CONQUEST THROUGH BENEVOLENCE:
THE INDIAN RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL APOLOGY AND THE (RE)MAKING OF
THE INNOCENT CANADIAN SETTLER SUBJECT
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ABSTRACT

This thesis offers a critical discourse analysis of the Canadian government’s 2008 apology to the former students of the Indian Residential School system. The Indian Residential School apology claims to begin to pave the way for healing and reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and other Canadians, and, I argue, it makes this claim while reiterating colonial narratives of settler innocence, entitlement to land, and moral-ethical superiority. The apology claims to right wrongs that are discursively situated in a remote and distant past, without addressing ongoing colonial violence or the historic and contemporary benefits both the state and its citizens have inherited from colonialism. I contend that the apology enables a celebratory national narrative that allows the state and its citizens, and not the Indigenous peoples to whom it was putatively addressed, to recover from (and re-cover) a violent and traumatic past (and present) while repudiating responsibility on both an individual and state level.
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## Table of Contents

ABSTRACT .................................................................................................................. ii

Acknowledgements .................................................................................................... iii

Chapter 1: Introduction .............................................................................................. 1
  1.2 Interest in Research ......................................................................................... 10
  1.3 Chapter Summaries ........................................................................................ 12

Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework, Methodology and Literature Review ............. 14
  2.1 Theoretical Framework .................................................................................. 14
  2.2 Methodology ................................................................................................. 19
  2.3 Literature Review ......................................................................................... 24

Chapter 3: Historical and Legal Background ....................................................... 34
  3.1 Indian Residential Schools Historical Background .................................. 35
  3.2 The *Indian Act*, Enfranchisement and the Apology ............................. 38
  3.3 The Apology and Fiduciary Duty ............................................................... 40
  3.4 Legal Background ....................................................................................... 44
  3.5 Failed and Repeated Apologies to Indian Residential School Survivors ........ 48

Chapter 4: From Recognition of Wrongdoing to Transcendence of Colonial Shame; The Work of the Apology ................................................................. 51
  4.1 Statement of Apology .................................................................................... 51
  4.2 Tracing the Many Meanings of ‘Apology’ ................................................... 54
  4.3 To Whom is the Apology Addressed? ....................................................... 62
  4.4 Shame and the Nation ................................................................................ 67

Chapter 5: Innocence and Civility: The Ideal Canadian Subject ......................... 72
  5.1 White Civility and the Ideal Subject ............................................................ 73
  5.2 The Family as Nation ................................................................................... 81
  5.3 The New Formation of Canadian Settler Identity ..................................... 83

Chapter 6: Conclusion ............................................................................................. 86
  6.1 Limits of Study and Further Research Recommendations .................... 90
  6.2 Impact of Study on Educators, Scholars, Indigenous Peoples and Settlers .................................................................................................................... 92

References ............................................................................................................... 95
Chapter 1: Introduction

“Change will happen only when Settlers are forced into a reckoning with who they are, what they have done, and what they have inherited.” (Taiaike Alfred, 2005, p. 154).

“We cannot begin to combat everyday racism in Canada until we unearth, rather than suppress, the history of White supremacy and colonial racism that are fundamental to the establishment of Canada as a nation.” (Nurbese Philip in Daniel Coleman, 2006, p. 8).

“No apology in the House of Commons, made to the sound of land claims stalling in the background, can atone for, much less change, the culture that produced residential schools” (Susan Crean in Paulette Regan, 2010, p. 43).

On June 11, 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper delivered an apology in the House of Commons on behalf of the Canadian government for its role in the Indian Residential School system. The residential schools, an extensive school system established by the Government of Canada and administered by the Christian church, ostensibly to educate Indigenous children, had an explicit agenda of separating children from their families and communities and assimilating them into Euro-Canadian society. The Indian Residential Schools system, which was in operation for over one hundred years (from 1879-1996), was a system steeped in genocidal violence (Chrisjohn, 2006), and a central mechanism in Canada’s colonial nation-building project (Krebs, 2008; Thielen-Wilson, 2012). The apology, I argue, must be understood within the context of ongoing nation building. That is to say, the apology is a continuation of the nation-building project of colonial Canada, sustaining and maintaining the narrative of the peaceful, benevolent and legitimate settler while theft of Indigenous lands and violence against Indigenous peoples continues.
The apology speech was a self-proclaimed dawning of a "new beginning", and the genesis of a “new relationship” (House of Commons, 2008), between the Canadian government, other Canadians and Indigenous people. The apology claims to begin to pave the way for healing and reconciliation between settlers and Indigenous people, and it makes this claim while reiterating the same old Canadian colonial narrative of settler innocence, entitlement to land, and moral-ethical superiority. It claims to right wrongs that are discursively situated in a distant past, without addressing present ongoing colonial violence or the benefits both the state and its citizens have accrued from the system in the present. What does it mean to insist that the apology is an act that paves the way for healing and reconciliation in the context of a neoliberal multicultural settler-colonial state? Can an apology ever adequately address historical (or contemporary) violence? What is at stake if we insist that it can?

