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CHAPTER 3

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Introduction and Literature Review

From the mid-1880s to the 1980s, the Canadian government established a partnership with churches and aimed to “‘civilize’ and Christianize, and ultimately, assimilate Aboriginal people into the Canadian society” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada 2008, 2). They forcibly separated Aboriginal children aged five to sixteen from their families and forced them to attend residential schools with the intent to destroy Aboriginal culture (MacDonald and Hudson 2012, 431). In 1920, the Deputy Minister of Indian Affairs even argued that their goal was to get rid of Aboriginal culture in Canada by assimilating all of them (Miller 2004, 35).

For that reason, residential schools did not allow indigenous parents to contact their children. The children were punished for speaking Aboriginal languages. Also, since there was no policy for discipline in these schools, the discipline was harsh (Miller 2004, 183). Verbal and physical abuse were very common in these residential schools, and sexual abuse was not uncommon. Since schools were hastily and cheaply built, diet and medical care were so poor for these children that many children also died from being sick (TRC 2008, 4). Furthermore, these schools did not inform parents even when their children died or ran away from school. Therefore, a significant number of Aboriginal children who attended residential...
Schools are still missing, and many survivors are still suffering psychologically or physically (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996).

The definition of genocide by the United Nations (1948) includes “acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group... by forcibly transferring children of the group to another group” (United Nations 1948, 280). Therefore, many Aboriginal leaders and scholars refer to the Indian Residential School (IRS) system as cultural genocide conducted by the Canadian federal government (Akhtar 2010; MacDonald and Hudson 2012; Woolford 2009).

Residential schools were closed in the 1980s, and the information about these residential schools was known to the public from the 1990s. Consequently, the churches that ran residential schools started apologizing for their attempt at cultural genocide of Aboriginal people. The Canadian government established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and compensated all residential school survivors through the Indian Residential Settlement Agreement in 2006. Also, the Canadian government officially made an apology to Aboriginal people in 2008. In this recent reconciliation movement, the TRC set as their aim “to lay a foundation for the... reconciliation” (TRC 2015, vi). And the definition of reconciliation used by the TRC was the “establish[ment] and maint[enance] of respectful relationships” between Aboriginal people and non-Aboriginal people in Canada (TRC 2015, 16).

To achieve this goal of reconciliation, the TRC used storytelling (TRC 2015). In their report, the TRC gave the reasons for using storytelling as their reconciliation method: “It restores the human dignity of victims of violence and calls governments and citizens to account. Without truth, justice is not served, healing cannot happen, and there can be no genuine reconciliation between Aboriginal and
non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada” (TRC 2015, 12). They claimed that storytelling could contribute to finding the truth because it gives voices to the survivors. Furthermore, they contended that once the truth was revealed, restorative justice could take place, which could bring healing for the victims and reconciliation of the society.

This argument of the TRC was reasonable, since many scholars have advocated for the role of storytelling in the processes of social conflicts and their transformation (Lederach 2005; Senehi 2002; Randall 1991; Fine et al. 1992; Anderson 2006; Bar-On et al. 2000; Walker 2015). Scholars have argued that storytelling gives voices to those marginalized and becomes a means through which communities develop and articulate their worldview (Senehi 2002; Narayan 1989; Northrup 1989; Gugelberger and Kearney 1991; Randall 1991). They have claimed that stories create and give expression to personal and group identity and that these stories are a means of socializing people in all cultures (Senehi 2002; Fine et al. 1992; Anderson 2006). Also, they have contended that stories simultaneously engage minds and hearts and encompass the dimension of time, since they can draw on the past in order to envision the future (Senehi 2002; Tonkin 1995; Urban 1991; Bar-On et al. 2000; Belton 2012; Minow 1998). Therefore, with this storytelling approach, the TRC expected to move forward in their goal of reconciliation.

