

Conflict Transformation: Canadian Democracy and Aboriginal Relations

Laura E. Reimer
University of Winnipeg

This paper situates conflicts among Canadian politics and Aboriginal relations in the literature of peace and conflict studies. Canadian Aboriginal identity, the long-term efforts of public policy to dismantle that identity, and the evidence of current conflict transformation within Canada are presented and explored in this paper. The conflict is explained and established as an identity conflict; and then provides evidence that the conflict is transforming positively for the first time in Canadian history. Opening with a brief introduction to the history of Aboriginal people in Canada, the paper reviews relevant elements of identity conflict within the context of Canadian democracy. Then, the structural relationship between the government of Canada and Aboriginal people is explained, and related to the conflict. The paper concludes with discussion of the evidence of a transforming identity conflict contextualized nationally and globally, with cautious hope that this long-standing conflict is evidencing unmistakable signs of positive transformation.

Key Words: conflict, conflict transformation, Aboriginal, identity conflict, structural conflict, Apology, Canadian government, Canadian politics, Aboriginal issues, reconciliation, redress

The destruction of Aboriginal¹ identity within Canadian democracy is a story that begins over 400 years ago when the original inhabitants of the northern continent began the struggle to defend their lands and cultures from the claims of imperialism, the forces of colonization, and British Crown ownership. In 1996, Canada's *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* established that for most people, and especially for Canadians, it is the story of a hidden relationship characterized by disparity in power, violations of trust, and lingering unresolved disputes (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996, Volume 1, Chapter 1, paragraph 17). The difference between this and many of the world's identity conflicts is the notable absence of armed conflict (Wolff, 2006, p. 64). Historical developments in the relationship between the British (and subsequent Canadian

governments) and Aboriginal people, including the century-long national policy to erase language and culture, are critical to understanding the current conflict and the early-stage positive transformation argued in this paper.

This paper asserts that there is a desired change, or conflict transformation, in Aboriginal relations in Canada. The paper begins with an introduction to Aboriginal people in Canada, and reviews the relevant elements of identity conflict within the context of Canadian democracy. Then the structural relationship between the government of Canada and Aboriginal people is explained in order to establish the conflict in literature as an identity conflict. The paper concludes with a discussion and cautious hope that, according to peace and conflict literature, this long-standing conflict is in the unmistakable stages of positive transformation.

¹ 'Aboriginal' is the contemporary conventional term for the collective recognition of approximately 1.1 million Indigenous people in Canada, and is used in

Understanding the conflict

Canada is located in North America, nested between the Pacific, Atlantic, and Arctic Oceans. The southern border, which closely follows the 49th parallel, is shared with Canada's only neighbor, the United States of America. The country is vast; one of the largest geographic regions in the world. Originally inhabited by Indigenous people, by the early 1700s the land and its wealth of natural resources were the object of the colonial interests of the French and British empires. After losing the war of 1755 in Europe, France ascribed its claims to some parts of the land to Britain. Shortly thereafter, the territory was claimed by the British Empire as part of King George III's *Royal Proclamation of 1763* (Brooks, 2007). The identity conflict outlined in this paper has its earliest roots in this period. Although Canada was established as a Dominion in 1867 by the *British North America Act*, all Canadian legislation travelled to Britain to undergo the processes of British Parliament before becoming law. In 1982, this process ceased when Queen Elizabeth II signed *The Constitution Act*. All Treaties and agreements, including those among France, Britain, and Aboriginal people, remain the foundations beneath current Canadian law and the evolution of the conflict.

Originally, the fur trade compelled relations between the Europeans and the original inhabitants of the land. It would appear that economic motivations of colonialism to assure access to natural resources for the French and British empires were at the origins of the conflict (Helin, 2006). Then, the Industrial Revolution changed the economic needs of England, causing a decline in the importance of the fur trade to Europe, and

signalling the end of the need for cooperative relations between England, France, and the Indigenous people in North America. Partly in response to his need for natural resources, and partly in formal response to protests of land encroachment by Chief Pontiac, King George III signed the *Royal Proclamation of 1763* and claimed the entire continent of what is now North America for the British Empire. In addition to seizing control of the land, this legislation imposed British rule on the original inhabitants of the land, and exacted legal relationships that were eventually transferred to Canada under Section 25 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* within the *Constitution Act, 1982*. Standing on the traditions of French civil law, British Westminster democracy, *The Royal Proclamation*, and the regulations and legislation that flowed from these, the structural foundation for the official relationship between Canada and Aboriginal people living within her boundaries is established.

