oppressed and the oppressor – cannot – and this is indisputable – be changed within a year or two. Even if embarking on a journey towards reconciliation, the South African and Canadian example show the numerous challenges it encompasses. Four years after the final report of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2015), the government continues to struggle with keeping its promise to the

(2006) which called for an engagement in rehabilitating the situation of the indigenous Canadian population today, especially related to their residential school experience. When survivors of the Canadian aboriginal school system publicly addressed their experience, the Canadian government had to react by setting up a governmental agreement in which the idea of reconciliation was an essential part of their future program. Offering the chance to actively inform citizens about Native Canadian history, as well as engaging in a sharing of stories, fosters the reconciliation process that has long been neglected. Although there has been profound academic research on the residential school system in Canada earlier on (cf. James R. Miller 1996, Regan 2010), this research was limited to the academic scholarly arena while the public was left unimpressed. The newly established national centres initiated by the TRC such as the NCTR provide the chance for Native Canadians to express their concerns and share their stories as well as to make these stories available for the broader public. For further research on the Native Canadian boarding school system, see James R. Miller, *Shingwauk’s Vision: A History of Native Residential Schools*. U of Toronto P, 1996 or P. Reagan, *Unsettling the Settler within: Indian Residential Schools, Truth Telling, and Reconciliation in Canada*. U of British Colombia P, 2010.

indigenous population. While a variety of measures (TRC 340 ff.)<sup>9</sup> have been explicitly defined in the final statement on how to achieve a recognition of First Nations, the idealized historical renewal of the relationship between Canadians and Native Canadians is still stagnating.

Part of this challenging process are the manifold perspectives that need to be taken into consideration — including those of the government, educational institutions, mainstream society — and a courage to face mistakes, to address persistent discrimination and to admit to still existing dividing lines within a society based on equality; while equally asking the indigenous population to accept an apology and share their experience. Indeed, we cannot listen to all stories of Native Americans and we might not be able to immediately see the effects of reconciliation processes, but we can — at least — try to establish structures in which reconciliation may fall on fertile grounds. Thus, one of the initial steps was to establish platforms for the voices of the oppressed and to, at least, try to actively instil an awareness into the minds of the population. This, as the TRC reports as well, may in numerous cases prove to be slightly problematic as the indigenous population is confronted with stories of, for example, the practices at residential boarding schools for the first time in their life<sup>10</sup>. Instead of

<sup>9</sup> In a list of measures named “Call to Actions,” the Commission outlines the steps that need to be taken in education, politics, economy, social, as well as, community life — to name just the major areas of change — if the Canadian public is honestly interested in a successful reconciliation process. These hundreds of measures the TRC defines and explains at length in the final report prove the inevitable and enormous challenges of a conciliative process. The “Call to Actions” emphasizes the complexity of this project as it will take years to not only reorganize the political and social structures of a nation, but even longer to profoundly change the attitude of the people towards a recognition and acceptance of the indigenous peoples in Canada. Some of these aspects include: mutual responsibility on both sides, respecting human rights of First Nations, acknowledging their past, proclaiming a change in the political mindset as well as educating Canadians about the past highlighting the importance of research by increasing funding and support for educational institutions.

<sup>10</sup> With the TRC and the collection of “6750 statements from the Survivors of residential schools, [and] members of their families”, (TRC 29) “conduct[ing] ninety-six interviews with former staff and their family members” (TRC 30), the Canadian government has set out along the

reducing cultural barriers, it may rather provoke feelings of a renewed hostility when listening to the inhumane situations at these educational facilities. Recalling their experience may lead to another problem addressed – that of diverse and lasting consequences of colonialism that are certainly brought into the public eye. Yet, on the other hand, they may reopen a wound that has never truly been closed. Some reconciliation scholars argue that this way of approaching the indigenous population once again highlights their problematic position in society. Deborah McGregor (in “From ‘Decolonized’ to Reconciliation Research in Canada: Drawing From Indigenous Research Paradigm,” 2017) supports this theory by explaining that “[t]he ‘Indian Problem’ or the ‘Indian as a problem’ is a persistent yet fictional construct that continues to haunt indigenous peoples. It is difficult to see

challenging road towards reconciliation. This multi-sided perspective towards not only aboriginal families, and school staff, but also church members and the governmental institutions (also asking them for access to all documents related to residential schools (TRC 30)) was necessary in order to come as close to a full picture of the residential school system as possible. This process, as difficult as it appears in a global perspective, was as complex to solve for the smaller units involved: ranging from individuals who have to deal with their inner conflicts, and thus their ability to forgive by sharing their experience to the process within families who had to recover from the experience (staff or aboriginals). All these small steps demand an immense effort of strength to talk about a) what relatives had experienced at residential schools, and b) what staff members faced carrying out governmental and church agenda while at the same time listening to and – at least – trying to understand what the other side had to go through by creating an atmosphere of sincerity. Providing for the basis of reconciliation, listening to each other and expressing concerns, problems and attitudes, evolve into a necessary step in order to actually be able to raise awareness for indigenous history. Looking at a broader context, as we see in the non-reaction of most Canadian citizens, this rather theoretical approach has yet to be taken a step further. Initiating this reconciliation process, the Canadian government yet took a huge step towards a future in which both First Nations and Canadians can come to terms with their past, reversed its understanding of and dealing with native tribes – acknowledging the mutual historical background, eventually leading to a reconciled coexistence necessary for a future-oriented national identity (TRC 6).

a bright future when everywhere you turn your existence is understood and presented as a problem” (14).

