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Settler Shifts?

A Manitoba Public School´s
Changing Perspectives
on an Anishinaabe Community

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IRTG Diversity
Mediating Difference in Transcultural Spaces

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Abstract

The past few years in Canada have been marked by numerous events in the course of which Canadian Settlers were invited to reconsider their perspectives on, and practices toward the Indigenous population. Public schools are one of the main institutions directly invited to reflect on and challenge their own colonial legacy and ongoing colonial structures and practices. This project aims at better understanding how a Manitoba public-school and its Settler educators, represent, reflect on, and practice their relationship to Indigeneity and to their Anishinaabe neighbors. It thus explores how Settlerness is constantly constructed, through reproduction and disruption, and how this takes shape in this public school, in the midst of the changing recognition of Indigenous Peoples in Canada. The case under investigation is a K-12 public school, half of whose student population lives on the nearby Anishinaabe First Nation Reserve. Interviews were conducted with educators from the school. Based on this material, a grounded theory was developed, using a constructivist approach. The results are then discussed against the background of both the inner logic of educators' shared narratives, and of critical considerations, investigating structures of Settler dominations that were reproduced and disrupted in the school through changing practices.

Résumé

Les Canadiens non-Autochtones ont été invités au cours des dernières années à revisiter leurs perspectives sur les Autochtones et les pratiques qui y sont reliées. Les institutions d'éducation publique représentent un des plus importants milieux appelés à examiner et à affronter un héritage colonial, ainsi que les pratiques et structures coloniales qui persistent au cœur de leurs établissements. Ce projet met en lumière la façon dont une école manitobaine, par l'entremise des éducateurs non-Autochtones qui la composent, représente, repense, et pratique son rapport à l'Autochtonisme ainsi qu'à la communauté Anishinaabe avoisinante. On y explore comment, alors les droits des peuples Autochtones gagnent en visibilité, l'identité non-Autochtone, elle, est négociée et construite dans cette école via reproductions et perturbations de logiques coloniales. L'école fait l'objet de cette étude accueille des élèves de la maternelle à la 12ᵉ année, dont la moitié vivent sur la Réserve Anishinaabe de la Première Nation Roseau River. Une théorie ancrée constructiviste fut ensuite élaborée, basée sur le contenu d'entrevues conduites auprès des éducateurs. Finalement, les résultats sont examinés sous deux perspectives : l'une considère la transformation de l'école du point de vue des éducateurs; l'autre est une perspective critique qui considère les structures de dominations coloniales qui sont reproduites, remises en question ou refusées au travers des pratiques.

Land Acknowledgements

I grew up and lived most of my life on the un-ceded traditional territories of the Kanien:keha'ka people, who are the keepers of the Eastern Door of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Tiohtiá:ke, also known as Montreal, has traditionally been a meeting place for other Indigenous nations, such as the Omàmiwininì or the Algonquin people.

This doctoral research was conducted on Treaty One territory, which is the traditional homeland of Anishinaabeg, Cree, Dakota, Dene, Métis, and Oji-Cree Nations. The Border Land School Division and Roseau Valley School sit on the traditional homeland of Anishinaabe peoples. When Treaty One was signed, in 1971, the vast majority of the territory was taken away from seven local Anishinaabe First Nations so that Settlers could use and own land.

Expression of Gratitude

I often jokingly say that I wrote this doctoral dissertation only because I was paid to do it. And this is true: if it had not been for the generous support of the International Research Training Group "Diversity: Mediating Difference in Transcultural Spaces" over the first three decisive years of research, I would not have been in a financial position to conduct this work. The multidisciplinary research community they provided supported unique perspectives that enhanced my project, and because of the administrative support they provided, I could concentrate on what counted: the research.

My two supervisors, Prof. Dr. Stefan Köngeter and Prof. Dr. Till van Rahden, were wonderful supporters of my work in complementary ways. Stefan, who trusted my potential, was always there providing encouragement and confidence to help me explore and push the limits of my academic abilities. I felt energized, empowered, and thought "I got this" after each of our meetings. Till took me by the hand and patiently taught me what makes a good dissertation. Prof. Dr. Jean Friesen, from the University of Manitoba, also offered her ongoing and generous support as a mentor in this project; she was the local expert I needed.

This thesis was made possible because of the educators who agreed to dedicate some time to sit with me and discuss the state of Settler-Indigenous relationships in their institution. A special thanks to the Border Land School Division, whose school board agreed to open their schools to my study, and to all educators who met with me during the field research. I sincerely hope that the results of this research will make sense to you and support your ongoing efforts.