The *Indian Act* is the primary law governing the relationship since Canadian Confederation in the late 1800s. There has been almost no change to the formal legislation since. However, nearly a century later, public awareness increased regarding the gap between education levels, housing standards, and general health between Canadians and Aboriginal people. Evidence of shocking and extreme poverty and other social ills in Aboriginal communities continued to emerge in media and in government reports (Indian and Northern Affairs, 1996). Commissioned by Parliament in 1991, in 1996 Canada's government received the, multi-thousand page, five volume report from *The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*. The Report provided a graphic depiction of the

difficult life circumstances of Canada's Aboriginal people, and offered over 60 detailed recommendations toward a renewed and remedial relationship. These included profound Constitutional amendments and specific changes in areas that included health, education, mental health and healing, the family, and arts and heritage. Though there was much passion and proclamation by government authorities, virtually no changes were implemented over the ten year period after the report and, according to identity-based conflict literature (Rothman, 1997), government inertia further entrenched the conflict.

The 1996 *Report of the Canadian Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* emphasized that Canadians know little about the conflict, or about the peaceful and co-operative relationship that grew up between Indigenous/ Aboriginal people and the first European visitors during the early years of contact in the seventeenth century. As the land was settled and eventually established as Canada, the relationship became one of false assumptions and failure from British and Canadian authorities toward Aboriginal people. In 1920, prevailing assumptions regarding the relationship was expressed by senior Canadian bureaucrat Duncan Campbell Scott before a special committee of Parliament: “[o]ur objective is to continue until there is not a single Indian in Canada that has not been absorbed into the body politic and there is no Indian question, and no Indian Department” (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996, Volume 5, Chapter 13, paragraph 1). This was consistent with ethnocentric attitudes and policies around the globe and across the British Empire promoting “displacement and assimilation, and new philosophies that trumpeted the superiority of 'civilized'

Europeans over 'uncivilized', even 'savage', Aboriginal people” (paragraph 8).

The Fur Trade, the Treaties

The fur trade is important in the evolution of this conflict. Prior to 1830, Aboriginal people in British North America were administered by a branch of the British military. Any alliances with Aboriginal nations were solely for the purposes of military alliances primarily against American continentalism (Brooks, 2007). However, records from the fur trade suggest early European erosion of Aboriginal culture and identity primarily through influence (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996; Helin, 2006). Eventually, the global economy changed and the fur trade began to give way to the British need for minerals, timber and other natural resources in order to supply imperialist forays (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996). Britain then began to aggressively pursue possession of North American land, and the relationship became a colonial one.

As the British expanded into North America, they established Treaties with the leaders of the Aboriginal nations. These Treaties, especially Numbers 1-11, define land rights and distribution and are covenants intended to stand “as long as the sun shines, the grass grows, and the rivers flow” (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada, 2010a; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2008c). The Treaties are stewardship agreements and are regarded as such today. In fact, the “Government of Canada and the courts understand treaties between the Crown and Aboriginal people to be solemn agreements that set out promises, obligations, and benefits for both parties” (Aboriginal Affairs and Northern

Development Canada, 2010b). History suggests that the Aboriginal people did not perceive any threat to their identities or to their life upon the land, partly because European imperial interest in land ownership was outside the philosophical paradigm of Aboriginal people (Helin, 2006). Also, Aboriginal people did not lose a war against the Europeans, nor consent to being governed by the French or the British, and so they did not recognize or experience loss of land rights through conquest as international law prescribes (Helin, 2006). The Treaties were and are very significant in the ongoing conflict because for the first time, Aboriginal identity was defined by an external party that separated land from identity (Carter, 2009; Helin, 2006).

According to Aboriginal tradition, identity was defined by living a traditional lifestyle. Canadian legislation and literature interpret the Treaties as exchanges of land for other benefits provided by Canada, including ammunition and farm animals (Department of Justice, 1880-1985; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2008b; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2008c). The signing of the Treaties began a significant transition in Aboriginal identity as people moved onto established land Reserves and left a hunting lifestyle to commence a primarily agricultural one (Helin, 2006; University of Calgary, 2000). Treaties and their interpretation remain important to understanding the conflict today as they are closely associated with Aboriginal identity.

Identity Conflict

Identity conflicts are not identity crises, but are unique and often difficult to identify until they are transforming. Furthermore, identity conflicts are

difficult to understand and to mitigate in part because they are long, complex, and multi-causal (Black, 2003; Cook-Huffman, 2008; Rothman, 1997; Taras & Ganguly, 2010; Wilmot & Hocker, 2007; Wolff, 2006). Identity conflicts “rest on underlying needs that cannot be compromised” (Korostelina, 2009, p. 101). Rothman (1997) says “identity-driven conflicts are rooted in the articulation of, and the threats or frustrations to, people’s collective need for dignity, recognition, safety, control, purpose, and efficacy” (p. 7). Identity conflict is also rooted in land. Conflict scholars have established the correlation between land and identity (Carter, 2009). Often, land is closely tied to politics and identity and so becomes part of the conflict (Carter, 2009, p. 304).

