

ENVISIONING RESEARCH AND RECONCILIATION BASED ON RECIPROCITY: REFLECTIONS ON EMERSON IN CANADA'S OLDEST CONTINUOUS INDIGENOUS-EUROPEAN "MIDDLE GROUND"

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Just prior to the 500th anniversary of Christopher Columbus' transatlantic voyage, historian Richard White published a seminal book entitled *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650-1815* (1991). In it, he presented a history of almost 200 years of contact and interaction in this broad region that was not defined by European imposition and Indigenous resistance. Rather, it was marked by a sustained balance of power between diverse European and Indigenous groups – and people(s) born in between them – who had to operate on, create, or discover, a middle ground, searching for accommodation and common meaning. White (1991) observed that he was surprised by this conclusion, despite the unambiguous evidence – a surprise echoed by many scholars, especially in the US.¹

What I found most striking, in contrast, was not White's findings, but the surprise with which his findings were met by so many.² The general North American situation in 1991 was such that few could imagine any history of Europeans and Indigenous relations that did not entail progressive encroachment by Europeans, slowed only by receding Indigenous resistance and the inability of Europeans to either force their way or to suppress resurgence.³

If I saw things differently – and I was by no means unique in this regard – it was not because I had more imagination, or insight.⁴ It was for a very simple reason: my perspective was anchored in a sub-arctic context, in an Indigenous-European middle ground that also began in the 1600s, but did not collapse – as it did in the Great Lakes region after 1815. Instead, it has persisted – thought not without challenges or weak points and periods – to the present.

After moving south for post-secondary education, the contrast between Euro-Canadian and Indigenous demographic, cultural and political power was far more apparent. Also more apparent, however, was a shift from focus on the "Indian Problem" to focus the "Canada Problem." In their article on the latter theme, David Newhouse and Yale Belanger (2016) outline the low points of the Indigenous marginalization, but they also point out that since the failure of the 1969 "White Paper," the Canadian state has stopped driving the agenda in this regard; instead, it has been reacting to what John Ralston Saul has characterized more recently *The Comeback* (2014) by Indigenous peoples, starting with a demographic resurgence.

- 1 He saw his thesis as so radically new that he was hesitant to publish any of his early findings until he had completed all his research (White, 1991).
- 2 As one of the exceptions, James A. Clifton (1993) was critical of White's presentation of his theoretical approach and findings as entirely new.
- 3 Bruce Trigger for example, expressed reservations about the "middle ground" thesis as follows: "For Europeans the spirit of accommodation lasted only until they acquired sufficient power to dominate native people. Given the arrogance of Europeans, once the middle ground ceased to serve their ends, it might never have existed." (1992, p. 422).
- 4 It is through relationship that I have gained any knowledge or experience worth sharing, and if I listed all those who have indirectly helped me develop this article, it would produce a footnote longer than the main text of the article. What follows is a list of those who have offered comments and feedback specifically on this article: Roger Chum, Leila Inksetter, David Newhouse, Damian Costello, Leonard Rickard, Paul McLeod, Rose Anne Chabot, Adam Szymanski, Ken Coates, Dick Preston, Mishi (Lillian) Trapper, Toby Morantz, Fred Lazarus, Kaiatanoron Mayo, Wesley Cote, Meagan Commonda, Catherine Twinn, Catherine Lawson, and Vincent Gautier-Doucet. I am especially grateful to Frédérique Cornellier for her extensive input on various versions and her willingness to be a sounding board as I worked through challenging questions while editing successive versions. I am also grateful to the two peer reviewers, whose comments helped improve the article in key ways. Finally, I am grateful to Suzy Basile & Sébastien Brodeur-Girard for the invitation to present at the 4th Seminar on the Ethics of Research with Aboriginal Peoples hosted by the School of Indigenous Studies of the Université du Québec en Abitibi-Témiscamingue, First Peoples Pavilion, Val-d'Or campus, November 2018.



This is certainly backed up by Canadian census data, which shows that the Indigenous percentage of the Canadian population is on the rise. It was 2.8% in 1996 and twenty years later it was 4.9%. In the last ten years, it has risen at a rate four times that of the non-Indigenous population. Moreover, this increase in proportion persists despite the fact that the number of non-Indigenous people is bolstered by a massive annual influx of immigrants. It is true that there has been an increase in people who identify as Indigenous. Yet the growing Indigenous percentage of the Canadian population is primarily a reflection of a much younger population with an average age of 32.1 versus 40.9 in the Canadian population as a whole. Similarly, 26.8% of the Indigenous population is aged 14 and under compared with 16.4% of the Canadian population as a whole (Statistics Canada, 2017).⁵ There is likewise a higher birthrate (2.2% versus 1.6% in 2011) among the Indigenous population, though there are significant variations in this regard within both Indigenous and non-Indigenous populations (Statistics Canada, 2015). Nevertheless, the statistics frame Indigenous people as very much a minority, and this reinforces the sense of demographic marginalization from which Indigenous people are said to be rebounding.

Yet statistics are often incomplete and misleading. Even during the lowest point of their population decline, Indigenous peoples' demographic marginalization has been limited to the margins of the Indigenous territories over which Canada claims sovereignty. This is a very intentional inversion of perspectives centred in southern Canada and the post-Confederation era. When I teach Indigenous studies, even my Indigenous students are often struck by this assertion.

Indigenous people have never ceased to be a significant majority in the majority of Canadian territory. Beyond a relatively narrow southern strip of territory running parallel to the US border and certain northern urban centres, Indigenous people have never ceased to be the majority, albeit with a much lower population density. The most recent statistics affirm that they are the overall majority in the three territories, which constitute 39.3% of Canada's land mass, and throughout vast tracts of the provincial north. In the Nunavik region, for example, which constitutes another 5% of Canada's land mass and a third of Quebec, the population is 90% Inuit or Cree (Statistics Canada, 2021). Indigenous peoples' uninterrupted majority occupation of the majority of Canada is a fact that highlights the need for envisioning reciprocity, especially when one considers the importance of natural resources for both non-Indigenous and Indigenous

economic prosperity. Throughout the longest period of Indigenous-European interactions in the majority of this territory, to ignore this fact was to risk one's life and livelihood.

I spent the first eighteen years of my life in this majority Indigenous majority of "Canadian" territory (the quotation marks acknowledge the contested nature of Canadian claims to this territory). When White published *The Middle Ground*, I was completing high school in the majority-Cree municipality of Moosonee, characterized by most Ontarians as the end of the province's northern rail and its gateway to the arctic. For me, and many of my classmates from the island of Moose Factory, crossing the Moose River to attend school in the younger mainland community was a first experience of life away from home, but still in a Cree-centred world. When the river was freezing or breaking up, making boat or ice-road transportation impossible, we would fly over by helicopter and stay the week in the old "barracks," on the former Cold War radar base that had been partly transformed into Northern Lights Secondary School. I was residing in these barracks when I witnessed from afar, in November 1989, the dismantling of the concrete wall that had divided East and West Berlin into foreign territories for decades. It was a lesson that lines of division and unity are not always as simple as they might appear.

5 Note that the nadir of Indigenous population decline was about a century ago, and coincided with the peak in the rate of non-Indigenous population growth (through natural increase and immigration).

Although residents of my home community considered Canada a foreign country in the early twentieth-century, they also hosted, by the end of the century, Canada Day celebrations that surpassed anything I later experienced as an Ottawa resident. By the eve of Canada's 150th anniversary, however, enthusiasm for such celebration had been dampened – in Ottawa, Moose Factory and elsewhere. If 1989 was a watershed moment in relations between Eastern and Western Europe, 2015 was perhaps an equivalent watershed moment in Canada, for Indigenous peoples and the Canadian state.

In 2015, the release of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's (TRC) final report showed how much Canada's future depended on coming to terms with its post-Confederation colonial past. Scholarly research was highlighted as both a principal means of wider transformation, as well as a principal site in need of reform. This was made clear by the TRC research process, report and calls to action, and by the statements, commitments and actions that subsequently emanated from scholarly institutions.

Yet the seeds for both the TRC and its wider impact were planted or cultivated thirty years earlier, by the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples and those who participated in it across Canada – above all, Indigenous people, to a degree never before seen in such a

national public process. I recall well the visit of the Commissioners to my high school, and my participation in a talking circle with Commissioner George Erasmus. Such scenes were repeated across Canada, in urban, rural and remote communities. By the end of its five-year mandate in 1996, RCAP had produced or elicited an unprecedented volume of archival and community-based research involving and relating to diverse Indigenous peoples, and their relations with diverse non-Indigenous peoples and, above all, the Canadian state.