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Chapter 1
Settler Responsibilities beyond Reconciliation

1.   Research in the Era of Reconciliation

> Reconciliation is not an indigenous problem; it is for all of Canada.
> (Truth and Reconciliation Commission Chairperson Justice Murray Sinclair, Truth and Reconciliation Commission 2015: VI)

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's work has become central to how Canadians understand Indigenous-Settler[1] relationships. In 2006, a settlement agreement was reached in response to thousands of individual abuse claims and several class action lawsuits from former Indian residential school survivors against the government and churches who shared responsibility for these schools. Part of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement was the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Chaired by Justice Murray Sinclair, with Chief Wilton Littlechild and Marie Wilson as commissioners, between 2009 and 2014, the Commission gathered stories of former Indian residential school students to initiate a truth-telling and reconciliation process. The Reconciliation Commission's final report was published in 2015. Labelling the Indian residential school system a tool of 'cultural genocide', it contained 94 calls to action directed towards different government branches, covering areas including child welfare, health, education, language and culture, and the justice system.

In the years that followed, the report sparked controversy across Canada. The Idle No More movement became highly visible in 2013 and, in the Prairies, the Treaty Relation Commission of Manitoba also started raising consciousness about treaty responsibilities. Events such as the adoption of the United Nations' Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples "without qualification" by Canada after

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1   As Battell Lowman and Barker (2015: 96), I capitalize 'Settler' the same way I capitalize Indigenous, the latter being now common practice. I consider the capitalization as expressing Settler colonialism "as an identity that connects a group of people with common practices" (15) and which entails a "set of responsibilities and action" related to "a position of privilege and enjoyment of standing" (Flowers 2015: 33). Beyond that, I capitalize it because being 'Settler' means belonging to a colonial structure that shapes individual and collective identity in relation to state and national boundaries. In some way, it has the same national quality as does the term 'Canadian', but instead of forcibly including Indigenous people, the term position itself in the relationships (without pretending to any mutual exclusion). For the same reasons, I also capitalize *Western* and *White*.

nine years of opposition (Fontaine 2016, quoting Minister Carolyn Bennett; Kirkup 2016), the inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, or the Gerald Stanley trial for the murder of Colten Boushie on a rural Saskatchewan farm, focused public attention on social justice issues and oppression of Indigenous people in Canada. The attention the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report received contributed to an unprecedented emphasis on *reconciliation* between non-Indigenous Canadians and Indigenous people and on Indigenous education (Morcom/ Freeman 2018), gradually leading institutions and individuals to formally commit to the project.

Research for this dissertation began in 2016 and was conducted at a time when reconciliation was starting to develop its meaning across Canadian communities. It seeks to better understand the changes in which Settler institutions, operated by Settler Canadians, engage in relation to their Settler position and their relationship to local Indigeneity and colonialism. It sheds light on how Settler educators reflect on their responsibilities and imagine solutions by evaluating how these are articulated, the rationales on which they are based, and the extent to which they are critical of Settler-colonial norms. The research question that emerged from my inductive research design is the following: How do educators at Roseau Valley School, Manitoba, map, understand, represent, make sense of, and, by extension, perform and enact the school's relationship to Indigeneity? Therefore, this is a study of collective Settler perspectives on and practices in relation to local Indigeneity, as articulated in the specific case that is Roseau Valley School, in southern Manitoba, through its team of educators.

Objectives, Potential and Shortcomings

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission defined 'reconciliation' as a renewal of relationships based on mutual respect achieved by addressing inequalities:

> To the Commission, reconciliation is about establishing and maintaining a mutually respectful relationship between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in this country. In order for that to happen, there has to be awareness of the past, acknowledgement of the harm that has been inflicted, atonement for the causes, and action to change behaviour (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015: 6–7).

The meaning of reconciliation is contested and sometimes contradictory, however. Although the Truth and Reconciliation Commission conferred a specific meaning to the idea of reconciliation, Settler Canadians articulate a wide range of views in public debates. The idea of reconciliation is evolving and continues to be interwoven with public and political discourses on the state of Indigenous-Settler re-

lationships in Canada. In the year after the publication of the Commission's final report, a poll suggested that Settler Canadians' historical awareness of the Indian residential school system and its legacies had improved (Environics Institute 2016). Understanding Settler-colonial history and its ongoing legacy, however, is a process that takes time, and the meaning of reconciliation evolves as Canadians put it into practice. The haste for Settler Canadians to show symbolic recognition and good intention – without a solid grasp of the history of colonization and its' repercussions on the first inhabitants of Canada – might lead to some missteps. An example of this in the Prairies is Manitoba Premier Brian Pallister's 'bike ride for reconciliation' in June 2017 to honour the 200th anniversary of the Peguis-Selkirk Treaty. The former premier, probably well intentioned, rode his bicycle across the 160 kilometres that separate East Selkirk from the Peguis First Nation Reserve. For the First Nation, this was an intense reminder of the history of violence: This was the route the Peguis First Nation's earlier members had to travel when they were forcibly removed from their original territories and relocated in 1907 (Carter 1989; Taylor 2017). The Premier took the opportunity during this 'bike ride for reconciliation' to meet with members of his party at two different events along the way, but not with anyone from the First Nation community. Public debates – and there are plenty – on what meaningful reconciliatory practices as opposed to merely paying lip-service entail, and on what reifies Settler-colonial privilege and domination, are inherent to the struggles over defining *reconciliation* in Canada.