Identity conflicts also remain within a structural framework that serves the purposes of one party, but not the other (Jeong, 2000a). Although some identity conflicts are not violent, lack of violent confrontation does not mean the conflict is not protracted or not to be acknowledged as serious, but only that it has not yet escalated to war (Carter, 2009). Identity conflict describes the conflict in Canada, and the following section of the paper outlines how foreign aggression, abuses of power, oppression, unjust control, lack of autonomy, threats to self-rule, and challenges to sovereignty, human rights abuses, and threats to identity or way of life were reinforced as deliberate policy decisions of the Canadian government (Carter, Irani & Volkan, 2009; Carter, 2009). In these ways, it is evident that the historical relationship between Canada and Aboriginal people is a protracted identity conflict.

Conflict transformation is about positive change, and although they are

stubborn and slow, identity conflicts have the potential to transform positively. According to peace and conflict literature, “transformation works to promote constructive processes” (Lederach, 2003, p. 26). The process includes a period of going backward as much as going forward in relationships (Lederach, 1995; Lederach, 2003; Rothman, 1996). However, change is a circle, meaning that there may be forward, desired movement, followed by an impasse, and may even include times when the change processes seem to be “going backwards” (Lederach 2003, p. 42). Importantly, “the circle recognizes that no point in time determines the broader pattern” (Lederach, 2003, p. 43). In this way, it may be recognized that Aboriginal relations in Canada, despite potential setbacks, are transforming forward in a desired direction.

Aboriginal identity

Aboriginal identity is land-based and spiritual. Prior to European contact, “Aboriginal societies were self-reliant, socially-coherent, healthy, and had a clear direction. They evidently thrived without welfare, without unemployment insurance, and without government transfer payments.” (Helin, 2006, p.66). Other historical documents, including those recorded within the diaries of Europeans, reflect Aboriginal nations as self-governing, sophisticated, and flourishing cultures with complex social structures (Helin, 2006; Wallace, 1986). This was formally changed as the *Indian Act* and its attendant rules and regulations were formalized and enforced.

The implied threat of violence against settlers by displaced Aboriginal people who had been moved from the land to specific Reserves and the threat of further

isolation to Aboriginal people through consecutive legislation underscored the entrenchment of conflict. Enemy-imaging of Aboriginal people as “savages”, as “uncivilized”, and even as “warriors” throughout historical documents also served as a means of control and maintained inequality while Aboriginal people were increasingly ‘hidden’ from mainstream Canadians (Crawford 1998a, p. 1; Galtung, 1971; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996). For Aboriginal people, traditional Aboriginal identity steadily eroded in the context of the evolving relationship with Canadian democracy.

Initially, British colonial policies and then Canadian law forcefully dismantled Aboriginal culture and identity, mostly by invalidating and outlawing social structures and institutions (Fanon, 2004). Democracy was used for control purposes (Galtung, 1971), and government imposed the Western political organization on Aboriginal nations. The Reserve structure, still in place today for example, attacks the foundations of Aboriginal identity. Only the Chiefs communicate with government officials. This means that all power is centralized at the elite level, while community members remain voiceless and powerless (Allard, 2002). There are no lines of accountability. There are still no checks and balances in the system today, and so the government structures on reserves are fair grounds for corruption, nepotism, and fiscal abuse (Allard, 2002). At the same time, the establishment of Chiefs and Band Councils as Reserve leadership were deceptive; ultimate authority and permission really resided (and remains) in the office of the Indian Agent (now the Minister of Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada). In this way, entrenched structure maintains a

colonial relationship with Aboriginal people despite political promises or public concern (Wallace, 1986).

Through a policy of relocating Aboriginal people to land Reserves distant from mainstream society and far from their original territories, Aboriginal culture began to submerge beneath the weight of many losses, which is also part of identity conflict. The establishment of Reserves also imposed the loss of home and belonging, loss of food sources, loss of spiritual places, loss of lifestyle, and loss of freedom (Thira , 2009). During one period of Canadian history, in fact, Aboriginal people could not leave their Reserves without a form of ‘passport’ issued by the Canadian government. Fanon (2004) writes, “the most essential value, because it is the most meaningful, is first and foremost the land: the land, which must provide bread and, naturally, dignity.” (p.9). In these and many other ways, the colonization process established and entrenched identity conflict between the citizens and structures of Canadian democracy, and Aboriginal people.