However, unexpected results emerged after five and one-half years of their operation. The statistical data before and after the TRC did not show any significant changes toward the reconciliation in Canada. Before the TRC began, the Canadian Human Rights Commission (2013, 4) found that:

Aboriginal people living in Canada, compared to non-Aboriginal people, had lower median after-tax income, were more likely to experience unemployment, were more likely to collect employment insurance and social
assistance, were more likely to live in housing in need of major repairs, were more likely to experience physical, emotional or sexual abuse, were more likely to be victims of violent crimes, and were more likely to be incarcerated and less likely to be granted parole.

Although the TRC process was supposed to address this inequality of the Canadian society, the final report from the Environics Institute for Survey Research (2016a) revealed not very different results from earlier surveys. According to their report, even after the TRC: compared to non-Aboriginal people, Aboriginal people living in Canada experience “discrimination today on a regular basis, comparable to, if not worse than, other marginalized communities in Canada such as Muslims and Black people” (25). Also, the Institute found that they experience systemic discrimination at the institutional level, especially in the education and criminal justice systems (Environics Institute for Survey Research 2016b). In other words, there were no significant differences before and after the TRC, even though the TRC was established to bring constructive changes in Canadian society.

Not only was this failure supported by the statistical data, it was also supported by the arguments of many indigenous groups and scholars (James 2012; Akhtar 2010; Montgomery 2015; Slobodian 2015; Walker 2015). Slobodian (2015) and James (2012) made criticisms that Canadian society is far from being reconciled, since the TRC could not give space for victims and perpetrators to meet, reconcile, and heal with each other. Also, Montgomery (2015) and Akhtar (2010) contended that the TRC failed to address its aim of reconciliation, since it lacked the participation of the non-Aboriginal public. Furthermore, one of the IRS survivors, Viv Ketchum, stated, “I don’t expect much to happen after, I don’t think . . . We’re just going to be placed aside. I think that’s the reality for us” (Walker 2015).
Although the TRC should have helped her to feel that justice is being restored and her voice matters in the society, she felt the opposite and was disappointed with the fact that the society still marginalizes Aboriginal people in Canada. Hence, both the statistical data and literature support the conclusion that the TRC failed to transform the conflict and reconcile Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples in Canada.

Research Question
As described above, the conventional wisdom suggests that the TRC should have brought reconciliation to Canadian society, since the TRC used the storytelling method, which is advocated by many scholars because it is very helpful in bringing conflict transformation and reconciliation. Although many Canadians and Aboriginal people expected that the TRC would bring constructive changes and reconciliation to Canadian society, the statistical data, indigenous leaders, and scholars suggest that Aboriginal people are still marginalized, and they feel far from reconciliation. Therefore, in light of this, an important question is: To what extent has the TRC in Canada sought “to get the underlying, root causes of the conflict, to solve the problems that led to it in the first place?” (Avruch 1998, 101). The aim of this research is to answer this question.

In order to do so, I will employ the theoretical framework of conflict transformation. In particular, I will focus on the roles that culture, power, and identity play in conflict transformation and argue that conflict transformation can take place when these three concepts are addressed. For the cultural perspective, I will focus on how inclusive culture can contribute to transforming conflict in society. Regarding power, I will elaborate on how the empowerment of the traditionally oppressed people can contribute to transforming conflict in society. And, for identity, I will describe how renegotiation of
identity can contribute to transforming conflict in society as well. Then, I will examine whether the reconciliation efforts by the TRC seek to address the problems through cultural change, empowerment, and identity renegotiation in society (Hallward 2006; Lederach 2003). I will conclude the paper with several implications for scholars and practitioners in the field of reconciliation.