It was not just RCAP's research output, however, but its approach to research input that had a transformative impact. If Canada's research *Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* (TCPS) has a chapter dedicated to Indigenous research (CIHR, NSERC, and SSHRC, 2018), it is largely because of the work of the Royal Commission and the ethical standards it set for such research.⁶ Although far less extensive, the Indian Claims Commission (set up at the same time to review rejected Specific Claims) also championed and integrated community-based research and oral history testimony. I witnessed this first hand during my five years as an ICC historian, where I also served as the first chair of its research ethics committee. Both these commissions ultimately owe their existence to local and national Indigenous mobilization and protests during the 1990 Oka Crisis, another

significant watershed moment in the history of Indigenous relations with the Canadian state.

A quarter century after RCAP, research and research ethics remain a precise and foundational focal point for reconciliation and decolonization discussions and efforts. Thanks to visionary Indigenous and non-Indigenous scholars and leaders – and the grassroots Indigenous mobilization that amplified their voices – much has been accomplished. Reconciliation and decolonization are now commonplace themes in university contexts, where research by and with Indigenous peoples is also far from counter-cultural. Amidst this tremendous Indigenous-led transformation, however, obstacles and challenges continue to manifest themselves in old and new ways, and there is a growing need for critical reflection on how we envision reconciliation and decolonization – if we do at all. While praising Richard White's *The Middle Ground*, Daniel K. Richter also warned that "future scholars ... may become so enamored of the middle ground ... that they lose track of the underlying power relationships and conflicts that made that ground so fragile" (1992, p. 716).

What is the nature of these "underlying power relationships," and what will they look like once reconciliation and decolonization are no longer needed? Such a situation may be difficult to imagine, for one would be hard pressed



6 David Newhouse, personal communication. David Newhouse is Professor of Indigenous Studies and Director of the Chanie Wenjack School for Indigenous Studies at Trent University. He was a member of the policy team on economics for the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. He has coedited with Katherine A.H. Graham, a book (2021) that examines the legacy of RCAP.



to find any human society that has no need for reconciliation. Indigenous North America at the time of contact was no less a “Common and Contested Ground”⁷ than Europe was in the same period, and disrespect or struggles for rights rooted in prior relationship to specific lands and resources did not *originate* with Columbus’ arrival. On the other hand, why do we face the challenge of reconciliation on the scale we do today, or along the lines drawn by our frequently polarized differences and politicized identities? Was this inevitable? If *indigenous* rights had received more respect, or if no mass migration or power imbalance had arisen to permit their widespread disrespect, would the *same* pan-*Indigenous* identity, or any such identity, have formed on top of, or between, Omushkego, Eeyou, Innu, Wabanaki, Dene, Anishinabe, Haudenosaunee, Siksika, Sto:lo, Inuit, and so many other diverse peoples?⁸ How do we dig deeper into what went wrong without losing sight of the lessons of what went right, or vice versa? How do we identify and uproot systemic injustices and prejudices, or compensate for power imbalances without letting these same problems interpret, define and confine the totality of our past, present and future identities and relationships?

It is easy to read the present as the inevitable outcome of the past, rather than one of many possible results of a messy encounter between factors within and beyond the scope of human freedom. But such a deterministic view of the past constricts our ability to *passer à l’avenir*, as Jocelyn Létourneau (2000) argues so eloquently. How could we hope for, let alone demand of ourselves or others, anything different or better? The answer found by some has been to suppress or cancel those who fall on the wrong side of their vision of a deterministic and/or progressivist history, but what lessons from history need to be ignored to believe this capable of achieving any good? Reflecting on his personal and extensive experience, in the Soviet Gulag, of the human capacity for inhumanity in the name of human progress, Aleksandr Isayevich Solzhenitsyn writes as follows: “If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being” (1974, p. 168). If neither good intentions, generational or structural change, nor a mere shift in the balance of power can ensure justice, then sustained critical reflection is needed on how we might risk getting reconciliation and decolonization wrong.

It may seem that good relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples are something we have to build from our imagination, with no prior examples to work from. Yet, are there no models of relations formed between them, such that these categories were not the primary way of thinking of each other? What can we learn in this respect from the genesis of the Métis, or from those métis individuals and populations that never identified as such because interculturality and intermarriage were seen as unexceptional?⁹ By “we,” I mean all of us, non-Indigenous, Indigenous, and those who fit poorly into these categories.

“Do not give others that which is superfluous to you; give them what they need. Give and receive with all your heart” (Léger, 2018). What would our relationships look like if we were guided by an ethic of reciprocity, solidarity, and magnanimity: by a commitment to see, emphasize, cultivate and share, in a spirit of service, what is best in ourselves and each other? More precisely, what would they look like in the context of research? And how do we envision, foster and live such relationships now? I do not propose to answer all these challenging questions, but to reflect on them in and through a particular context and perspective. My hope is to help foster research relationships founded not only on reciprocity,

- 7 An allusion to Theodore Binnema’s *Common and Contested Ground: A Human and Environmental History of the Northwestern Plains* (2004). The comparison to Europe is mine not Binnema’s.
- 8 I do not capitalize “indigenous” in the first instance to emphasize that its use as an adjective, to describe the nature of people’s relationships to land and relative newcomers, necessarily precedes its use as a proper noun to describe those same peoples.
- 9 The Métis Nation did not emerge in the 19th century because métissage came to be seen as exceptional, but for other particular socio-economic reasons. See Nicole St-Onge (2006). In some contexts, people of mixed ancestry have often hidden their Indigenous heritage because it was looked down on by others, but my point is to ask what we can learn from contexts where it was neither hidden and nor seen notable or exceptional.

solidarity and magnanimity (concepts I will define more fully below), but also on a deep understanding and appreciation of the shared humanity that precedes, permeates and transcends our differences.

As I write this, the words of Dakota (Santee) poet, John Trudell, resonate powerfully in my memory:

We're starting to not recognize ourselves as human beings. We're too busy trying to protect the idea of a Native American or an Indian, but we're not Indians and we're not Native Americans. We're older than both concepts. We're the people.¹⁰ We're the human beings (cited in Diamond, 2009).

The point is not to dismiss the relational and cultural specificity and diversity of our lived humanity, but to emphasize the primacy of our shared humanity. In responding to a draft of this article, Meagan Commonda shared the Anishinabe teachings on reciprocity she received in her formative years. She also echoes Trudell's emphasis on a shared humanity:

... the concept of reciprocity ... taught to us during the formative years ... can be applied in all aspects and levels of life: Never take more than what you need, and what you do take, you must return something of equal value. This can be in terms of harvesting, hunting, as well as knowledge. Any time there is something to be learned from something or someone, we must always give back. This has been the foundation of my belief system, including the work I do in the P[ublic] S[ervice]. Asking Indigenous communities to offer their insights and knowledge towards initiatives means eventually and hopefully producing work that will give back and benefit the communities. ... you have captured those concepts ... in a way that moves away from the "Them vs. Us" narrative (personal communication, March 12, 2021).

It is not always easy to move away from a "Them vs Us" narrative, but this is the challenge of decolonization: to recover the freedom to see the differences and commonalities of our shared humanity. Eight years ago, Meagan spoke to this in her feedback on a course on Colonialism and Indigenous Peoples:

I felt at first that Cecil ... was referring to ... another form of assimilation, but now I see that he ... would like to see something that respects both the personal and the community aspect of what it means to be human. ... I know that I still have a long way to go in order to become fully decolonized. I am still dealing with some anger and hurt of what the residential schools era has left us with ... but I know now that unity between Indigenous peoples and Settlers is possible. This was not something I thought I would be able to see prior to taking this class so that I say Miigwetch!¹¹

The reflections I have to offer in this article are rooted in conversations and relationships that preceded this course and have continued since. They are more foundational or philosophical in nature, but they have tangible implications. Moreover, they conclude with pragmatic and specific suggestions for Canada's research Tri-Council (and other research agencies) that may help transform how we see past, present and future research relationships, and the wider mutually influential relationships in which they play a key role.

10 The "people" is the literal translation of the terms many Indigenous people use for themselves: Anishinabe, Inuit, Dene, etc.