The Indian Act

In 1867 Canada was established as a Confederation, carrying all prior British and French laws, agreements, and Treaties relating to Aboriginal people. In 1876, *The Indian Act* consolidated all legislation pertaining to the regulation and control of Indian people and Indian lands in Canada (Helin, 2006; National Aboriginal Database). It is the only legislation in the world designed for a specific race of people. The document formally defines Aboriginal people according to identity indicators established by the British government (Assembly of First Nations, 2014; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996). According to conflict

scholar Stefan Wolff, “ethnicity, above all, means identity with one’s own ethnic group” but the *Indian Act* removed collective identity to focus on individuals (Wolff, 2006, p. 31). Together with *The Indian Act* legislation, the Treaties established the legal and political identity “Indian” (Canada, 2009). After 1876, traditional Aboriginal identity practices were forbidden or outlawed and Canadian legislation alone formally established Aboriginal identity (National Aboriginal Database; University of Calgary, 2000).

Residential Schools

The Residential Schools policy removed children from their communities and disrupted the inter-generational socialization of families while intending to integrate graduates into the non-aboriginal world (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996). Residential schools were established in all but three Canadian provinces commencing in the early 1870s, and represent another core contribution to this identity conflict. Aboriginal children were removed from their families and communities and trained in residential schools into the image of European manners and values (Saskatchewan Indian, 1975). All Aboriginal languages and practices were forbidden in the Residential Schools (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996). The *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* is clear that the purpose of the residential school policy was to extinguish the language and culture of Canada’s Aboriginal population, a practice that continued in Canada for almost a century (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996).

This policy direction was halted entirely in the 1980s. However, it was not

until June 2008 that the Canadian government responded with remorse and reconciliation. In 2008, Conservative Prime Minister Stephen Harper issued an official statement recognizing that the long-standing “policy of assimilation was wrong” and asking forgiveness from the residential school survivors and all Aboriginal people in Canada (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2008). The Apology was accepted on behalf of all Indian people by leaders of Canada’s Aboriginal groups. The delivery and acceptance of the Apology is possibly the pivotal transformation point for this conflict.

Outlawing Traditional Ceremonies

Traditional Aboriginal cultures were self-defining and self-governing. Decisions were undertaken by the community as a whole through public gatherings and ceremonies. After Confederation, most Aboriginal ceremonies were outlawed by the Canadian government. The assault on Aboriginal culture and customs focused on the Potlatch Ceremony, recognized as the heart of Indian government, spiritual activity and focal point of the community. A Methodist Minister wrote to his annual conference in 1899 (McCullagh, 1899). His description is rich and relevant here:

No better description could be given of the Indian people than that supplied by the name they give themselves...truly they are a public people, for they have no private business, not private rights and no domestic privacy... Every matter is regulated by a public manifestation of assent on the part of the united clans...Potlatch is a necessity from an Indian point of view in order to preserve the unity, distinctions

and traditions of the race (McCullagh, 1899, n.p.)

Evidently, the Potlatch ceremony threatened British interests in North America as it was contrary to imperial interests (Barnett, 1938). The Potlatch was outlawed from 1880 to 1951 under the prohibitions of *The Indian Act* (Cairns, 1999; Helin, 2006; Saskatchewan Indian, 1978). Also in 1885, the prairie Sun Dance, similarly important to prairie Aboriginal people was outlawed, and further dismantled Aboriginal identity (Carter, 2009).

Transforming the conflict

Only since 2006 has the Government of Canada undertaken deliberate action and public statements to acknowledge their responsibility in the conflict, and spoken the language of reconciliation. However, when voters elected a Conservative government in late 2006, despite no precise statements toward Aboriginal reconciliation during the election campaign, deliberate, constructive transformation began to emerge through public policy and through the leadership of the Canadian government. Interestingly, and with the astute observation of hindsight, this coincided with the efforts of similar leadership systems in other global efforts in former British colonies toward racial reconciliation, in particular New Zealand, Ghana, Botswana, and the USA (Osei-Hwedie & Rankopo, 2010; University of Waterloo, n.d.).

Under the leadership of Prime Minister Stephen Harper, Canada formally began to take action. This included three actions that are significant for reconciliation (Weyeneth, 2001). These were the Parliamentary approval of money to be released from the Canadian

Treasury Board as compensation for ills, a public apology, and genuinely inclusive consultations with Aboriginal Leaders for legislative change. These events, beginning in early 2007, began to transform the entrenched and seemingly intractable identity conflict toward peace and with justice. According to peace scholarship, the state is a logical form for resolving identity conflict and structural conflict (Byrne & Irvin, 2000, p. 117; Carter, 2009). That the Harper government has undertaken concrete action is important to understanding the transformation of this conflict. Historically and in recent decades, the Canadian government has only promised, not acted.