Reconciliation is about changing relationships. It seems uncontested that *some* change is necessary to move away from an oppressive colonial system. However, the degree to which norms, habits, and structures must be disrupted is not agreed upon. Although it is becoming difficult for Settler Canadians to keep ignoring or denying a colonial *past,* many still refuse to acknowledge a colonial *present*. For example, on a political rhetorical level, there has been a significant discursive change. Whereas Prime Minister Stephen Harper stated at the G20 meeting in 2009 that Canada "has no history of colonialism" (Simard 2009), his successor Justin Trudeau publicly acknowledged Canada's colonial past. According to Trudeau, the federal government is committed to reconciliation with Indigenous peoples. "No relationship is more important to Canada than the relationship with Indigenous Peoples", the Prime Minister said on National Aboriginal day in 2017 (Trudeau 2017). Although political rhetoric emphasises relationships in the present, it does so, however, by maintaining colonial structures, which does not address how or where commitments to reconciliation must disrupt colonial structures if they are to retain appeal for Settler Canadians? On this note, there seems to be a tendency in mainstream Settler Canadian discourses to understand reconciliation as a new version of multiculturalism, a celebration of diversity, a culture of tolerance and of equal human rights for all. As will be discussed in Chapter 2, the cultural approaches to address Canada's rela-

tionship to Indigeneity and to disrupt the oppressive impacts of Settlerness remain problematic and is frequently rejected by Indigenous peoples (see, for example St. Denis 2011 about Indigenous rights within a multicultural framework).

Although the Truth and Reconciliation Committee identifies learning about the Indigenous experience of Indian residential schools and honouring these experiences as a condition for reconciliation, the process has a fundamentally different function for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. For Indigenous people, it supports working through national, communal, familial, and personal trauma. The awareness of the harm inflicted is necessary to make sense of the legacy of genocidal violence and to begin the process of recovery.[2] Settler Canadians need to understand the intergenerational consequences of the violence endured in residential schools. The function of this process is to rectify both misinformation and ignorance. A 2016 survey by Environics Institute unveiled some statistics about Canadians' awareness of the existence of the Indian residential school system seven years before and one year after the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report (see Figure 1).

The results of the survey suggest Settler Canadians' relative ignorance regarding the oppression of Indigenous peoples through schooling, which is also confirmed by other sources (Knickerbocker 2015). The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action in the field of education directly tie into this lack of awareness. Genocidal strategies for the elimination and removal of Indigenous peoples from their traditional lands – who were seen as problematic to the Canadian nation-building project – have long been erased from the national narrative. For in school curricula, omissions and false representations served to legitimize colonial practices. Indeed, neither Indian residential schools nor the ongoing presence of Indigenous people and their resistance received much attention in the history curriculum until recently. And when it did, it was under a Canadian national narrative of history.

As a result, generations of Settler Canadians (including educators) remain ignorant of the history of relationships between Indigenous peoples and the Settler state. In 2016, when asking whether "Aboriginal peoples[3] have unique rights or [if they

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2   The Truth and Reconciliation Commission's final report (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015) discussed a *cultural genocide*, but the final report of the National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls states that "it is time to call it as it is: Canada's past and current colonial policies, actions and inactions towards Indigenous Peoples is genocide" (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019a: 27).

3   Ethical considerations tie the word we use to certain discourses because of the connotation they carry, especially in a context of oppression. To refer to the original people of the land and their descendants, I use different terms in different circumstances. *Indigenous* people are the people who "share experiences" of having been "subjected to the coloniza-
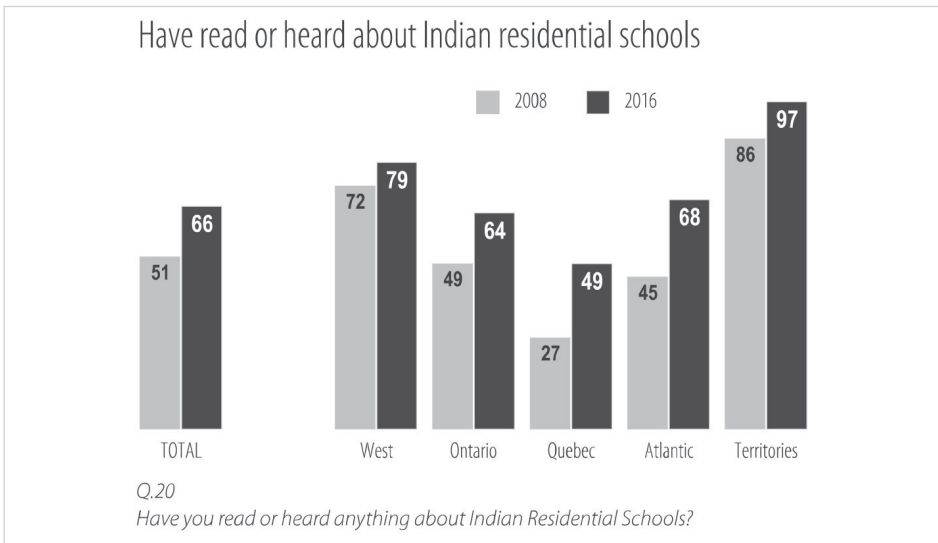
Fig. 1: Canadian Public Opinion on Aboriginal Peoples (Environics Institute 2016: 29).