11 Meagan Commonda, comments on 2013 course on Colonialism and Indigenous Peoples, University of Ottawa. Although I was only a Teaching Assistant for this course, I took on a co-teaching role and led several full-class discussions (with a hundred students) on challenging questions that many students identified as transformational for the course: "What does it mean to be Indigenous?" and "What is your vision of a Decolonized Canada?" Dr. Wesley Cote, medical doctor and grandson of Anishinabe Elder William Commannda, also read a draft of this article, and gave permission to quote from his feedback on the course: "One day in class Cecil threw out a question that got everyone ... thinking and talking ... 'if you could picture Canada in 50 years what would it look like?' Cecil also asked people not to have fear and just let things out. ... We talked about this for a couple of classes and then Cecil gave his impression of what this might look like. His was similar to my idea ... even though it was a look into the future, it was like we would take a step back into the past. I say this because his vision is exactly the way our people used to live before contact and I found it nice to hear a vision like this; it reminded me of my gramps' vision [William Commannda] where people of all colours could live together. They would celebrate both their similarities and differences." Wesley played a key role in helping this discussion go forward when he quoted his grandfather on the need for a vision, as some students felt such a discussion was distracting from the urgencies of now (this was in the middle of the Idle No More movement).





Although this text is inevitably somewhat autobiographical, my emphasis is on the self-in-relation, because the vision and hope I share are not founded on innovative insight, creative imagination, utopic aspirations or naïve optimism. Rather, they are grounded in personal and practical experience that originated with my *emersion* in Moose Factory and Moosonee, two subarctic James Bay communities in the homeland of the Mōsonīw Ililiwak (Moose Cree) that are also home to other Omushkego (Ontario) Cree, as well as Eeyou (Quebec) Cree, and others of diverse and mixed origins. As noted earlier, Moosonee is a majority Cree municipality and Moose Factory is a two-by-three mile island divided between Moose Cree First Nation's primary reserve land and a smaller off-reserve section where many of MoCreebec Eyoud (*Moose Factory* and Moosonee residents who are *Crees* originally from the territory now part of Quebec) live, along with others. When one zooms in on these communities – as I shall do later in this article – multiple, interlaced and sometimes competing Indigenous identities come into focus that do not coincide neatly with these jurisdictional boundaries or the two distinct treaties that were signed by ancestors or relatives of those who live there: Treaty No 9, signed by the Omushkego Cree in 1905, and the 1975 James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement, signed in 1975.

I was born in Moose Factory the year this second treaty was signed, and I spent the first 18 years of my life on this island community, living a stone's

throw from the grandson of one of Moose Cree First Nation's Treaty No. 9 signatories. Family trips south were very limited, at most a few weeks every second summer or so. With a few temporary exceptions, I was the only person without Omushkego or Eeyou Cree ancestry in my class: a fact that some never noticed, others considered irrelevant, and a minority never let me forget. On the other hand, all but few of my Cree classmates had some admixture of Orcadian, Scottish, English, French, Norwegian, or other non-Cree ancestry, and only a few were fluent in Cree (an exception among James Bay communities). It was only in high school that I participated in more frequent sports trips, to Timmins and other neighbouring northern Ontario communities. I also met more first-language Cree speakers of my age, whose families came from more northerly Omushkego communities.

To be clear, my perspective is that of a non-Cree born and raised in what was for me a predominantly Cree world. But I use the term *emersion* and not *immersion*, because in contrast to my parents and others who were immersed in this world when they moved here, it was in this broader Cree-centred world that I emerged. It is a world, moreover, that remains one of two primary focal and reference points for my scholarship and work, my relationships, my overall quest for understanding, and my sense of self-in-relation. My perspective is profoundly shaped by Cree elders, leaders, scholars, mentors and role models, both in their articulation of their own traditions and their engagement with

ideas and ideals that originated elsewhere, Christianity especially. Finally, I have learned as much from non-Cree elders, scholars, leaders, mentors and role models who have engaged no less seriously with Cree intellectual and spiritual traditions. In addition to these positive models and lessons, there have also been negative models and lessons. This echoes Cree elder and scholar Louis Bird's observation about traditional Cree and Judeo-Christian narratives: they recount, time and again, what happens when people abandon or distort what they know to be true and right, including the ethical principles that find unique expression in these traditions and in their mutually transformative encounter (2007).

To round out the picture, I was raised and educated by parents from the "two solitudes" (more precisely, French Catholic *Québec* and English Loyalist Protestant New Brunswick) who met on the frontier between Cree and Inuit territory (in Northern Quebec). Not surprisingly, as teachers who became missionaries, the perspectives and commitments they shared with their closest Cree friends did not always line up with those defined as "secular" or "progressive." This made me acutely aware that questions of reconciliation, resurgence and even decolonization could be interpreted very differently, that they extended beyond Indigenous contexts while also intersecting with them in mutually influential ways. This also helped me understand the critical need to balance a penetrating, nuanced, contextualized critique of what went wrong, *in our respective and shared*

histories, with an equally attentive and careful examination of what went right, and to anchor both in a deep appreciation and affirmation of our shared humanity. In this regard, the importance of Cree and other Indigenous cultures transcends their particular contexts.

If I am interested in the relevance of reciprocity for Indigenous research, it is also because I see the trans-cultural relevance of Indigenous research, knowledge and experience for understanding and living this and similar ideals. Likewise, my interest in Cree intellectual and cultural history is not merely a question of where I am from, but of what this has taught me about being human and living well in relation to our human and other-than-human world. This is an especially relevant question now, amidst increasing political and cultural polarization, and the need for greater solidarity on pressing questions relating to environmental sustainability, bio-ethics, and philosophical anthropology. “*Solidarity* ... is not a feeling of vague compassion or shallow distress at the misfortunes of so many people, both near and far. On the contrary, it is a *firm and persevering determination* to commit oneself to the *common good*; that is to say to the good of *all* and of each individual, because we are all really responsible *for all*” (John Paul II, 1987).¹² Such critical questions

make it all the more important to envision and enact research founded on reciprocity, solidarity and magnanimity, and to draw relevant lessons from our distinct and shared experience.

In this regard, the reflections I offer here are closely linked to my current SSHRC-funded post-doctoral research, as well as my experience working with a non-profit organization that I helped set up in my home community when I started my SSHRC-funded doctoral research more than a decade ago. They also draw on conversations I have been a part of as a non-Indigenous member of SSHRC’s Indigenous Advisory Circle since its creation in 2014, as well as prior consulting work for the Interagency Secretariat on Research Ethics, on principles and best practices for Indigenous research.¹³ Finally, they also draw on a wide range of other Indigenous-related professional, volunteer, and academic experience in intentionally diverse contexts and roles.

My post-doctoral research project is entitled “Envisioning a Reconciled Canada: Lessons in Leadership and Reciprocity from the James Bay Cree and Fifty Years of a Transformative YMCA Program among them.”¹⁴ As I made clear in my application for funding, however, I was seeking support for my contribution to a project that originat-

ed and developed in conversation with others, and can only be completed in partnership with them. In fact, this research project originates in the shared experience and appreciation of leadership teachings anchored in the ideals of reciprocity and magnanimity. Moreover, I would not be writing this text or exploring these questions were it not for the profound influence and confluence – in my own life and others – of Cree leadership teachings and examples, and of the Moose Factory YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Association) Leaders Corps.

This leadership program, entirely volunteer-driven, was founded in 1967 by John Delaney and others as an extension of the Midland YMCA. Although it ran primarily in Moose Factory, it also had participants from Moosonee and offshoots and influence in other communities in Omushkego Aski and Eeyou Istchee. Further research is needed to fully understand, contextualize and critically assess the principles, examples and legacies that define this program, its founders and leaders, and those who have shaped it with their participation. Nevertheless, the immediate evidence suggests a profoundly positive impact. Today, decades after having first met him, the Director General of the Cree School Board of Quebec, Abraham Jolly, still refers to John Delaney as a mod-



12 Italics in original. I cite this source because the most widespread and developed articulation of the concept of solidarity is found in the tradition of Catholic Social Teaching.
13 Cecil Chabot (principal researcher) and Brent Faulkner, “Review and Analysis of Ethical Principles and Best Practices for Research involving Aboriginal Communities, of Federal Departments and Agencies, Canadian Universities, Colleges, Provinces and Territories,” Final Report Submitted to the Interagency Secretariat on Research Ethics, March 31, 2005. This was prepared in anticipation of the revisions to the TCPS2.
14 To be clear, envisioning a reconciled Canada does mean committing to the preservation of the existing political and legal structures that make Canada what it is today. It means being committed to reciprocity between those who find themselves bound – through no choice of their own usually – by a relationship of shared citizenship, even if the fullness of reciprocity and renewal relations might mean unbinding, rethinking and transcending these existing bonds of citizenship. Whatever new or revised political and legal structures are put in place, they have to protect the responsibilities and rights that flow from real relationships on the ground.



el teacher in his talks to Cree School Board teachers (personal communication, April 2018). Yvonne Morrison, the Executive Director of Omushkego Education, the regional equivalent for Ontario, is a former leader in the program. So too are Heather Moore, Executive Director of the Moose Cree Education Authority; Dorinda Vincent, Executive Director of the Moose Cree Health Authority; and Doug Jeffries, Director of Moose Cree Youth Services. Most significantly, at the request of the youth themselves, Moose Cree First Nation has established a John R. Delaney Youth Centre (Barrie Advance, 2009).