The *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal People* (1996) and the Kelowna Accord (formally called *First Ministers and National Aboriginal Leaders: Strengthening Relationships and Closing the Gap*), represent two recent initiatives by the Canadian government that appeared to address the conflict and its attendant issues, but in reality did not shift power relations or provide concrete building blocks toward peace (Jeong, 2000). Although the Royal Commission Report provided Canadian Parliament with startling data, information, statistics, and recommendations (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996), firm action was not forthcoming in policy directions. Scholars suggest that the benign response to the Commission is evidence of the unwillingness of the Canadian Government of the Day to genuinely reconcile the conflict, and a further entrenchment of the identity conflict (Jeong, 2000b; Wolff, 2006).

In 2006, the Kelowna Accord was described by the Canadian government and media as unique in its degree of involvement from national and Aboriginal

leaders. The goal of the collaborations, according to then Prime Minister Paul Martin, was to address five key areas: education, health, housing, drinking water, and economic development, and to “make a real difference” (Martin, 2006; Patterson, 2006). Jeong states that “strategies for transforming conflict dynamics cannot simply rely on the assumption that improved communication and changed perceptions [will] put parties on an equal basis” (2000, p.37), though it seems that these were the strategies leveraged by the Canadian government.

Despite promises to allocate \$5.1 million toward aboriginal issues, the potential for further mistrust, deeper identity conflict, and even violence, emerged as it became apparent that there was no money allocated by government (Patterson, 2006). After many years of promises for change that did not come, the twenty year reign of the Liberal government ended in late 2006 (Patterson, 2006). Although the consultations leading to the Accord have been heralded as “unique in Canadian history,” (Metro Coalition for a Non-Racist Society, 2006) in fact none of the structures or underlying conflicts presented in this paper were materially addressed during the tenure of the outgoing government. According to Wolff, “the root causes of ethnic conflict cannot be wished away.” (2006, p. 206). Kriesberg stresses the importance of specific conditions and goals in order to address conflict adequately and appropriately (Kriesberg, 1984; Coy & Woehrle, 2000). When conditions do not converge, “the effort fails” (Kriesberg, 1984, p. 97; Wolff, 2006; Carter, 2009). These likely further entrenched the conflict due to interpretations of disingenuousness (Carter, 2009).

However, while they did not produce immediate change for Aboriginal people, nor did they address the Canadian identity conflict, both the *Kelowna Accord* and the *Royal Commission* raised awareness across the country. The processes of the Accord and of the *Royal Commission* were helpful and important to transformation by providing legitimate forums for constructive storytelling and community construction for Aboriginal people (Byrne & Irvin, 2000). According to scholars, these may be recognized as creating conditions that contribute toward conflict de-escalation (Jeong, 2000a; Kriesberg, 1984).

Real Change

During his national election campaign, Stephen Harper insisted that his Conservatives would honour the spirit of the *Kelowna Accord*, but otherwise spoke little of Aboriginal issues. The election of the Harper government did result in two concrete actions in response to both the agreements of the *Kelowna Accord* and the *Royal Commission*. These began to implement real change and must be recognized as significant to the early stages of conflict transformation.

Among the first actions undertaken was a public apology to Aboriginal people for policies that had hurt individuals and devastated Aboriginal culture. Although “there is no ‘uniform’ theory of reparations that fits all cultures, all nations, and all peoples” (Tsosie, 2007, p. 43), there is an emerging literature exploring reparation and redress for historical harms (see for example Cunneen, 2005; Petoukhov, 2013; Walker, 2010). Significant for peace and conflict studies, the Apology was issued between two other post-colonial national apologies in three former British colonies. In addition to Canada’s

Apology, the New Zealand Apology to Vietnam veterans for post-war treatment was issued May 2008, and the American House of Representatives Apology for US Slavery and Jim Crow Laws was issued July 2008 (University of Waterloo, nd).

According to Robert Weyeneth, there are two elements of an apology that are critical for reconciliation: apology and forgiveness (2001). The federal Apology meets both criteria (for full text, see Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2008a). In Canada, on June 11, 2008, the Prime Minister, as the leader of Canada’s government, rose in the House of Commons and reading a speech he had allegedly written himself, simply asked forgiveness from the Aboriginal people for the Canadian residential schools policy. The pain of identity loss and the responsibility of the government in that pain are key elements of reconciliation evident in the Apology. The Prime Minister’s Apology also contained Weyeneth’s second crucial component: the recognition that one has been in the wrong (2001). The Prime Minister did not justify or offer excuses for the actions of the Canadian government toward Aboriginal people since 1867, he stated “we were wrong,” and asked forgiveness (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2008a). Also important to resolving identity conflict, the Prime Minister closed his Apology with “We are sorry” in Canada’s two official languages (French and English) and in the dominant Aboriginal languages.