**Conceptual Framework: Conflict Transformation**

According to Galtung (1969), there are two types of peace: negative peace refers to “the absence of war,” and positive peace refers to “a societal condition in which structures of domination and exploitation, which underlie war, have been eliminated” (Avruch 1998, 26). Rooted in Galtung’s notion of positive peace, Lederach (1996) emphasizes the notion of conflict transformation (Avruch 1998, 27). Conflict transformation is a process that “engag[es] with and transform[s] the relationships, interests, discourses and, if necessary, the very constitution of society that supports the continuation of . . . conflict” (in Hallward 2006, 49). It aims at addressing “the underlying, root causes of the conflict, to solve the problems that led to it in the first place” (Avruch 1998, 101). Because Lederach and Galtung see that what gave birth to the conflict in the first place is the sociopolitical system (Avruch 1998, 101), they argue that conflict should be approached in wide-ranging and comprehensive ways to progressively “address the surface issues and change underlying social structures and relationship patterns” (Lederach and Maise 2003, 3).

Then, how can we restructure this sociopolitical system? To begin with, Lederach argues that conflict transformation includes “identify[ing] and understand[ing] the cultural patterns that contribute to the rise of violent expressions of conflict” (Lederach and Maise 2003, 4). He emphasizes that there are cultural patterns that
are oppressive to those who are traditionally oppressed, and he further maintains that these should be addressed in order for conflict to be transformed, as these are among the root causes of the conflict. Huda et al. (2011) explain these cultural patterns as “a discourse of exclusion of the ‘other’” (4). In their article, they recognize the discourse of othering as one of the biggest obstacles for the integration of society (Huda et al. 2011, 4). Discourses are developed by those in power with the explicit or implicit aim of shaping attitudes of people to achieve desired goals, which range from legitimizing power to deconstructing power (Aronoff and Kubik 2012). Thus, when discourses continue to exist in society, those without power are oppressed through the language and fixed meaning in codes that are within the discourse. This benefits those with power. Consequently, when this discourse of othering continues to exist, people cannot be integrated in the society and the conflict remains, since one of the root causes that brought the conflict in the first place continues to exist.

The cultural patterns that should be addressed, however, are not only “the discourse of exclusion of the ‘other,’” but also the world-views that are focused only on those with power (Huda et al. 2011, 4; see also Orakzai 2011, 35; Hallward 2006, 51). This point is explained well by Orakzai (2011) and Hallward (2006). In their articles, both point out how societies that have conflict have tried to resolve their conflicts through the approaches developed by Western theory. While analyzing the limitation of these approaches, they both emphasize the importance of incorporating the local culture in conflict transformation. For instance, Orakzai (2011) studied the conflict in the Swat Valley of Pakistan and found that the Pakhtun culture can suggest “ways in which the root cause of the conflict might be addressed to bring about peace and sustainable development,” which the Western approaches cannot suggest with the lack of perspective.
in the region (35). Similarly, Hallward (2006) studied the natural resources conflict regarding the land between Israelis and Palestinians and suggests that scholars and practitioners should look at the conflict reflecting the values, identity, and worldviews of the disputants. In other words, since conflict itself arises from the different worldviews of the disputants, when people try to address the conflict from only one perspective, it lacks the viewpoint of the other disputants who understand causes and dynamics of conflict differently. Thus, in order for conflict to be transformed, structural transformation that integrates indigenous values and draws on indigenous cultural or religious resources must first take place (Orakzai 2011). The cultures of the oppressed ones must be heard and reflected, and people should draw upon the fundamental worldviews of the parties themselves and engage in large cultural change (Hallward 2006).

In addition to explaining these issues in the cultural dimension, Lederach (2005) also points out the issues in the structural dimension that give birth to conflict. He argues that, for society to transform conflict successfully, the cycle of violence that keeps victimizing the victims and benefiting the offenders in the society must be broken (Lederach 2005). As one of the ways to break this cycle, Hallward (2006) maintains those traditionally oppressed must be empowered. Here, she sees empowerment as “a condition in which traditionally disempowered groups have developed their latent power to the point where they can advocate for their own needs and rights” (Hallward 2006, 50). This is similar to Galtung’s concept of positive peace as well. Galtung argues that people must pay attention not only to direct violence but also structural violence, which involves “social, political, economic systems which prevent individuals from reaching their human potential” (Hallward 2006, 50; see also Avruch 1998, 26). In other words, for conflict to be transformed, the social, political, and economic systems should not discriminate against
any members and should be equally empowering for all members of the society.