“Mr. D” as so many of us came to call him, arrived in Moose Factory in the late 1960s as an 18-year-old Indian Residential/Day School teacher and eventually retired from the provincial public school system. He married Grace Visitor, a Cree woman who also strongly influenced the program and remains a recognized leader in her own right. With the exception of a few years in Fort George, they lived together in Moose Factory until John’s passing in 2005. The eldest of their three children, Christina Linklater, still runs the program. The structure remains relatively simple: John and Christina have recruited and trained young people as coaches in sports programs, putting them in positions of leadership and responsibility where they serve and mentor younger children. If the impact has been profound, however, it is due

to a core emphasis not on athletics but on the reciprocal nature of authentic leadership. This ethos is captured in the lines of the YMCA “Leaders Creed” that former Leaders Corps members from the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee quoted in a plaque awarded to John, commending him for his service: “I believe in the greatness of myself and that I am in this world for a purpose, that purpose being to put back into life more than I have taken out.” This is the essence of magnanimity.¹⁵

This post-doctoral research project brings me back to where I started. Developed in partnership with many of the people and organizations mentioned above, it aspires to follow the same ethic of reciprocity, solidarity, and magnanimity that defined the program. We share the conviction that this program made a difference not because it replaced, or filled a hole in, traditional Cree leadership examples and teachings about reciprocity. Rather, it was successful because it resonated deeply with Cree emphasis on seeing, cultivating and sharing the best in oneself and others. Regardless of what nuances, corrections or elaborations our research may require in this regard, there is much to be learned from this unfolding history, not only locally and regionally, but also nationally. The focal point of the research is the Leaders Corps program, its relationship to traditional Cree leadership ideas and ideals, and, above all, the personal ex-

periences and understandings of their points of convergence, complementarity or divergence. Yet attention is also being given to the broader historical context in which their encounter must be understood: the history of the James Bay Cree and their relations with newcomers over more than three centuries. The outcomes envisioned included scholarly publications and activities, but above all community-based and community-focused outcomes and activities, including some that can have positive impacts well beyond, both regionally and nationally.

In this regard, this post-doctoral research project and the present text are also closely tied to my volunteer work over the last decade as a founding board member of the Moose River Heritage and Hospitality Association. This non-profit association unites grassroots and jurisdictional members – Moose Cree First Nation (part of Mushkegowuk Council), MoCreebec Eeyou Council of the Cree Nation (of Eeyou Istchee), and the Town of Moosonee – around the motto of “building a future with our shared past” (www.mrhha.ca). The mission, vision and guiding principles embody Cree understandings of reciprocity and hospitality, and are worth citing in their entirety:

VISION STATEMENT:

We share an interest in the rich historical and cultural heritage of Moose Factory, Moosonee and the Moose

15 The plaque is in possession of Grace Delaney, widow of John Delaney. Drawing from Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics* and other sources, Alexandre Havard (2007) identifies magnanimity as virtue specific to leadership: the habit of looking for, and drawing out, the best in oneself and others – striving for excellence – for the sake of serving others better. It is intimately linked to humility, which is not about thinking poorly of oneself. Rather it means recognizing what we have received as gifts (starting with life itself), recognizing that others have also received talents and gifts, and that all these gifts are received in order to serve others. Humility is the habit of truthfulness and service.

River region. That historical and cultural heritage is primarily Omushkego, but includes major contributions from other peoples, contributions that have become part of the present-day community's political, social, religious, economic and cultural fabric, in the course of its long evolution that predates Moose Factory's establishment as a fur-trade post in 1673. As demonstrated by our communities' additional Eeyou, Orcadian, Scottish, English, Norwegian and French heritage, hospitality has long been one of the most important aspects of Moose Cree and Omushkego culture.

MISSION STATEMENT:

The purpose of this association is to preserve, document, promote and perpetuate our historical and cultural heritage and our tradition of hospitality. We believe that this will have enormous benefits for ourselves, our communities as well as a broader society to which we continue to contribute. Our non-profit association draws on the support of our leadership, councils and jurisdictions, and includes elders, youth, harvesters, community members and hosts, film-makers, librarians, spiritual leaders, community researchers and educators, university and college professors and students, musicians, artists and many others who have a passion for our combined heritage.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES:

- We are committed to working and consulting with our leaders, public servants, elders, youth, and many others – inside and outside our communities – who share a passion for our combined heritage.
- We are committed to ensuring that all our members have an active role in refining our vision, defining our objectives and achieving our goals.
- We are committed to respecting, revitalizing and celebrating the richness of our cultural, linguistic and spiritual heritage, and recognizing and respecting our relationships with the land and all those around us.
- We are committed to thinking big and starting small, to local capacity-building and volunteerism, to fostering a culture of personal responsibility towards others.¹⁶

Our mission and vision connect education, culture, language, arts, music, heritage, history, economic and community development. (In the midst of drafting this article, I have taken up the part-time role of Executive Director of this association.) We are currently preparing a commemoration in 2023 of 350 years of Transatlantic Cree-European relations since the establishment

of Moose Factory as a year-round fur-trade post in 1673. We see this anniversary, however, as an opportunity to explore the wider and deeper history of the community and region: thus the phrase, "More than 350 years in the Making." Such a project inevitably raises questions and challenges of reconciliation and decolonization. Those involved in this initiative, however, share the view that the primary answers to these questions and challenges are also to be found in this same history, which holds important insights for anyone interested in helping form a new generation of leaders capable of envisioning and building reconciliation and decolonization.

With regard to leadership, decolonization and reconciliation, the last fifty years of James Bay Cree history – especially Eeyou Istchee history – already features very prominently in Canadian and international arenas. This is above all because of the *James Bay and Northern Quebec Agreement* signed in 1975.¹⁷ The JBNQA is not only the foundation of Canada's first and arguably most successful modern treaty relationship. It was also forged in tension with what remains Canada's largest hydro-electric development project, and with a predominantly francophone province, where this project was presented as a primary tool of *Québécois* nation-building and decolonization relative to English Canada. Operating under a



16 These statements and guidelines were drafted during a two-day community meeting held on November 20-21, 2008, organized by Laurie Sutherland and myself, and attended by Doug Jeffries, Clarence Trapper, Bert Wapachee, Geraldine Govender, Allan Jolly, Sinclair Trapper, Bert Morrison, Jimmy Kapashesit, John Beck, Victor Linklater, Stan Louttit, Greg Williams, Greg Spence and Richard Grom. See Chabot and Sutherland (2009).

17 Signatories to the JBNQA include the Government of Quebec, the James Bay Energy Corporation, the James Bay Development Corporation, Hydro-Québec, the Grand Council of the Crees (of Quebec), the Northern Quebec Inuit Association, and the Government of Canada.

nationalist banner of “*Maitres chez nous*” (“masters in our own house”), Robert Bourassa, René Lévesque, and other Quebec leaders were quickly confronted with the fact that others had prior and priority moral and legal claims to most of the house, having lived there since time beyond memory. This was especially true for that enormous territory, “*Nouveau Québec*,” where the name itself underlined that the province’s history and presence in the region was recent and minimal.

Commenting shortly after the close of the JBNQA negotiations, Cree Grand Chief Billy Diamond stated: “It has been a tough fight, and our people are still very much opposed to the project, but they realize that they must share their resources” (cited in Richardson, 1975, 404). Ultimately, a hydroelectric project that was expected to help give birth to a modern *Québécois* nation-state, also inadvertently helped give birth to a modern Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee, which now has embassies to the UN, Canada and Quebec. Despite the 1975 agreement, implementation issues and disputes continued to fester for decades. This is not surprising given that the relationship was forged in a context marked by ignorance, imposition, misapprehension, resistance, confrontation and often reluctant compromise between competing and deeply compelling nation-building projects that are each viewed in some measure as emancipative by their proponents.

It was only after the signing of the “Paix des Braves” agreement in 2002 that the Quebec-Cree relationship began to significantly improve, leading to the recent major agreement, in February 2020, on a 30-year joint development plan. Grand Chief Abel Bosum attributes this new relationship in large part to “the courage of our Cree community members who shared their knowledge, and of the government officials who listened to them” (2020)¹⁸. This sentiment has been echoed by others, such as Cree Nation Government Executive Director, Bill Namagoose, who recently praised one Quebec leader as “one of the brave ones on the Québec side that negotiated the historic and transformative Paix des Braves between the Cree Nation and Québec” (2020).