are] just like other ethnic/cultural groups", the same survey found that almost two thirds of Settler Canadians in the Prairies were not aware of these rights[4] (Environics Institute 2016: 14). Nonetheless, for Settler Canadians, education about the Indian

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tion of their lands and cultures" by a "colonizing society [who denied their sovereignty, and] that has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives, even after it has formally pulled out" (Smith 1999: 7). I use the term *Indigenous* when discussing Indigenous rights, or Settlerness, but it also reinforces the idea of an inaccurate and simplified binary between the oppressed and the oppressor. In a Canadian context, Indigenous (or Aboriginal) people encompass First Nations, Metis, and Inuit. On the other hand, Indigenous (as well as Indians, First Nations, Aboriginal) acts as a *pan-Indian* term, which erases the diversity among the groups of Indigenous peoples and deflects the attention from their status of *nations*. I also use the term *First Nation*. In this empirical research, *First Nation* often refers to the Roseau River Anishinaabe First Nation. For this, I interchangeably use Anishinaabe – meaning the people – which accounts for, and attempts to honour the specific identity of this *nation*. I rarely use the term Indian, or native. While some First Nations sometimes refer to themselves as Indians, it is generally considered outdated and carries a heavy colonial connotation, especially when used by Settlers. I therefore only use it in either historical contexts or when it is part of the empirical material. I finally left out the term Aboriginal, which became common after 1982, when Section 35 of the Canadian Constitution used it in a legal context, because of the Canadian paternalist control that I see behind it.

4   Indigenous people have a unique status in Canada to which special rights are bound. These can be traced back to the signing of treaties, which is the bedrock of the Confederation. Treaties were signed between First Nations and the Crown to share the territory. They are recognized through the Section 35 of the Constitution Act.

residential school system does not yet contribute to construct a critical conscious-ness of Settler Canadian responsibilities. What is missing is what Sherene Razack calls an "historical accountability" that must be confronted when we justify that the rights we have as Settlers or as Indigenous peoples come from deals *made in the past* (Razack 1998: 29). The treaties are still in effect today – Indigenous people agreed to *share* the land (Craft 2013; Krasowski 2019), and therefore to enter into a relationship with Settlers. The land is still shared today, and Settler-Canadians keep exercising their treaty rights.

The Manitoba Treaty Relation Commission aims to raise awareness about treaty responsibilities on part of Settlers. The phrase "we are all treaty people" has been gaining recognition beyond the Prairie provinces, inviting Canadian Settlers to ac-knowledge their treaty responsibilities (Wilson 2012). Misinformation contributed to anti-Indigenous racism in the Prairies (Gebhard 2015, 2017; Latimer 2018; Levas-seur 2014; Macdonald 2015; MacDougal 2016), which continued to legitimize colo-nial ideology and relations of dominance. (Green 2006). Many Settler Canadians maintain, for example, that Indigenous people themselves are responsible for not achieving social and economic equality with other Canadians – a sentiment that has been shown to be stronger in the Prairie provinces (Environics Institute 2016).

Many scholars and Indigenous people disagree with an understanding of recon-ciliation as a renewal of relationship based on mutual respect to redress inequality. This, they argue, remains a problematic goal, because the residential schools are only the tip of the iceberg in terms of structural oppression. Respect and a Canadian understanding of equality does not necessarily redress power imbalances. To Pau-lette Regan, a meaningful reconciliation is not looking for closure from a traumatic past, but rather represents an invitation to "fundamentally rethink our past and its implication for our present and future relations" by addressing colonialism as the root of the problem (Regan 2010: 4). She warns that the superficial understanding of reconciliation that became entrenched in Canadian discourse might make genuine reconciliation fail and risks deepening the divide between Indigenous people and Settlers (62). Dylan Robinson also points out that when reconciliation becomes a narrative of "a return to positive feelings" and of feelings of friendliness (Robinson 2014: 284), it becomes an understanding of "reconciliation with the nation-state" that "survivors have often refused […] altogether" (Robinson 2014: 298). For exam-ple, some Indigenous scholars and activists[5] state that:

> reconciliation is recolonization because it is allowing the colonizer to hold on to his at-titudes and mentality, and does not challenge his behaviour towards our people or the land. It is recolonization because it is telling Indigenous children that the problem of history is fixed (Alfred 2017: 11).

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5   See also (Rachael Yacaaʔał George 2017).