Lastly, Lederach (2005) elaborated on the importance of looking at the relational dimensions of the conflict. According to Lederach, the cycle of violence has fixated the interaction and communication between the victims and offenders by breaking up their relationships. When their identity is labeled as victims or offenders in the society, conflict cannot be transformed because these labels prejudice the interactions and communication between them. This is the reason that Lederach claims that the identity and history of victims must be renegotiated within the society by engaging all members of the society. The victims’ and offenders’ identities must be integrated together to include all of them. In remembering the history and renegotiating the identity with all members of the society, “the proximity that touches the web of community life in context of actual relationship and community” can be developed, and the healing process can finally take place in the society (Lederach 2005, 145). Thus, reconnecting people in actual relationships—“practices of accessibility”—is the core issue that can decide the success of restorative justice as well as conflict transformation (Lederach 2005, 143). Consequently, the society needs to help restructure identities of those traditionally marginalized in global and local contexts (Huda et al. 2011).

As illustrated above, the conceptual framework—conflict transformation—suggests that when all of these happen, constructive social change and genuine reconciliation can take place in the society. Then, what about the TRC in Canada? Did the TRC seek to address the root causes of the conflict through inclusive culture, empowerment, and identity renegotiation in the society? To answer this question, I examined the TRC employing the previously mentioned elements.
Data and Analysis

The TRC in Canada is unique compared to the TRC in other societies. Although the TRC in other societies, such as South Africa, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, emerged “from a process of transition to democracy or from a pact among previously warring parties,” the TRC in Canada emerged simply because of a court mandate (James 2012, 189; Stanton 2011, 4). In 2005, approximately 15,000 residential school survivors filed a class action suit against the Canadian federal government, and, as one of the conditions of their settlement agreement, the court mandated the establishment of the TRC. This was because people expected that “the TRC would help mainstream Canada to better understand the actions and consequences of residential schools and allow aboriginal victims an outlet to express their feelings and pain” (Montgomery 2015).

After years of preparation on how to bring reconciliation to the Canadian society, the TRC employed the victim-centered approach, which uses storytelling as a method to reconciliation, adopted from the successful model of the TRC in South Africa (Slobodian 2015; James 2012). From June 2010, the TRC travelled the country to hear testimony from 7,000 witnesses about their experiences at residential schools in its five and a half years of operations (Walker 2015). During this process, the TRC focused on addressing three specific goals: acknowledging and witnessing the Indian Residential School experience, promoting awareness of the IRS system and its impacts, and creating a public record of the IRS legacy (Stanton 2011). Then, which of the elements—inclusive culture, empowerment, and the renegotiation of identity—has the TRC addressed?

Firstly, the TRC failed to foster inclusive culture in the Canadian society. It could not address “the discourse of exclusion of the ‘other’” (Huda et al. 2011, 4). Also, it could not include the worldview of Aboriginal people in its process. According to James, although “the
discursive frames promoted by the Canadian government and media must be addressed” for conflict to be transformed, these deeply rooted aspects were not addressed during the TRC process (James 2012, 197). According to James, instead of addressing the prevailing anti-indigenous stereotypes and biases, the TRC process further strengthened the stereotypes and biases against Aboriginal people. After the terrible experiences in the IRS were shared, the Canadian media often projected the IRS survivors as “helpless therapeutic subjects who need externally administered healing in order to unburden themselves of their anger and become conventionally productive citizens” (James 2012, 197). In other words, although the storytelling process was supposed to bring Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples together, it ended up highlighting the differences between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples and fed into the discourse of othering. And this discourse again benefited those with power by helping to ignore the important question of “political self-determination and control of land” of Aboriginal people (James 2012, 197; Henderson and Wakeham 2009, 4).