Linda Archibald’s paper “Decolonization and Healing: Indigenous Experiences in the United States, New Zealand, Australia and Greenland” presented to the Aboriginal Healing Foundation in 2006<sup>11</sup>, focuses on the traumatic aftermath of colonization that comes with the rehabilitated awareness of indigenous cultures and traditions. Elaborating on the consequences of colonialism in Canada, New Zealand as well as the United States as “damaging” in terms of social status, rights, traditions and identity (Archibald 1), she comes to the conclusion that the last decades were characterized by a growing interest in indigenous life, history and traditions which, in her opinion, set the basis for “an examination of the policies and practices that resulted in indigenous peoples’ suppression” (Archibald 1). She calls this change of perspective the beginning of decolonization. Whether, as she states, this automatically leads to a “move toward a more positive, dynamic vision of the future” (Archibald 1) remains debatable considering the complexity of such a reconciliation process as, for example, public funding for this explicit organization stopped in 2014 (Aboriginal Healing Foundation; TRC 233).

Yet, since the process of decolonization has been explored in more detail during the past years and especially through the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission, it is openly and publicly addressed. It does not only include the deconstruction of colonial power structures, residential schools, political and social inequality, but it encourages the non-indigenous population to also perform a change in their way of thinking by recognizing the idea that natives undeniably played a significant part in society – historically and currently. Archibald goes even further by calling decolonization a “healing process” (*Executive Summary* vi) which perfectly reflects the situation Native Canadians and Native Americans find themselves in. Generations after generations have suffered from colonial structures and regulations, leaving them inferior in their own country. These “open wounds” have not healed and

<sup>11</sup> The Aboriginal Healing Foundation was founded in 1998 as non-profit organization trying to support Native American reconciliation (for further information, see the official website of The Aboriginal Healing Foundation: [www.ahf.ca](http://www.ahf.ca), accessed 14 May 2018). For further information on funding, see [www.ahf.ca/faqs](http://www.ahf.ca/faqs), accessed 14 May 2018.

the question remains how they were supposed to have healed given the fact that the United States has not taken serious steps towards a reconciliation and towards explicitly admitting to mistakes they have made in the past in terms of its native nations. Archibald discusses the consequences of this lack of interest and provides a number of actual therapeutic steps in order to overcome these traumatic experiences.<sup>12</sup> Thus, revealing the truth about historical realities, asking for reconciliation, Canada as well as the United States – and other countries in which indigenous nations went through the same suppression – have to also accept the healing process involved, which might take considerably more time than assumed. Moreover, it does not only ask indigenous people to come to terms with the past. It also, and even more significantly, needs white Americans to reread historical documents and acknowledge native presence as well as importance for the social, historical and political development of their country. Yet, we know it is a mutual story which means that both sides need to recover from the past and need to start talking to each other, both sides need to make peace with the past and need time to recover.

Alongside this exchange of knowledge, it is also necessary to take a moment to think about what you have just been taught. It might sound simple, but without listening to what the other part has to say, without also reflecting upon each other’s understanding of the world, values, and perspectives, it won’t be possible to find the truth and to imbed the newly gained insights into daily life. This proves the complexity of a reconciliation process, which not only asks for an apology but a sincere

<sup>12</sup> The psychological impacts of colonialism and psychological therapy analyzed to a great extent by Archibald will not find further discussion at this point as a deep psychological analysis lies beyond the scope of this paper and touches upon an expertise I am not familiar with. For further research on the psychological impact of colonialism, see Ania Loomba, *Colonialism, Postcolonialism (The New Critical Idiom)*, Routledge 1998; Linda Archibald, *Decolonization and Healing: Indigenous Experiences in the United States, New Zealand, Australia and Greenland*, 2006. On accompanying reconciliation processes, see Daniel Bar Tal, “From Intractable Conflict Through Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation: Psychological Analysis.” *Political Psychology*, vol. 21, no. 2, 2000, pp. 351-365; or Nicholas Tavuchis, *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation*. Stanford UP, 1991.

interest in cultural, political, social and ideological structures and ideals of other nations. This paper positions itself in the debate on reconciliation accordingly. A process of reconciliation requires more than a mutual acceptance and more than a willingness to forgive. It needs the courage to reveal insights into personal experiences at, for instance, religiously-oriented residential schools, malpractices at reservations or the continuous confrontation with discriminatory acts. At the same time, it asks for the courage to face the truths that might be uncovered by giving all groups, directly or indirectly involved, the chance to give their stories a voice – revealing insights that no one wants to admit to or that have been tried to be kept in the dark.