Canadian policies that regulate the life of Indigenous people have not ceased to exist but taken on new forms (Alfred/Corntassel 2005). The Indian residential school system was designed to erase Indigenous people through assimilation. As part of a coherent policy to eliminate Indigenous Peoples in Canada, it thus epitomizes Canada's most destructive colonial policies and practices (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015: 3).

On this, Indigenous activists are clear: "the historical violence of colonialism is not over, it is ongoing" (Simpson 2016a: 6). Canada's "colonial present" (Thielen-Wilson 2012) needs to be framed as a continuity of the politics of displacement and assimilation of Indigenous peoples that were behind the Indian residential schools. Indigenous scholars have criticized discussions in postcolonial scholarship because they fail to *act* against contemporary forces of oppression. To them, there is nothing 'post' about colonialism in Canada, nor in any other Settler-colonial context (Dei 2006; Kovach, 2009; Lefevre 2015; Smith 1999; Yazzie 2000). As Phillip Howard argues, postcolonial theory situates oppression in the past, "tam[ing] the political bite" of decolonial and anticolonial resistance discourses when it needs "to name, track, isolate, and resist ongoing colonial relations" (Howard 2006: 46).

In Canada, colonialism is alive and well. It is rehearsed daily through structures, attitudes, and practices. For example, as Old Crow Chief Norma Kassi reminded the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, even though Indian residential schools are no longer in operation, the Canadian child-welfare system continues to apprehend children from Indigenous parents and to send them into foster families who are usually non-Indigenous, thereby continuing the assimilation process (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2015: 138). The recent report of the Inquiry into Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls similarly concluded that "Indigenous children are removed from their families due to conditions of poverty or as a result of racial and cultural bias. The state characterizes these circumstances as 'neglect.'" Further, the report noted that the state is prioritizing "funding for foster homes over economic and support services to [vulnerable Indigenous] families" (National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls 2019b: 355). Such examples illustrate the structural violence on the part of the Settler state. In addition, Settler-Canadians, too, perpetuate Settler colonialism through patronizing attitudes. In 2018, a well-established research and opinion poll institute asked Settler Canadians what they thought Indigenous communities should be like and do (see Figure 2).

This survey exemplifies an entrenched, ongoing colonial entitlement whereby Settler-Canadians tell Indigenous peoples what they should do and how to best solve their problems. The survey questions themselves reflect a paternalist attitude: what Indigenous people should do is not up for public debate nor conditional on public opinion (Palmater 2018). The rather disturbing results illustrate the scope of
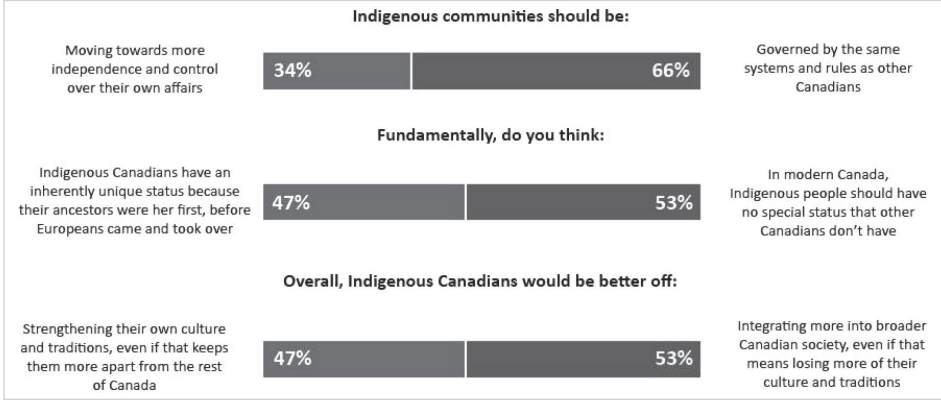
Fig. 2: Truths of Reconciliation: Canadians are Deeply Divided on How Best to Address Indigenous Issues (Angus Reid Institute 2018: 3).

a decades-long agenda promoting national assimilation. In short, even if policies change, national colonial narratives of justified domination remain 'well rehearsed' (Schick 2009: 114).

Mainstream reconciliation understanding in Canada frames colonialism as a set of damaging past *events* and their legacies for which the state apologizes, offers reparation, and seeks absolution. It has been argued that Settler nationalism re-iterates the colonial logic of presenting injustice as taking effect *elsewhere* and *elsewhen* rather than as systemic constructions operating *here* and *now* (Higgins/Madden 2017: 37). Inspired by DiAngelo's argument on White fragility (2011, 2018), I argue that public rhetoric over reconciliation, in order to reach a wide Settler Canadian public, has to remain palatable for White Settlers. Indeed, it does not articulate Settler privilege, nor does it attempt to disrupt Settlerness. Consequently, reconciliation's goal is less to expose and dismantle ongoing colonial *structures* than it is to enable damaging practices. This is an important limit to reconciliation, and it has been pointed out by Indigenous scholars. Glen Coulthard contends that there are two main criticisms to be made about reconciliation in Canada:

> The first involves the state's rigid historical temporalization of the problem in need of reconciling (colonial injustice), which in turn leads to, second, the current politics of reconciliation's inability to adequately transform the structure of dispossession that continues to frame Indigenous peoples' relationship with the state (Coulthard 2014: 120).