Not only did it fail to address the discourse of othering, the TRC also failed to include the worldview of Aboriginal people in Canada. Although the TRC was established in the context that the culture of Aboriginal people has been suppressed and missed for almost a century, the TRC did not hear and reflect the fundamental values and worldviews of Aboriginal people as it was supposed to (Henderson and Wakeham 2009). In the TRC project, what Aboriginal people wanted were disclosure, information about what went wrong, explanations, apologies, and the assurance that changes will be made so that it does not happen again (Carroll and Unger 2015). However, the TRC ignored what they wanted. Disclosure and information about what went wrong, explanation, and assurance about the future were not included in the process (Carroll and Unger 2015). Only a
collective apology was given by the Canadian government in 2008 (Edwards 2010). Lederach argues that, for conflict to be transformed and for restorative justice to take place, the society needs to “create adequate public truth and accountability” (2005, 143). However, the TRC only focused on creating public truth, not accountability. Instead, the TRC (2015) framed this accountability as “the shaming and pointing out wrongdoing” and stated that these were not the purpose of the TRC (vi). James (2012) criticized this by comparing it to a situation in which perpetrators say, “We are sorry for what happened to them,” not “We are sorry for what we did,” since this missed the necessity of accountability in promoting restorative justice (203). Accordingly, the TRC did not reflect the perspectives of Aboriginal people about how they would like to transform this conflict.

Secondly, the TRC failed to empower the traditionally oppressed. Although the structural issues that oppress Aboriginal people must have been addressed to break the cycle of violence, the TRC did not pay attention to this aspect at all. The issues often brought by Aboriginal scholars and practitioners are the self-governing nation and land rights (Rymhs 2006; Akhtar 2010). They often argue that these issues must be addressed, since the denial of these rights is what actually resulted in giving birth to the IRS system and leading the society to support this system a century ago (Simpson 2001; James 2012). However, even after a century, in 2016, these political and economic rights were still not recognized in Canada. To illustrate: Although the Constitution Act of 1982 recognizes the First Nations as a minority, it does not actually set out any specific guarantees of their self-determination (Akhtar 2010). Also, in 2007, although many states adopted the Indigenous Declaration of Rights at the United Nations, the Canadian government still declined to adopt this declaration. Power is still dominated by the government and the individual beneficiaries of the injustice (James 2012; Akhtar 2010). Although the IRS,
which used to explicitly discriminate against and oppress Aboriginal people, was abolished, the sociopolitical systems that implicitly carry out the power imbalances between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples continue, while non-Aboriginal people still do not recognize the political and economic rights of Aboriginal people in the society (Stanton 2011; Akhtar 2010). Therefore, restorative justice and equality could not be brought to the society. Again, this contributed to the failure of the TRC in bringing constructive changes to the system that reinforces the power imbalance in Canada.

Lastly, the TRC failed to help Aboriginal people renegotiate their identity in their society. The identity of the traditionally marginalized is often renegotiated in the process of storytelling because it gives voices to everyone regardless of age, space, time, and intellectual level and enables people to remember, emphasize, and accept the reality of Aboriginal people and build the future together based on the present (Senehi 2002). However, what the TRC did through their storytelling process was simply to hear the voices of Aboriginal people and write them down in the report (James 2012). No effort was made beyond this simple storytelling process. There was no shared empathy between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, because there was negligible involvement of the non-Aboriginal public (Stanton 2011). Also, the reality of Aboriginal people was not recognized as reality, since media only focused on sharing the provocative stories—because the more tragic the survivors’ experiences were, the more likely news was to gain attention (Stanton 2011; James 2012). Because the TRC did not use the storytelling method correctly, the TRC just contributed to inheriting and internalizing the dichotomies of the “oppressor and oppressed” even further (Rymhs 2006). Aboriginal “identity and history often dwell on tragic narratives rather than on the ways that Aboriginal people have re-imagined themselves in the present” (Rymhs 2006, 118). The renegotiation of Canadian identity
to include those marginalized through “restory[ing]” the past and future in the present did not take place (Lederach 2005, 140); and, unfortunately, the TRC could not bring changes to the imperial legacy and national identity when it did not recognize the identity of Aboriginal people in Canada as well (Rymhs 2006). Accordingly, although the TRC argued that the Commission’s focus was to “lay the foundation for . . . reconciliation,” the TRC did not lay any foundation for reconciliation (TRC 2015, vi). They did not foster inclusive culture by addressing the discourse of othering and including the values and worldviews of Aboriginal people in transforming the conflict. They did not empower the Aboriginal people, as they failed to recognize the political and economic rights of the Aboriginal people. Also, they failed to help them renegotiate their identity in the Canadian society, since they could not go beyond the storytelling process, though this was the most important part of the process. Therefore, the TRC failed to bring about constructive social changes to the sociopolitical system that gave birth to the conflict in the first place and failed to transform the conflict, resulting in a failure to bring genuine reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal peoples.