Additionally, the payment of reparations is apology in material form (Weyeneth, 2001). Significantly, monetary reparations were sent to residential school survivors by the government before the national apology, lending significance and sincerity to the Prime Minister’s statements while

addressing some of the underlying consequences of the conflict. Apologies have been used historically to diffuse potentially volatile situations and so in Canada's case the federal Apology might be seen as a tipping point in conflict management. The action has great potential toward conflict reconciliation because of the involvement of leadership (Byrne & Irvin, 2000). The Apology was offered by the country's national leader and accepted by the Grand Chief of the Assembly of First Nations on behalf of all Aboriginal people (Weyeneth, 2000; Wolff, 2006; Assembly of First Nations, 2014). One other notable distinctive of the Apology is that it accepted responsibility, which is also important toward reconciliation (Thomas, 2003). Although the actions were undertaken and accepted by officials and elites (and rejected by some), according to scholars, important criteria for reconciliation were met.

Another significant action of the Canadian government was the actual flow of dollars from the Canadian Treasury Board. Like the individual monetary settlement for former students of residential schools, the release of federal dollars for Aboriginal communities represents a material apology (Weyeneth, 2001). In the timeframe between his election and Harper's Apology, over \$700 million was designated in the federal budget and released from the Treasury Board directly to Band governments for the restructuring of Reserve institutions (Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 2009). (There is a notable absence of these releases in the Canadian media. Research regarding the role of the mass media in conflict perpetuation and the potential role for the media in conflict transformation remains a field of great potential for study).

Structural change is an indicator of definitive conflict transformation (Byrne & Senehi, 2011; Jeong, 2000b). The Assembly of First Nations² (AFN) website indicates that the conflict seems to be transforming positively toward what Simmel identified as a "different social order" in which leadership pursues positive change regardless of structure (Coy & Woehrle, 2000, p. 2-3). In traditional conflict management strategies, elites preserve the status quo through the maintenance of existing institutions (Jeong, 2000b). The current Band structure is the same structure that was established through the legislation leading up to and including the *Indian Act*. As politically elected leadership, the potential for corruption and self-serving amongst the Aboriginal leadership (Wolff, 2006) poses a threat to peacebuilding, but does not lessen the argument that the conflict is transforming.

Aboriginal self-governance, another pillar of transformation, remains unresolved at time of writing. Other elements of identity conflict, according to peace scholars, are the structural and institutional conditions that cause human suffering (Crawford, 1998b; Indian and Northern Affairs Canada, 1996; Jeong, 2000; Patterson, 2006). Research conducted among First Nations in the Canadian western provinces of Manitoba and Saskatchewan places the blame and responsibility for poor governance ultimately on the *Indian Act*. The Assembly of First Nations has placed repeal of *The Indian Act* among their policy priorities (Assembly of First Nations, 2014). This will be the next frontier for collaboration, or conflict.

² 'First Nations' are specifically those Aboriginal people and nations in a unique relationship with the Canadian government as defined by the *Indian Act*.

Until the *Indian Act* is changed, overhauled, or repealed, the structural legislative foundations for the conflict remain largely intact. According to the tenets of democracy, any movement toward reconciliation remains at the mercy and political processes of the Canadian government as the country's leadership. However, First Nations leadership at the Assembly of First Nations seem to be emerging out of a colonized paradigm into a unified voice to positively articulate both basic and social needs for Aboriginal people, also critical for conflict transformation (Burton, 1972; Coy & Woehrle, 2000). The policy platform of the AFN is described as two main thrusts: "reconciliation and recognition of First Nation governments affirming Treaty and aboriginal rights, consistent with section 35, *Constitution Act, 1982*"; and "sustainability and structural change" which includes change in the fiscal relationship, nation-building support and "federal policy renewal...in the form of the elimination of the *Indian Act*" (Assembly of First Nations, 2014). This suggests that Aboriginal people are building a new, transformed, and stronger identity apart from the structures of British North America.

Timing is critical in peace building, and active leadership of the AFN and of the Canadian government coincided to create a window of opportunity for transformation and reconciliation that both parties have found the courage to seize. According to ethnic conflict scholar Stephen Wolff, "the key is for individual leaders to recognize and use the opportunities that exist for settling their differences without recourse to violence." (2006, p.40). This has been notable among First Nations leaders and in the Canadian Prime Minister, as demonstrated

in particular through the Apology, and through monetary reparation and redress.