As pointed out by Richard Preston, a scholar highly respected in Eeyou Istchee and Omushkego Aski, the Cree approach was to act according to the principle of reciprocity and to hold out hope that the other side would respond:

I find that the political stance of Cree leaders has sometimes very effectively emphasized the morality of personal autonomy, placing hope at the front and trying to expand public awareness, in preference to protesting the politics of minority group identity in opposition to hegemonic national identities. The goal is to maintain respect relations, even when they are not reciprocated. In

a fashion reminiscent of Gandhi, the hope is that respect will eventually be reciprocated (Preston 2010, 287-288).¹⁹

Whatever shortfalls the JBNQA treaty relationship has – it is not without Indigenous and non-Indigenous critics – its successes are based in large part on an ethic of reciprocity and hope that has enabled the Cree to envision and work towards relationships that are not perpetually confined by any of the present-day problems or divisions they seek to resolve. This reciprocity and hope, in turn, must be understood in a longer pre-1975 historical context, and a deeper Cree cultural and philosophical framework.

The Cree – Eeyou and Omushkego Cree alike – have a long history of reciprocity with non-Indigenous people, examples of which have persisted even through the lowest points in Cree relations with federal and provincial governments. Like Gandhi, moreover, many of the Cree leaders who persisted in an ethic of reciprocity have been deeply influenced by a Cree engagement with Christianity that predates residential schools and has persisted in spite of their negative impact (Carlson, 2008; Morantz, 2002; Honigmann, 1958; Preston, 1987 & 1989; Long, 1986 & 1987). In other words, they have experience of successful relationships of reciprocity with new people and ideas, where newcomers have learned from

18 As Mishi (Lillian) Trapper points out, however, these agreements do not mean that all Eeyou leaders or community members were supportive.

19 See also Scott (1989) and Feit (1994).

them and vice versa; there are also many lessons of failures to live reciprocity, but such failures are not limited to post-contact experience or to newcomers – who often had much to learn about Cree expectations in this regard. On the contrary, Cree oral tradition is filled with ancient stories that make it clear this ethic is innate to no one. It must be learned and cultivated.

In 2017, I helped organize a panel at McGill University on the theme of “Indigenous Leadership, Governance and Development,” featuring Grand Chief Abel Bosum in conversation with former Canadian prime minister, the Right Honourable Paul Martin. In his presentation, the Grand Chief focused on his own and his people’s dramatic journey of the last fifty years, from what he aptly called the “invasion” of the 1970s, to the present day (McGill University, 2017). He started, however, by briefly summarizing the first three centuries of European contact in terms primarily of reciprocity and partnership. In this respect, he echoed many Cree knowledge-keepers and elders,²⁰ as well as non-Cree scholars and close collaborators, such as Daniel Francis and Toby Morantz (1985), whose history of the pre-1870 fur trade in eastern James Bay is entitled *Partners in Furs*. This view, as these authors pointed out, is a reminder of the problems of assigning one global interpretation to the history of fur-trade or other Indigenous-European relations in the Americas since 1492. Such histories may appear to be

marginal or isolated examples, or minor nuances in the general thrust of history, but Richard White’s work suggests otherwise. Regardless, without nuance and precision, even a decolonial narrative risks colonizing the past, present, and future with an interpretive imperialism that may prove as destructive as the imperialism and colonialism it legitimately opposes. It may also impose a marginalized and colonized identity on people who are simply centred elsewhere. And yet, many still see the integration of Indigenous peoples within the Canadian system, or Indigenous knowledge within Western academia for example, as the measure of their relevance or success, or of Canada’s decolonization. This is not an argument against intercultural dialogue and exchange, or for ignoring real instances of marginalization and colonization. Rather it is a reminder, echoing others, that we need to relativize our notions of centre and periphery and avoid reading the worst into every situation. Indigenous peoples may be a minority within Canada as a whole, for example, but they have never ceased to be the majority in the majority of Canadian territory.

Moose Factory and Moosonee may seem isolated from southern Canadian perspectives, but I did not see these communities as a marginal spaces. Rather they were, and are, Cree-centred gathering places and connection points with a wider world that we encountered – some more gradually than

others – through film and television. Well before the establishment of these permanent settlements, the Moose River estuary was a site for Omushekgo Cree summer gatherings. And it was because of this that the Hudson’s Bay Company established its second oldest fur-trade post here in 1673. By the 19th century, Moose Factory was the primary transportation and communication hub between the James Bay watershed, Canada and the North Atlantic World, and yet, most Cree hunters’ lives and livelihoods were still centred in the bush. Ellen Smallboy, who shared her life history – most of it spent on the land – with Regina Flannery in the 1930s, is a good example in this regard. She was not marginalized, let alone colonized; she was simply centred elsewhere (Flannery, 1995). The same can be said of those who called Moose Factory home for most of their lives, such as Ruby McLeod, who acted as interpreter for Flannery and Smallboy, as well as Nellie Faries, Ruby’s daughter, and her husband Gilbert. These two, who were long-time neighbours and friends of my family, were Cree but also had European heritage, as was typical in Moose Factory especially.

It was partly from a deep sense of transatlantic connection and reciprocity – present in their socio-economic and family relations, and reinforced by the signature of Treaty 9 in 1905 – that many James Bay Cree volunteered to serve in the First and Second World Wars. Gilbert, for example, was



20 John Kawapit, a Whapmagoostui elder, recounted to Pierre Trudel a story of first contact that frames the relationship in this way (Trudel, 1994, 94).

a Second World War veteran and Nellie contributed immensely on the home front in his absence. *Fur Country*, a National Film Board documentary completed in the midst of the war (Buckman, 1944), profiled Moose Factory as a Hudson's Bay Company town; a generation later, however, Cree filmmakers would present a very different picture of a much larger and predominantly Cree permanent settlement, with the fur trade as one component in a longer and broader history.²¹

Similar socioeconomic transitions occurred in other communities around the bay in this period, in large part because of the diminished capacity of the land and the declining fur trade to sustain a population that had continued growing, thanks in part to external help received in times of hardship (Chabot, 2008). Reciprocity in such times was still important for Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples alike, and the Great Depression and the two World Wars had prolonged this sense. By the postwar period, however, fur traders and non-Indigenous no longer faced the same necessity in this regard as they had previously, and certainly not as much as the Cree. Nevertheless, a new generation of strong leaders was emerging: people with wartime experience and a shared heritage profoundly shaped by Cree-European reciprocity and intermarriage. Among them were Munroe Linklater, Gilbert and Nellie, all of them former Moose Cree chiefs (or

acting chief). They helped guide their people through the transition from bush to community, from hunting and gathering to participation in an industrialized economy, and from traditional de-centralized self-governance to more formal and centralized self-governance within frameworks limited by the *Indian Act* and other colonial legislation.

During this period, the community did not escape the influence and impact of widespread ideas and ideologies of racial, civilizational, and evolutionary progress, difference or divergence. These assumptions were carried in by many outsiders and sharply critiqued by others, but they did not succeed in displacing or dominating a stronger sense of shared humanity and reciprocity. On the contrary, intermarriages and close friendships continued to be formed. One foreign medical doctor, who arrived in Moose Factory the 1950s, quickly found his notions of racial difference overturned, and soon developed close relationships. His comments are worth quoting:

When I first went to work among them ... I expected to find that these people would have an undeveloped brain with an undeveloped long-sighted eye of the primitive man. Never did I make such a mistake. ... Their language is like the people, logical, grammatical, imaginative and expressive It is certainly not that of a primitive

people or unintelligent, who only need a language to express the simplest requirements and not their thoughts. ... One has to be beware [sic] however, as quite unknowingly slight mispronunciation will entirely alter the meaning of a word. There was the unfortunate moment when instead of telling someone to look at my nose, I told him to look at my arse, or when another Doctor, instead of saying to a woman "breathe out" (let out your breath) said "blow off your wind". The Indians on both occasions were highly amused. They love a joke at the white man's expense, but to give them their due, they are just as appreciative if the laugh is on them. ... Their opinion of whites is often more shrewd than is realized. A certain party of politicians were going round the reserve, one never stopped talking, was always asking questions and was well known for the fact that he was one of those people who talk a lot and never do anything. Finally he suggested ... that he would like to be made a member of the band and to receive a[n] Indian name. The Indians courteously agreed to this, but when he asked for a translation of his name, with a grave and impassive face they solemnly said "Big Wind."²²

21 See, for example, Rickard's *Okimah* (1998), Cheechoo's *A Glimpse into Moose Factory's History* (1991), and Linklater's *The Gathering of Our People 2003 & Omushkego Creefest* (2003). I happen to appear in two of these three films. In the second film, my grade seven Cree language and culture class (in the 1980s) is shown in a teepee being taught traditional skills, and I was interviewed for the second documentary, while cooking for the community feast at the Gathering of Our People in 2003.