Consequently, discussions over reconciliation do not address whether rights and titles are violated, nor do they touch upon the exploitation of unconquered and unceded territories (Simpson 2013). For instance, a key issue that is usually ignored is the national economy based on resource extraction. This leads to conflicts over Indigenous land claims – including those involving Indigenous tribal authorities

who e.g. resist the construction of pipelines on unceded Indigenous territories in the Western provinces – in which the Federal and Provincial Judiciary has the final say. When colonialism is understood as an event situated in the past, it becomes much easier to defer responsibility. Individuals, institutions, and communities can then dismiss and deny Settler identity and complicity in Settler colonialism. This distance has been called 'Settler moves to innocence' by Tuck and Yang (Tuck/Yang 2012), or 'Settler fragility' by Indigenous (Colville Confederated Tribes) scholar Dina Gilio-Whitaker (2018a). It also enables the placing of blame on an unembodied state, challenging a "nameless collective" (Kitching 2011: 167) or demonizing historical figures of authority as if their ideologies and actions were disconnected from contemporary Canadian values.

Beside situating colonialism in the past and denying the colonial character of present policies and structures, the reconciliation rhetoric presents other limitations. Its calls for education about the residential school system, have for example been said to re-victimize and re-pathologize Indigenous communities on account of their emphasizing the traumatic Indigenous experience of Western education (Gebhard 2017; Tuck 2009). Meanwhile, for Settler Canadians, this leads to *colonial empathy*, which "fails to link past wrongs to ongoing racism and oppression" (Regan 2010: 75). Settlers like to reposition themselves as contemporary helpers or saviours of the Indigenous victim. This encourages moves to innocence (Tuck/Yang: 2012): strategies to assuage guilt or responsibility without relinquishing privilege. By reducing their responsibility for reconciliation to learning about Indian residential schools, Settlers attempt to "achiev[e] redemption through the act of listening" (Davis et al. 2017, referencing Tuck/Yang 2012: 408). Many scholars have identified narratives of innocence as a core constituent of Settler national identity (Davis et al. 2017; Hiller 2017; McLean 2006, 2016; Schick 2014; Tuck/Yang 2012). Reconciliation exposed falseness behind the myth of innocence for *past* Canadian policies and practices, simultaneously re-inscribing the contemporary Settler Canadian as innocent. As Thielen-Wilson has argued, the Settler state response to Indian residential schools' violence "reproduce colonial relations in the present" (Thielen-Wilson 2012: 2). After the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's report and the wide diffusion of the need for reconciliation, not much has changed. Mainstream discourses fail to re-position current Settler Canadians as complicit in the ongoing colonial domination of Indigenous peoples.

While the 94 calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission focus on modifying practice, they do not, however, offer a conceptual framework to engage in the disruptive shift of consciousness required for Settler Canadians to understand the causes of colonial oppression to atone for them. Challenging the causes of inequality, Sheelah McLean asks Settler Canadians to "interrogate our own complicity in colonial mechanisms" (McLean 2016: 172). This gap between atonement

for inequalities and acknowledgement of complicity is one of the reasons why the discursive field of reconciliation is so fragmented. Beyond the commitment to improve Settler-Indigenous relationships, Canadians (and the Canadian government) address reconciliation with an approach that does not disrupt existing structures of power. The Settler identity remains unquestioned. A rhetoric of public reconciliation directs attention away from critical views that interrogates ongoing colonial heritage and complicity. Paulette Regan identified this need in 2006:

> We are still overly-focused on researching, analyzing, and interpreting Indigenous experience. What is missing is a corresponding research emphasis on our own experience as descendants of Settlers who colonized (Regan 2006: 35).

A link seems to still be missing between historical *awareness* of colonial wrongs and historical *consciousness* of colonialism as a current system (inherited from the past, but fundamentally unchanged) designed for the privilege of Settler-Canadians over Indigenous people, and effective *here* and *now*. Unlike mainstream discourses about Settler-Indigenous relationships in Canada, this thesis is based on the premise, in line with arguments fundamental in Settlercolonial and Indigenous studies, that colonialism is not an *event* that belongs to the past, but rather a complex structure where social inequalities keep being reaffirmed through their constant reproduction.

And in Education?