Conclusion

The progression of conflict between Aboriginal people and the European traders and explorers that introduced Westminster Parliamentary democracy, mercantilism, and capitalism to North America is a story of protracted conflict, now indicating evidence of transformation. There have been catalysts within the early years of the new millennium toward building respectful and responsible peace, as the core causes of identity conflict are patiently addressed through careful and purposeful leadership (Northrup, 1989, p. 55; Rothman, 1997, p. 7; Wolff, 2006, p. 2). The next phase will require structural change.

The Indian Act has been the primary structural tool used to deconstruct Aboriginal identity. Aboriginal people are defined as "Indians" in the legislation, which also dictates their relationship to the land and removed traditional self-government structures. Deliberate assimilationist policies were used to further erode Aboriginal identity. When traditional ceremonies such as the Potlatch and the Sun Dance were outlawed, Aboriginal people experienced severe culture and identity loss. The residential schools policy removed language and culture, and separated Aboriginal children from their families and the other markers of their identity as Aboriginal people. As the conflict evolved, it was framed in ways that would justify the policies of domination and assimilation that disguised the original motives, which in many ways is represented by control of the land.

The processes that led to the *Report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal*

People and the *Kelowna Accord* are significant recent developments in the conflict. According to scholars, conflict could have escalated due to words without action on the part of the Liberal government. Instead, after a symbolic and material apology by the Canadian Prime Minister for the wrongness of the assimilation policies, there has been evidence that leaders in Canada and among the First Nations are willing to consider accommodation toward reconciliation.

Canada's story stands in the context of a growing global climate toward reconciliation and redress, but the courage of the Canadian and Aboriginal leadership has decisively pursued change and this must be recognized. According to peace and conflict literature, the process of change is circular, meaning that there may be set-backs and at times, stagnation. But the actions undertaken this far in Canada assure that for the first time in recorded history, peacebuilding with justice is taking place, and we are witnessing constructive conflict transformation in Canada's Aboriginal relations.

References

- Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. (2010a) *Treaty guide to Treaty Number 8*. Retrieved from: <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/>
- Aboriginal Affairs and Northern Development Canada. (2010b). *Treaties with Aboriginal people*. Retrieved from: <http://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/>
- Allard, J. (2002) Big Bear's Treaty: The road to freedom. *Inroads* 11: 108-167.
- Assembly of First Nations. (2014). Retrieved from: <http://www.afn.ca/article.asp?id=3>.
- Barnett, H. (1938). The nature of the potlatch. *American Anthropologist* 40-3: 349-358.
- Black, P. (2003). Identities. In Cheldelin, S., Druckman, D., & Fast, L. Eds. *Conflict: From analysis to intervention*. (pp. 120-138). New York: Continuum.
- Brooks, S. (2007). *Canadian democracy* 5th edition.
- Burton, J. (1972). The resolution of conflict. *International Studies Quarterly* 16-1: 5-29.
- Byrne, S. & Irvin, C. (Eds.).(2000). *Reconcilable differences: Turning points in ethnopolitical conflict*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian.
- Cairns, A. (1999). The potlatch papers: A colonial case history (review). *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 30-2: 357-360.
- Canada. (2009). *The Indian Act, 1880-1985*. Department of Justice. Retrieved from: <http://laws.justice.gc.ca/en/ShowFullDoc/cs/I-5///en>.
- Carter, J. (2009). Lessons to ponder: Insights and advice from the front lines. In Carter, J. Irani, G. & Volkan, V. (eds). *Regional and ethnic conflicts: Perspectives from the front lines*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Carter, J. Irani, G. & Volkan, V. (Eds). (2009). *Regional and ethnic conflicts: Perspectives from the front lines*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Prentice Hall.
- Cook-Huffman, C. (2008). The Role of identity in conflict. In Sandole, D., Byrne, S., Sandole- Staroste, I., & Senehi, J. (Eds.), *Handbook of*