22 I am working on a project to publish these stories and bring them back to their communities of origin.

The socioeconomic, educational and political transition of the mid-1900s posed many challenges, not just in spite of outside help, but also because of it. The Cree word for leader is *okimaw*, but for Indian Act chief is *okimakan* – the suffix carrying the meaning “not quite real or authentic” (Ellis, 1960). This does not imply a criticism of leaders like Munroe, Gilbert, Nellie and other Moose Cree chiefs, but of the *Indian Act* structures within which, and against which, they had to work. As elsewhere, even genuine attempts to assist Indigenous people were all too often entangled, and at times entrenched, in ignorance, racial and cultural prejudice, and a “bureaucratic colonialism” – as Toby Morantz (2002) calls it – the repercussions of which have been detailed by the RCAP and TRC reports. It was in this period that the long-standing Indigenous-European reciprocity was perhaps at its weakest. Certainly this was the case in Quebec, as Grand Chief Abel Bosum pointed out. Yet it was neither gone nor forgotten, and it helped shape Cree responses and solutions, including the 1975 JBNQA and the subsequent establishment of the MoCreebec Association by its Eeyou beneficiaries living in the Moose River area.

I witnessed the transformative impact of this treaty on the MoCreebec people and I grew up aware of socioeconomic, political and cultural problems and divisions within my home community more generally – as well as some of the external contributing factors – although my siblings and I undoubtedly experi-

enced many of them in unique ways because of our background. But these problems were dwarfed by the powerful example of so many who made it intuitively clear that the best answers to these external and internal problems came from within – not to the exclusion of other sources, but as a grounding for engagement with them. As Cree elder Raphael Wabano put it in the 1970s, what the communities needed was a Cree-centred cultural centre where people could bring together the best of northern (Cree) and southern (non-Cree) values and ideas (James Bay Cree Society, 1979). His thinking was echoed and exemplified by many others. It was with such role models, in thought and action, that I left the north to pursue post-secondary education.

Adapting to life in the south was initially easy – not because it was more familiar, but because I was familiar with adapting to differences. Having grown up as a visible minority (relative to my context) I was immediately drawn to others who stood out, and I quickly came to know every visible minority in my Quebec City college of 700 students. I was drawn to immigrants, because I was both an “immigrant” to Quebec from Cree country, and had been part of a second generation of an “immigrant” family to Cree territory. I sensed a connection to the province where my father’s family had lived for generations, but I also found myself falling into an intensely critical spirit, at times, that was really just homesickness. (Two decades later, I can share a good laugh with some of my Inuit stu-

dents, from the region where my parents met, about the quirks of adapting to southern city life and dealing with homesickness for the north.)

It did not take me long to realize how my formative years had immersed me in perspectives and relationships that did not fit neatly into the typical “native” versus “newcomer” binaries that I soon encountered not only or even primarily in colonial-era historical accounts, but often equally so in more recent academic and non-academic writing. The work of White and other scholars were very helpful, but other post-colonial and de-colonial scholarship seemed to reinforce – in inverted ways – the very problems they purported to address. After immersion in some of this literature, I often felt the need to “detox” from its polarizing tendency to assume or assert an “Indigenous versus non-Indigenous,” or “Indian versus White,” conflict paradigm in every context. The imposition of such a dichotomy affected me personally, as I had struggled since my youth to avoid being lumped in (always by a minority) with everyone else who had the same skin tone or reduced to the worst aspects of my perceived or real heritage. Above all, I did not want to be told – implicitly or explicitly – to relate to my friends (some as close as family) as a “whiteman.” This label had always carried only negative connotations and physical repercussions inside and outside school (always from a minority). Yet this school of hard knocks helped me appreciate what baggage that the label “Indian” carried for my Cree friends in other contexts. It also





made me keenly aware of the repercussions of using intensified racialism or conflict awareness as an answer to racism or conflict. How does one foster awareness of racism, for example, without inadvertently training ourselves and others to reduce people and their experience to their skin tone or their real or perceived genetic heritage? Or how does one even speak about the Hutu-Tutsi conflict, to take a more distant example, without contributing to, and reinforcing, the notion that every Hutu and Tutsi identifies according to these binary divisions? Instead of transcending colonialist binaries and prejudices, is there a risk that some decolonial efforts might simply reinforce these binaries and invert their moral and cultural judgements?

My critical awareness of the interpretive imperialism that is inherent in all conflict paradigms became stronger in the late 1990s as I delved deeper into the history and historiography of an uncommon incident of violent conflict known locally as the 1832 “Hannah Bay massacre.” (I still have a photographic memory of the place and moment where I first heard a story of this conflict.) I selected this topic for my MA thesis after consulting with educators, leaders and elders back home, who cautioned me that it was being misinterpreted and sometimes misused in the context of contemporary politics (Chabot, 2010).

Ultimately, I found the best way to resist the interpretive imperialism of binary conflict paradigms was to remain grounded in the community that I still call home, not because it is free of such problems, but because this community shed unique light onto these same problems while also containing – within its history, culture(s) and people(s) – profound answers to them. In this regard, I have increasingly come to appreciate this home not only as one of Canada’s oldest continuous Indigenous-European middle grounds but also as a significant Indigenous middle-ground. In this context, questions of “indigenous” or “aboriginal” identity take on diverse meanings with different reference points and need to be relativized.

Moose Factory and Moosonee constitute, in some way, a microcosm of Canada, in different proportions. As one zooms in on these neighbouring communities, multiple, interlaced and sometimes competing Indigenous identities come into focus that do not coincide neatly with jurisdictional or treaty boundaries. Some of the Cree who live here have their traditional hunting grounds in the Moose River watershed; others have origins or family connections in neighbouring or more distant parts of Omushkego Aski of Eeyou Istchee and speak distinct dialects of Cree (a total of four or five if one includes R-dialect Cree). As noted already, few are without some European ancestry. Others have sometimes been identified by it; once known as “halfbreeds,” the majority of them

now have “Indian” status. Finally, some have no Cree ancestry, but may be Indigenous or intermarried with Crees. In the end, few people and relationships fit neatly into various categories that, for some, represent the diversity, richness and complexity of the community, but for others, its divisions. This same diversity, however, prevents any dividing line from claiming a monopoly. There are simply too many and they overlap too much: Moose Factory versus Moosonee; Moose Cree versus other Omushkego Cree; original Moose Cree members versus transferees from other Omushkego or Eeyou Cree Nations; Eeyou (Quebec or JBNQA) Cree versus Omushkego (Ontario or Treaty 9) Cree; Moose Cree First Nation (Omushkego) versus MoCreebec Council of the Cree Nation (of Eeyou Istchee); L-dialect versus Y-dialect or N-dialect Cree; and status Indian versus regained-status (Bill C-31) versus non-status (see Chabot, 2010 & 2017, and Long, 1986).

Colonialism and other external factors explain many of these categories and the divisions they sometimes frame (Long, 1986), but local and regional diversity, difference and division have a longer and deeper history. Regardless, living an ethic of reciprocity was challenging long before European contact or the creation of the “Canada problem” (Newhouse and Belanger, 2016). Yet, in upholding this ethic as an ideal worth struggling for, the Cree have gained deep insights into what it means to be human and to live well in relation to our human and other-than-human

world. It is no surprise – for those who take time to listen, like Richard Preston and John Long²³ – to discover that Cree philosophical anthropology, moral philosophy and metaphysics that can hold their own in a conversation with any philosophical tradition.

The 1832 Hannah Bay “massacre” originated in a failure to follow the ethic of reciprocity in a time of desperation and hardship.²⁴ When I took on the research in the late 1990s, however, I started referring to it, in more neutral terms, as the 1832 Washaw Conflict (Washaw being the Cree name for Hannah Bay). This decision reflected the primary reason why I had been asked to undertake this research. As a non-Native native of Moose Factory – so to speak – I was told I was in a good position to re-examine what some people characterized as a conflict divided along the lines of “Quebec versus Ontario Cree” or “Moose Cree versus MoCreebec Eeyou Cree”. Nevertheless, it soon became clear that other conflict paradigms were competing for interpretive

imperium, especially variations of the “Indian-versus-White” paradigm. The majority of people involved or killed in the incident, however, were Cree, in what almost everyone at the time acknowledged was an exceptionally rare incidence of violence. Ultimately, I found that intercultural miscommunication and misunderstanding were partly to blame for the conflict, but that the primary issue was a failure of reciprocity, solidarity and magnanimity in a period of hardship and starvation, a failure that was condemned by the majority of Omushkego, Eeyou and non-Indigenous contemporaries. Yet the retaliation meted out against the original attackers, by Cree and HBC relatives and friends of the victims, was also subject to criticism, both at the time and later on, by Cree and non-Cree alike.