> State institutions such as schools are implicated in reproducing relations of dominance and oppression (Sheelah McLean (2016: 1), organizer of Idle No More, PhD in educational foundation at the University of Saskatchewan)

Some people have described the years following the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's 94 calls to action as a 'post-TRC era', or the beginning of the 21st century as the 'age of reconciliation" (Verwaayen 2017: 31). Reconciliation had started to become a buzzword in educational research and practice when the field work for this thesis was conducted in 2017. At the 2019 annual conference of the Canadian Society for the Study of Education in Vancouver, Terry Wotherspoon and Emily Minne noted in their preliminary research results on provincial curriculum reforms that there is a 'universal formal commitment to reconciliation' throughout the Canadian provinces. New education policies, research, and practices take the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's calls to action as their theoretical framework (Davis et al. 2017). Implementation of the calls to action – although still largely pursued uncritically – are deemed the way forward. Their tangible ideas respond to educators' needs to have their *'So what? Now what?'* questions answered – as uttered

by a participant in this project. What I noticed from education conferences is that the potential of a reconciliation framework is addressed with such hope, enthusiasm, and confidence that its limitations are often ignored. The concept of reconciliation does produce categories to articulate the problem of Indigenous oppression in Canada. But since these categories are also a product of power, reflecting on their production and reproduction would have the potential to disrupt beyond the effects of imbalanced social relationships (Popkewitz/Lindblad 2000: 8). As I will discuss in Chapter 2 calls for disrupting the status quo and culturally based understandings of inequalities are increasing.

A key political objective in the development of modern nation-states has been the construction and consolidation of a common national identity (Anderson 1983; Bhabha 1994; Calderon 2014; Richardson 2002; Stanley 2006). George Richardson reminds us that the function of education imagined in a modern nation-state was to "help realize the Enlightenment project" in industrialized nations (Richardson 2002: 54). Since the aim of education was thus to "manufacture the modern citizen" (Richardson 2002: 56), by the early 20th century public school curricula started securing the popularization of national grand narratives (Stanley 2006: 34, 35). In his book on nation-building, Anderson notes that colonial school systems promote colonial nationalisms (Anderson 1983: 122). Educational institutions, particularly public schools, were designed as the primary agent and mechanism for the production of the Canadian national subject. (McLean 2016; Schick 2000). Homi Bhabha, in a postcolonial critique of modernity, asserts that "the first duty of the state is to 'give' to the nation its cultural identity, and above all to develop it" (Bhabha 1995: 56). In Canada, the creation of a dominant Canadian national identity functioned through discourses of liberal inclusionary and pluralistic practices, entangled with nurtured myths of benevolence towards minorities. As the Canadian anthropologist Eva Mackey points out, Canada mobilizes liberal 'tolerance' to manage populations (Mackey 2002). In this context, manufacturing the 'Good Canadian' by creating a 'true national feeling' was the purpose of educational institutions (Vincent Massey, in Cochrane/Wallace 1926: 11).

The problem with the creation of a national cohesive identity and of imagined communities, as Timothy J. Stanley puts it, is that while this fosters a sense of connection, it also has the power to exclude. While certain people are thought to be Canadian, others are not (Stanley 2006: 33, 34). Within this context, Sheelah McLean argues that, in the face of diversity, "white teachers are gatekeepers for the reproduction of nationhood" (McLean 2016: 72). Through the performance of White Settlerness, schools become reaffirmed as White spaces, "even in the midst of claims of multicultural inclusion" (Schick 2014: 88). To Hiller, it is the "discursive and material mechanisms [of cultural pedagogies] that school our imaginations as Settler subjects, rendering as well as enforcing the given-ness of our place here,

Sources of learning about Aboriginal peoples

Source	Value
School/education	45
Media/TV/newspapers	36
Contact with Aboriginal peoples	24
Have Aboriginal friends/co-workers	21
From family/friends	15
Books	14
Live near Aboriginal community/reserve	9
Through work/job	7
Museums/cultural performances	4
Movies/film	3
Other sources	6

Q8.
From where, or from whom, have you learned what you know about
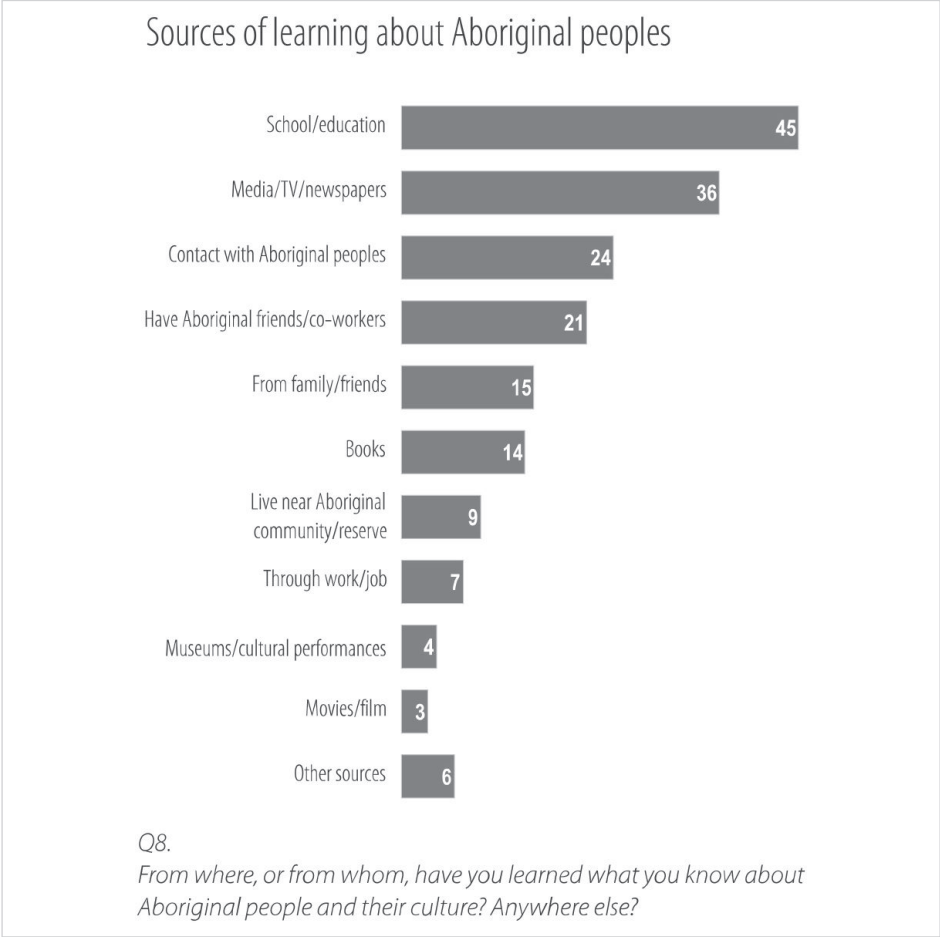*Aboriginal people and their culture? Anywhere else?*