- conflict analysis and resolution*. (pp. 17-29). London, UK: Routledge.
- Coy, P., and L. Woehrl. (2000). *Social conflicts and collective identities*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.
- Crawford, B. (1998a). The causes of cultural conflict: An institutional approach. In Crawford, B. & Lipschutz, R. (eds). *The myth of "ethnic conflict"*. Berkeley, CA: University of California at Berkeley.
- Crawford, B. (1998b). The causes of cultural conflict: Assessing the evidence. In Crawford, B. & Lipschutz, R. (eds). *The myth of "ethnic conflict"*. Berkeley, CA: University of California at Berkeley.
- Cunneen, C. (2005). Colonialism and historical injustice: Reparations for Indigenous peoples. *Social Semiotics*, 15(1), 59-80.
- Fanon, F. (2004). *The wretched of the earth*. Translated by R. Philcox. New York, NY: Grove Press (Original work published in 1963).
- Friesen, Rudy. (1991). Reflections on Oka: The Mohawk confrontation. *Conflict Resolution Notes* 8, no. 4: 36-38. Retrieved from: <http://www.beyondintractability.org/articlessummary/10223/>.
- Galtung, J. (1971). Structural theory of imperialism. *Journal of Peace Research* 8, no. 2: 81-117.
- Helin, C. (2006). *Dances with dependency: Indigenous success through self-reliance*. Vancouver, BC: Orca Spirit Publishing.
- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (1996). *Report of the royal commission on Aboriginal peoples: Looking forward, looking back*. Ottawa, ON: Canada Communication Group.
- Indian and Northern Affairs Canada. (2008a). *Statement of apology*. Retrieved from: <http://www.aainc.gc.ca/ai/rqpi/apo/index-eng.asp>.
- Jeong, H. (2000a). *Peace and conflict studies: An introduction*. Hants, UK: Ashgate Publishing.
- Jeong, H. (2000b). Peace building in identity driven ethnopolitical conflicts. In Byrne, S. & C. Irvin, (eds), Dixon, P., Polkinghorn, B. & J. Senehi, assoc. (eds). *Reconcilable differences: Turning points in ethnopolitical conflict*. West Hartford, CT: Kumarian Press.
- Kriesberg, L. (1984). Policy continuity and change. *Social Problems* 32-2: 89-102.
- Lederach, J. (1995). *Preparing for peace: Conflict transformation across cultures*. Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press.
- Lederach, J. (2003). *The little book of conflict transformation: Clear articulation of the guiding principles by a pioneer in the field*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books.
- Martin, P. (2006). House of Commons speech on the *Kelowna Accord Implementation Act*. Retrieved from: <http://www.paulmartin.ca/en/speeches-20060602-1>.
- McCullagh, J. (1899). The Indian potlatch. Substance of a paper read before C.M.S. annual conference at Metlakatla, B.C. Toronto, ON: Woman's Missionary Society of the Methodist Church. Retrieved from: <http://www.canadiana.org>

- Metro Coalition for a Non-Racist Society. (2006). The Kelowna accord: Closing the gap? Retrieved from: http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/CommunitySupport/MCNRS/AboriginalRightsPanel/KelownaAccordBackgrounder_short.pdf
- National Aboriginal Database. (2009). Retrieved from: <http://epe.lacbac.gc.ca/100/205/301/ic/cdc/aboriginaldocs/m-stat.htm>
- Osei-Hwedie, B., & Rankopo, M., (2010). "Indigenous conflict in Africa: The case of Ghana and Botswana." In Osei-Hwedie, B., & Rankopo, M. *Cultural bases of conflict, conflict resolution and peacebuilding in Africa*. University of Botswana: Gabarone, BW.
- Patterson, L. (2006). Aboriginal roundtable to Kelowna Accord: Aboriginal policy negotiations 2004-2006. Ottawa, ON: Library of Parliament, Parliamentary information and research division. Retrieved from: <http://www.parl.gc.ca/information/library/PRBpubs/prb0604-e.htm>
- Petoukhov, K. (2013). Recognition, redistribution, and representation: Assessing the transformative potential of reparations for the Indian residential schools experience. *McGill sociological review*, 3: 73-91.
- Rothman, J. (1997). *Resolving identity-based conflicts in nations, organizations, and communities*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Saskatchewan Indian. (1975). *Government Indian policy in Canada*. Retrieved from: <http://www.sicc.sk.ca/saskindian/a75our06.htm>
- Thira. D. (2009). Beyond the four waves of colonization. Retrieved from: <http://www.swaraj.org/fourwaves.htm>
- Thomas, R. (2003). Can money undo the past? A Canadian example. *Comparative Education* 39-3: 331-343.
- University of Calgary. (2000). Canada's First Nations: Treaty evolution. Retrieved from: http://www.ucalgary.ca/applied_history/tutor/firstnations/treaty.html.
- University of Waterloo (n.d.) *Public Apology Database*. CCM Lab: University of Waterloo, Waterloo, ON. Retrieved from: <http://ccmlab.uwaterloo.ca>.
- Tsosie, R. (2007). Acknowledging the past to heal the future: the role of reparations for native nations. *Reparations: Interdisciplinary Inquiries*, 43-68.
- Walker, M. U. (2010). Truth telling as reparations. *Metaphilosophy*, 41(4), 525-545.
- Wallace, Paul W. (1986). *The white roots of peace*. Saranac Lake, NY: Chauncy Press.
- Wilmot, W. & Hocker, J. (2007). *Interpersonal conflict*. (8th Ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill.
- Wolff, S. (2006). *Ethnic conflict: A global perspective*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Weyeneth, R. (2001). The power of apology and the process of historical reconciliation. *The Public Historian* 23-3: 9-38.a.