These were some of the key points that I emphasized when I shared my research locally and regionally in three different workshops for the regional Omushkego Education Great Moon Gathering, in guest lectures for univer-

sity classes delivered in Moose Factory, and in radio and print interviews. Local people were as important an audience for me as any academic or wider audience. I shared my thesis and research sources (in paper and digital formats) with local governments and schools as well as individuals who had contributed to the research. I also contributed to (and benefited from) research for a proposed film project on this event, under development by Cree film maker Paul Rickard, and for Moose Cree First Nation (undertaken with John Long) on historic sites in the Hannah Bay region. In this latter regard, I made a site visit in September 1999, travelling by boat from Moose Factory with Sinclair Trapper, in whose family territory the original Hannah Bay House was located.

As I was reminded on that occasion – and again now, in the aftermath of the lethal negligence, rooted in racism, that killed George Floyd and Joyce Echaquan²⁵ – navigating conflict histories is like navigating the muddy waters of Hannah Bay, where the Washaw

- 23 Richard “Dick” Preston (2011) speaks of listening for a long time to Cree narratives before arriving at an “aha moment,” an epiphany moment, where he understood. The rest of his career, he says, has been about refining and explaining what he saw in that moment. Like Preston, John Long spent hours with Cree elders and saw them not as informants but as mentors, as the scholars and teachers they were. On reading this draft, Cree educator Roger Chum shared the dedication that John Long, his former teacher, inscribed in a copy of his book, *Treaty No. 9: Making the Agreement to Share the Land in Far Northern Ontario in 1905* (2010): “To my friend and teacher ...” (emphasis added). Although she did not conduct oral interviews, Toby Morantz is another example of a researcher who is very well respected among the Cree, especially the Eeyou, whose history she has documented in two books and many articles. All three of them have been models for me and acted as formal and informal advisors and mentors from my MA thesis onward. The list is much longer of scholars whose research with and for James Bay Cree exemplified an ethic of reciprocity well before formal research ethics protocols were in place.
- 24 On January 22, 1832, during a very hard winter, one Cree hunter, two orphan Cree boys and a young HBC apprentice of mixed Cree-European ancestry fled more than 60 km from Hannah Bay House. Arriving cold and shaken in Moose Factory the next day, between 3 am and 4 pm, they hastily divulged the news that Quappakay, a Cree *okimah* who usually traded at Rupert’s House (present-day Waskaganish, QC), and members of his family had arrived in starving condition and, within two days, had attacked the house and killed William Corrigan, the HBC trader stationed at Hannah Bay. They feared, moreover, that none of the nine others (all of Cree or mixed ancestry) who were there had escaped. By the end of April, the alleged perpetrators would be apprehended, with help from Cree on both sides of the bay, and the men over the age of 15 would be executed, though not with the approval of all the HBC men involved. There is much more to this history than this minimalist account indicates. See: Chabot (2002) and chapter 3 of Chabot (2016).
- 25 See: *The Economist* (2020, June 13), APTN (n.d.), and Bourihane (2020, October 7). As this last article shows, Joyce Echaquan’s family and community are drawing from both Christian and pre-Christian traditional spiritual sources to find healing.



conflict occurred. This bay has long had a reputation as a dangerous body of water that must be navigated with great caution. The cold muddy water hides its depth as well as the presence of boulders and rocks scattered over mud-clay tidal flats where walking can be difficult. A sudden north wind and high tide can quickly change the depth and conditions of the water, and dramatically increase the distance to the shoreline and safety.

When returning to Moose Factory, Arnold Cheechoo, Sinclair Trapper and I got a taste of Washaw's danger. Pummelled by the combined force of wind and waves, one of our two boats cracked a rib and began to sink. We managed to transfer its cargo and outboard motor, before cutting it loose. I was the last one off. As we continued on to Moose Factory the waters gradually grew calmer, and so did we: although we laughed it off, we did not take our close call lightly. Then, two weeks later, a great tragedy occurred in the same area where we had had our relatively minor accident: two boats were swamped by towering waves tossed up by a fierce north wind. Only the strongest made it to shore. Although this tragedy claimed eight lives, the rescue and recovery efforts brought together the local and regional people and jurisdictions in ways that dwarfed any political or other divisions that sometimes surfaced between them (Blair, 1999).

The Washaw tragedy of 1999 showed that the ethic of reciprocity had far greater strength than any local divisions or frictions. Ultimately, my research into the Washaw tragedy of 1832 also revealed the same, not only with respect to any alleged or real divisions between Omushkego and Eeyou Cree, but also with regard to apparent Indigenous-European divisions. Both tragedies also showed how the land acted as a stern teacher for Cree and newcomer alike, providing repeated reminders of the need for personal competence – mental, moral and practical – as well as the interdependence of all life and the need for others. Living in this land for millenia, since time beyond memory, has profoundly shaped, though not determined, Omushkego and Eeyou Cree's philosophical anthropology – their understanding of who they are in relation to their human and other-than-human world – and their ethic of reciprocity.

Living in this land according to this ethic of reciprocity demands epistemic integrity and prudence: careful discernment of reality, be it the thickness of river ice, the changing of the weather or seasons, the movements of animals, or the intentions of a newcomer. It also requires self-governance, which often makes the difference between life and death in an unforgiving subarctic environment. Yet, as noted already, traditional stories repeatedly warn against failures in this regard (Bird, 2007). Dire circumstances have often forced stark choices between reciprocity and its inversion or perversion. Manipulative and

extremely individualistic, this anti-ethic does not hesitate to reduce truth and others to mere objects of power in the pursuit of narrow self-interest. In Cree tradition, the antithesis of the ideal *okimaw* ("leader" or "elder") is the person who is so power-hungry, afraid, and ethically or mentally unhinged that he or she transforms into a cannibal *wihtiko* (windigo) (Bird, 2007). Thus, some Cree interpreted the main instigators of the 1832 attack on Hannah Bay House as having turned *wihtiko* (Chabot, 2002). This interpretation led me deeper into Cree intellectual and cultural history.

When I began my doctoral studies in Indigenous intellectual, cultural and religious history, I focused on the *wihtiko* concept as a photographic negative of Cree philosophical anthropology and ethical ideals, and as a means of tracing their evolution over time in relation to European influences, actions, ideas and ideals. What I discovered in Indigenous and European encounters with the *wihtiko* and each other was not radical cultural difference but profound common ground "on the edge of humanity." Even amidst conflict and misunderstanding, even if expressed in different ways across cultural time or space, there was a persistent shared conviction that reducing truth or others to mere objects, in quests or contests for power, was to risk losing one's humanity (Chabot, 2016).



What the history of the *wihtiko* also revealed was the intimately intrapersonal – not merely interpersonal – and entangled nature of the struggle between our quests for human and moral authenticity and quests for power over the very definition (authority and authorship) of human and moral authenticity. I also found deep insights in Cree philosophy and spirituality that resonated profoundly with, or challenged, aspects of other intellectual and spiritual traditions, from the Book of Genesis and Aristotle to Michel Foucault and Charles Taylor.

Starvation-induced *wihtiko* possession or transformation may be almost unheard of today, but the anti-ethic it embodies – if not the *wihtiko* itself – remains an explanation and guidepost for critiquing failures to adhere to the ethic of reciprocity, including many of those outlined by RCAP and the TRC. To state it more positively, Cree ethical ideals remain foundational to the success of one of the strongest Indigenous nations in Canada – the Cree Nation of Eeyou Istchee – and to the resilience and resurgence of the Omushkego Cree. Yet this success is by no means perfect, on either side of James Bay.