From a psychological perspective, reconciliation, first and foremost, thus asks the white majority to challenge existing and deeply ingrained stereotypical prejudices. This step includes quite more than just confronting themselves with the situation of the native population. It demands a willingness to “form new beliefs about the former adversary, about their own society, and about the relationship between the two groups. It is not a formal process, because it requires a change of societal beliefs” (Bar Tal 365). While Native Canadians, as well as Native Americans, had years to reflect upon their historical and present-day status, the white majority, who has avoided touching upon this topic, is now confronted with several problems at the same time. It is not only about recognizing native peoples as an essential part of American or Canadian history, present and future or about admitting to mistakes, but a journey into the inner self – fundamentally questioning history, an entire worldview, indeed, an identity. Being aware of these time-consuming procedures of truth finding, I agree that reconciliation will be a “multi-generational journey” (209). An apology can only be seen as a starting point of this journey as the politics of “assimilation,” as noted in the TRC, “have left deep scars on the lives of many Aboriginal people . . . and have deeply damaged the relationship between Aboriginals and non-Aboriginal peoples” (TRC 183). This can equally be transferred to the situation of indigenous peoples in the United States. The questions that consequently need to be asked in order to actively pursue a meaningful reconciliation are and cannot solely be based on research about Native Canadian or Native American culture. This has been done to a large extent in the past hundreds of years. But I agree with Deborah McGregor that “[t]o focus only on Aboriginal peoples, and not

simultaneously turn one’s gaze on oneself and his/her society, remains a colonial act” (13). Yet, what true reconciliation asks for – and what I argue in this dissertation – is taking a look at both sides by reversing the gaze.

Turning to Canada again, we see how difficult it is to reach the public and reverse stereotypical images for the better. Even though the Canadian government has reopened the chapter on aboriginal history, it has not yet taken the promised and desired effect in the renewal of the relationship, especially when it comes to the public opinion and general mindset. While after the establishment of the TRC, numerous conflicts remain to be unsolved on a political, social, judicial and educational level (TRC 8), it is the – to a large extent – still biased and uninformed attitude towards the indigenous population that is far more problematic. Inspired by the TRC, the Environics Institute for Survey Research<sup>13</sup> (supported by a number of other organizations such as the NCTR<sup>14</sup>), conducted a study on “The Canadian Public Opinion of Indigenous Peoples” in 2016 shedding light on the impact of the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation project within the Canadian population. The underlying question, whether there has been a significant change in how the Canadian non-aboriginal population perceives its aboriginals, was extended to more general aspects such as the idea of how much Canadians actually know about the aboriginal cultures of their country – regarding the present as well as the past. Despite a newly-awakened interest in indigenous peoples and a growing awareness of their existence (Environics 5), most responses remained ambiguous at the core, alternating between a romanticized nostalgia and negative prejudices keeping up the degrading pictures of either “the noble savage” (past) or pitiful natives (present) and their deplorable situation

<sup>13</sup> See [www.environicsinstitute.org](http://www.environicsinstitute.org), accessed 18 May 2018, for further information on the Environics Institute and its current projects. The study led by the Environics Institute “consisted of telephone interviews conducted between January 15 and February 8, 2016, with a representative sample of 2,001 individuals 18 years and older across Canada who did not self-identify as Aboriginal (i.e., First Nation, Métis or Inuit)” (Environics 2).

<sup>14</sup> Reconciliation Canada; The Circle on Philanthropy and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada; The Inspirit Foundation; Institute on Governance; National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation; Tides Canada (see “The Canadian Public Opinion of Indigenous Peoples,” *Environics*, 2016).

in society (Environics 19). Thus, the results illustrate that the picture of indigenous people was not essentially influenced towards a deeper understanding by the establishment of the TRC. 61% of the survey's respondents report that their opinion about Native Canadians has not changed at all (Environics 12). At least public awareness – especially within the older generation or Native Canadian population (Environics 7) has grown when it comes to present-day challenges of aboriginals and historical inequalities, especially related to the residential school system. Yet, “many also believe [that first of all,] their mistreatment is not necessarily any more significant than that experienced by other marginalized groups in Canadian society such as Blacks and South Asians, and especially Muslims” (Environics 5); and they additionally believe that improving the situation for indigenous peoples is “by no means the most important part (much greater emphasis is given to such symbols as the health care system, multiculturalism and the geography of the country)” (Environics 5). At least, most non-aboriginal Canadians agreed on supporting reconciliation as a means to come to terms with the past preserving their cultural traditions as well as language and rituals.

Although Canada has put such a great emphasis on reconciliation, this report demonstrates that improving the situation for the indigenous population is still not regarded as one of the central political and social questions within the Canadian nation. This leaves us in a state of wonder about the situation in the United States. If – after all this effort taken by the TRC to change the perspective of non-aboriginal Canadians on Native Canadians – a significant change in their attitude towards the indigenous population cannot be seen, it makes it even more urgent to start reconsidering Native American historical contributions as well as their current position in society.