Fig. 3: Canadian Public Opinion on Aboriginal Peoples (Environics Institute, 2016, p. 15).

and shoring up the legitimacy of our claims to be the true inhabitants of the land"
(2017: 417). If the Settler element in Canada establishes itself as normative (Veracini
2011), and educational institutions produce citizens, then schools are spaces where
"settler colonial practices are normalized and reproduced for the masses" (McLean
2016: 103). If schooling thus teaches Settler-Canadians how to reproduce a certain
Canadian identity, public schooling therefore models and normalizes performances
of Indigenous-Settler relations (Calderon 2014; Schick 2014). A Eurocentric and Set-
tler conceptualization of the nation continues to marginalize Indigenous peoples,
knowledge, history, or worldviews (Battiste 2013a: 69; Calderon 2014; McLean 2016;
Richardson 2006; Richardson 2002; Stanley 2006). Settler-Indigenous relationships
have been so prominent in public and political rhetoric, however, that there is poten-
tial for change in public-school institutions. The question of *how* schools are model-
ling these relationships – with both continuity and shifts, with ambivalence, doubt,

but also leadership and confidence – calls for ongoing empirical research that will allow the development of the phenomenon to be mapped.

The influence of education on national representations is corroborated by statistics: in a survey conducted in 2016, school education was identified by Settler Canadians as being their primary source of knowledge about Indigenous peoples (see Figure 3). Only recently have Canadian curricula been revised to teach about Indigenous peoples' culture, history, relationship to the land and about their struggles with the colonial state *from Indigenous perspectives.* Nevertheless, the promotion of multicultural policies remains at the center of the Canadian education system. Therefore, schools have been designed to silence indigenous relationship to the land. These are honoured in treaties, which represent the bedrock of the Confederation and Canadian nationalism to this day (Mackey 2002; St. Denis 2011). The mainstream pedagogy resists disruption, and the Canadian nation-building function of education remains intact. My research is thus based on the premise that educational institutions are a major agent in the building of a national narrative of Canadian identity (McLean 2016; Montgomery 2005; Richardson 2002; Stanley 2006). Residential schools translated such nationalist ideals which construed Indigenous people as marginal, ultimately un-Canadian, into daily practices. Even today, public educational institutions serve a similar purpose, even if Canadian nationalism now draws on a rhetoric of multiculturalism, diversity, and inclusion. These arguments asserted by prominent scholars about the function of schooling in constructing the Canadian national identity are mostly theoretical and political ones. However, given that these scholars strive to create social change, the complexity of the situation on the ground – in schools – also needs to be explored. In-school practices unfold in unique ways depending on local and regional contexts.

The particularities of specific local cases have the potential to shed light on unique aspects of Settler-colonial education. Local empirical research brings nuances to how Settler colonialism is perpetrated, imposed, resisted, and transformed in school institutions. It allows the exploration of how schools produce normativity. What normalized practices do schools attempt to disrupt, and which ones do they reproduce? What triggers these shifts? What local (practical, ideological, structural) challenges, paradoxes, ambivalences are confronted or remain either unexplored or marginalized in the reconciliation discursive framework? What solution to these challenges do the actors in public school institutions imagine and implement? These broad questions are those this empirical study addresses by researching the discourse of educators in one school institution that has started to explore these questions.

The main points of the argument are the following: Public schools are part of an institution that is instrumental in producing national identity, and since this makes them the primary space in which Canadians learn about Indigenous peoples, they could potentially also represent the primary space to explore Settler-colonial iden-