In their narratives of the Washaw conflict and of *wihtiko* incidents, Cree elders make it clear that ethical ideals are innate for no one (Bird, 2007). On the contrary, they require education, cultivation, effort and constant adjustment. Adherence to the ethic of reciprocity, for example, could also be shallow, self-interested or duplicitous. Writing about the Innu in the 1600s, Jesuit missionary Paul Le Jeune puzzled over the material reciprocity they sometimes showed even to enemies, whom they might also conjure against (cited in Hallowell, 1955). Three centuries later, legal scholar Julius Lips offered this explanation: “if a case should become known where an Indian maliciously disregarded a signal erected in extreme need, he would likewise be disregarded in case of his own need” (Lips, 1937, p. 227). As with other cultures, Cree ideals in this regard could be articulated with emphasis on negative consequences of non-adherence or in more affirmative, hopeful and generous terms. As one Waswanipi woman explained, “When we have food, and we are living with others, we give them half our food, and it seems like we find more to replace it” (cited in Feit, 1994, 297).

In Cree society, some might adhere to an ethic of reciprocity primarily for fear or self-interest, while others fully embraced and placed their hope and faith in it.²⁶ The same, of course, can be said of all human societies and their highest ethical ideals, which are best upheld where there are incentives for adherence and consequences for non-adherence.

Research ethics protocols and frameworks are needed that foster and incentivize an ethic of reciprocity, but we should not assume that their absence means that people do not exercise reciprocity or that their imposition will make people more virtuous. These protocols and frameworks should place greater emphasis on drawing out, and cultivating the best in people rather than preventing the worst in them. There are many relevant examples of pre-RCAP research relationships of reciprocity in James Bay, long before research ethics protocols were in place. In fact, most of these relationships were founded and sustained on the basis of reciprocity and mutual respect, but this is a topic that requires more research and space than this text allows.

26 Commenting on a draft of this article, Mishi (Lillian) Trapper pointed out that faith is in placed in the Creator as the ultimate guarantor of Reciprocity. Personal communication, March 22, 2021.



Greater emphasis on reciprocity would enhance rather than replace the duty to consult that is foundational to current research ethics protocols. It must be acknowledged, however, that these protocols were added as a corrective to the imbalance of power that has often undermined Indigenous efforts to enforce ethical research protocols where they are not voluntarily adopted. As suggested already, moreover, it was added *because of* successful Indigenous efforts to correct this imbalance.

How does one acknowledge and address such imbalances without indefinitely framing Indigenous people as the weaker party in all their relationships with non-Indigenous people? This is my concern here: not to remove necessary protections, but to put them on stronger footing by helping envision and move towards the kind of relationships where such protections are no longer needed, even if they were to remain in place or made more universal. Commenting on a first draft of this article, Roger Chum – a Cree friend, role model and experienced post-secondary guidance councillor – summed up the vision perfectly: to move towards giving fuller meaning to the phrase “We are all treaty people.”

Reciprocity between treaty peoples in a university-community relationship does not impose an obligation on Indigenous people to share everything and be absorbed into other institutions and traditions. On the contrary, it means recognizing more clearly that Indigenous scholarly institutions and traditions have value and existence in their own right, with their own research protocols, independently of their relationships with Western scholarly institutions and traditions. As noted already, to assume that Indigenous intellectual traditions are marginalized unless Western institutions integrate them or are indigenized, is to doubly marginalize Indigenous traditions. On the other hand, reciprocity, solidarity and magnanimity also means recognizing that Indigenous intellectual traditions are important not only for Indigenous people, but because they have something uniquely valuable to contribute to universal human knowledge. In short, a relationship defined by reciprocity allows for greater mutual influence and fluidity of boundaries between treaty peoples, as first step towards reconciliation. This was the vision and achievement of the founders of the European Union, who simultaneously hoped for and sought to envision a reconciliation founded on socio-economic reciprocity and fostering magnanimity: the habit of seeing, cultivating and sharing the best in each other.²⁷

In a Canadian context, national and provincial research councils and other research funders have an opportunity to *magnanimously* foster reconciliation and reciprocity by acknowledging and affirming the universal applicability of Indigenous emphases on the ethic of reciprocity. The national research councils, for example, could augment their grant application assessment criteria with a fourth main criterion, that of reciprocity. In the case of SSHRC, for example, this would mean adding Reciprocity to the existing criteria of Challenge, Feasibility and Capability. To be clear, the Tri-Council already explicitly recognizes the relevance of reciprocity for Indigenous research, both in the *Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans* and elsewhere. Moreover, all three research councils articulate aspects of reciprocity in their general evaluation criteria, even if they do not always use the term.²⁸ However, integrating reciprocity as a fourth primary assessment criteria for *all* Tri-Council-funded research (Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike) would strengthen and increase the importance given to reciprocity. To do this, moreover, based on inspiration from Indigenous ethical principles, would be a powerful assertion that the relevance of Cree and other Indigenous knowledge and experience *is not confined* to Indigenous contexts any more than the relevance

27 Alexandre Havard's book on magnanimity as the essence of virtuous leadership originated as a response to law students' questions about what it was that enabled the European Union's founders to propose solidarity and reciprocity with former enemy nations, despite the opposition of compatriots who often harshly dismissed them as traitors. Havard, personal communication, 2012.

28 See SSHRC's *Guidelines for the Merit Review of Indigenous Research* (2018). CIHR developed guidelines early on, as of 2007, in partnership with Indigenous researchers and elders, which recognize reciprocity (2010). This was eventually replaced by Chapter 9 of the TCPS, which opens by defining “reciprocity” as “the obligation to give something back in return for gifts received – [a concept] which they [Indigenous people] advance as the necessary basis for relationships that can benefit both Aboriginal and research communities” (CIHR, NSERC and SSHRC, 2018, 107).



of Western knowledge traditions are confined to Western contexts. It could also be an opportunity to remind many of us that Western knowledge traditions and institutions are not the exclusive heritage of Western society. Rather, they are conduits, sites, repositories and beneficiaries of some of most extensive and diverse intercultural exchanges in human history. This reminder is needed because the collective strength – real and perceived – of dominant currents in this Europe-centred intercultural exchange has too often proven a weakness for those who have cultivated little appreciation of other knowledge traditions or awareness of the tremendous debt owed to them. This helps explain why many Indigenous elders have often been quicker to acknowledge what is relevant and universal in Western knowledge traditions. Many of them have no hesitation, for example, to use “reciprocity” – a concept and term drawn from European languages – to translate or convey their own Indigenous concepts and terms, even as they highlight what is unique to their own traditions.

The key point is this: there is much to be gained from giving reciprocity the same depth and emphasis it currently has in many Indigenous cultures, and from drawing out the specific nuances and insights embedded in the various terms found in diverse Indigenous languages. Indigenous peoples have unique insights into the challenges of living

and cultivating reciprocity, whether within or between their own peoples, or in relation to European Newcomers. Making reciprocity a central criteria for assessment of all research funding applications will help encourage all of us – Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike – to dig into our own traditions and histories for ways to enrich our shared understanding and practice of reciprocity, solidarity, magnanimity, *wahkohtowin*, *kayanerenkó:wa*,²⁹ or whatever concept or term we use to articulate similar ideals and principles. Most importantly, in and beyond our research, it will give greater incentive to envision, articulate, and enact a more explicit and tangible commitment to see, emphasize, cultivate and share – in a spirit of service – the best in ourselves, each other, and our shared humanity.

As emphasized already, this does not entail ignoring historical and contemporary injustices – in research or other contexts – or relativizing them in a way that dissolves or absolves anyone’s responsibility for addressing them. Rather, it insists that efforts to understand and find ways of correcting such injustices should not ignore the very examples and sources that can inspire *and activate* hope for something better – especially among those who, in one moment and manner or another, may be struggling most with fact that “the line dividing good and evil [that] cuts through the heart of every human

being.” Solzhenitsyn’s understanding of the human condition is echoed in Martin Luther King’s counsel to his closest collaborators, prior to their exposure of such dividing lines: “If you would change someone, you must first love them and they must know that you love them.”³⁰ This suggests that the best *starting* point for transformation is not cancellation but confirmation: finding and affirming what is good within a person, a relationship, a culture or a history.

Decolonialism must be founded on a vision that transcends not only colonialism but also itself. Otherwise, it risks extending colonial paradigms of division and difference into the past and future, while ironically imposing new patterns of uniformity and assimilation. What is needed is a vision of truly reciprocal relationship, and this is not something that need only be imagined from nothing. It can be learned from the historical and contemporary examples of many who have envisioned and lived such relationships, even if they have had to do so against the grain. My reflections are ultimately a small payment towards a great debt of gratitude to people – both Indigenous and non-Indigenous – who have given powerful examples in this regard.



29 For more elaboration on these last two concepts see: Smith (2004), Roan and Waugh (2004), and Williams (2018).

30 He said this to a group of his closest collaborators prior to a peaceful civil rights action that they knew would be met with violence. It was one of these collaborators, Richard John Neuhaus, who shared this story with me and others.

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