Conclusion and Implications

As many scholars have noted, constructive social change began in Canada when a collective apology was given and people started uncovering the truth (Edwards 2010; Carroll and Unger 2015; Bombay et al. 2013). However, further meaningful constructive social change will not happen with only this collective apology. For the society to change, the meaningful participation of all members of the society is needed, since it requires them to change the culture and to renegotiate the identity of non-Aboriginal people in the society. During this process, people need to recognize the sociopolitical systems
that have oppressed certain groups of people so that the society may move toward the justice and equality of all people.

The statement of one of the Aboriginal scholars well emphasizes this point: he claims that the conflict in Canada will be transformed “when the dominant society respects and recognizes [Aboriginal people] as peoples, honors [their] treaties to their full meaning and intent, acknowledges [their] land rights and treats [them] with the same respect any self-governing Nation would expect” (Simpson 2001, 145). For Aboriginals to be respected and recognized as a people, the culture and society in Canada must include them and give them a new identity other than that of being the victims. Also, for their treaties and land rights to be recognized and honored, the sociopolitical systems and discourses that have oppressed them must be understood and addressed.

This is what the TRC overlooked in this reconciliation process: storytelling does not automatically foster inclusive culture, empower those marginalized, and help those marginalized to renegotiate their identity. What the TRC should have focused on was that they needed not just storytelling but the storytelling that could bring about all these elements. From the beginning of the project, the TRC was supposed to reflect the values and worldviews of Aboriginal people and recognize how the discourses and sociopolitical systems have marginalized them. Then, based on this understanding, they were supposed to build a project plan. However, what the TRC did in their planning process was to look for a successful model and simply adopt what the TRC in South Africa did in a different context of the society. Also, even during the process, the Canadian TRC should not have stopped at the level of only giving voices to the survivors and listening to their stories. They were supposed to invite non-Aboriginal public into the process as well and make an effort to integrate them through the process. In other words, the failure of the TRC lies
In the shallow understanding of how storytelling can bring about constructive changes to the society and the hasty delivery of them based on this superficial understanding.

From this process, scholars and practitioners in the field of reconciliation can learn lessons. They need to understand the important roles that culture, power, and identity play in conflict transformation and reconciliation. When developing any reconciliation policies or project, they should begin with looking inward at all levels of perspectives and engage and respect the worldview of those traditionally marginalized to change their reality (Cherubini and Hodson 2008). Instead of assuming the needs and values of those marginalized, scholars and practitioners should start asking questions, such as how those marginalized feel about the process and what they expect to happen through the process, and they should be involved in the designing process. Then, scholars and practitioners would be able to recognize how those marginalized have been oppressed and marginalized through the sociopolitical systems and discourses. Also, when the project is implemented, scholars and practitioners must ensure that this process should not only focus on healing those marginalized but also on integrating all members in the society by encouraging active participation of all. The wounds of the wronged cannot be fully healed without pulling out the thorn together with the wrongdoers, since the responsibility for changing the realities of those marginalized does not rest solely on the TRC or those marginalized.
Bibliography