Apologies are gaining both social and political capital (Short, 2012; Zampf, 2009) as legitimate responses to racial violence and human rights violations around the (formerly and currently) colonized world. We need to think beyond the sentimentality of apologies and remain critical of the actions and narratives of colonial states. Nicholas Tavuchis (1991) writes in *Mea Culpa: A Sociology of Apology and Reconciliation* that, “an apology, no matter how sincere or effective, does not and cannot undo what has been done. And yet, in a mysterious way and according to its own logic, this is precisely what it manages to do” (p. 5). Begging the question, what do apologies actually do? What is the work that apologies perform? How do they support colonial states in recovering from
their violent and traumatic pasts (and present) while absolving responsibility on both the individual and state level?

The Canadian government has offered apologies to Japanese-Canadians for internment camps during World War II (1988), Chinese-Canadians for the imposition of the head tax (2006), Italian-Canadians for internment due to alleged leadership roles in fascist organizations (1990), and an antecedent apology to residential school survivors (1996), to name just a few of the more publicized examples. The 2008 Harper apology followed Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s apology to the ‘stolen generations’ of Indigenous people forcibly removed from their homes and families (see Barta, T, 2008, and Corntassel & Holder, 2008, for more on the apology to the ‘stolen generations’).

Scholars have noted that the political pressure to maintain Canada’s international reputation mobilized by Rudd’s apology was, in part, the impetus for Harper’s mea culpa (Dorrell, 2009). This seems especially plausible given that in 2006, when the conservatives came to power, Prime Minister Harper rejected the Kelowna Accord, was critical of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement and refused to apologize for the Indian Residential Schools (Thielen-Wilson, 2012). Others (like Dorrell, 2009) have noted Harper’s apology was also an attempt to offset the negative publicity from Canada’s vote against and refusal to adopt the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (later endorsed through a Statement of Support in November 2010). The proliferation of apologies, combined with the concern of maintaining a particular reputation both internationally and domestically, suggests that state apologies are more about sustaining national narratives than they are about addressing historic (or
contemporary) violence. As Mitch Miyagawa, a self-proclaimed Canadian apology “multi-culti case study” (with Japanese, Chinese and Indigenous ancestry), notes in *A Sorry State* (2009), state apologies are “more about forgetting than remembering”.

In September 2009, fifteen months after Harper delivered his apology for Indian Residential Schools, during a press conference at the G20 Pittsburgh Summit, Harper stated: “We are one of the most stable regimes in history. There are very few countries that can say for nearly 150 years they’ve had the same political system without any social breakdown, political upheaval or invasion. We are unique in that regard. We also have no history of colonialism” (Henderson & Wakeham, 2009, p.1). Not only does this claim disavow the foundational violence of the initial invasion of European settlers, it performs a remarkable erasure of both historical and contemporary colonialism, and undermines a long and ongoing history of Indigenous resistance (see Kulchyski, 2007; Dickason & McNab, 2008, for more on the history of Indigenous resistance in Canada). It also denies the history of the Indian Residential Schools for which Harper had just apologized. While the carefully worded apology speech never uses the term ‘colonialism’ or ‘genocide’, the *UN Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* specifically names the forceful removal of children from one group to another as genocide. How can we account for the discrepancies between the apology for Indian Residential Schools, on the one hand, and the claim that Canada had “no history of colonialism” and no “social breakdown”, on the other? If apologies are “more about forgetting than remembering”, as Miyagawa contended, does the apology produce the very conditions for Harper to claim that Canada has no history of colonialism?
The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples reports that in “poll after poll, Canadians have said that they want to see justice done for Aboriginal people, but they have not known how, in spite of the fact that Aboriginal people have consistently and forcefully articulated their specific demands for justice” (Cameron 2008, p. 389).

Canadians are able to maintain our identity as benevolent, humanitarian peacemakers by claiming we want to see justice done, at the very same time that we continue to benefit from colonial relations and ignore the specific demands for justice of Indigenous peoples. The apology is not an exception to this phenomenon. The apology insists we can begin to pave the way for healing and reconciliation without making changes to the material conditions of social relations between Indigenous peoples and settlers. Kanien’kehaka scholar Taiaiake Alfred (2009) writes:

Without massive restitution made to Indigenous peoples, collectively and as individuals, including land, transfers of federal and provincial funds, and other forms of compensation for past harms and continuing injustices committed against the land and Indigenous peoples, reconciliation will permanently absolve colonial injustice and is itself a further injustice” (p. 181).

These specific demands for justice link the history of Indian Residential Schools, and colonialism more broadly, to Indigenous political struggle for restitution, for material forms of compensation rather than just rhetorical gestures. As Paulette Regan (2011) writes, “Non-Indigenous Canadians must understand that the Indian Residential Schools history and legacy cannot be addressed in isolation from Indigenous peoples’ political struggle to live as self-determining, self-sufficient, healthy communities in accordance with their own customs, laws, and connections to the land” (p. 62).
The 2008 Apology followed nearly two decades of struggle on behalf of Indigenous people calling for legal accountability, and a sincere apology, for the destructive impact the violence of residential schools had on Indigenous peoples and communities (Thielen-Wilson, 2012, p. 1). It is not my intention in this thesis to undermine the political struggle for the apology, or any of the healing that came from an official acknowledgement of the suffering produced by Indian Residential Schools, but rather to honour the struggle as a fight for the recognition of the violence of Canadian colonialism both past and present. Henderson and Wakeham argue in *Colonial Reckoning and National Reconciliation* (2009) that while the apology holds significance for some survivors of Indian Residential Schools and their families, who have long awaited an official recognition of injustice and suffering, “it is possible, however, to recognize that importance while remaining critical of this speech act’s implications for shaping dominant state formulations of a present and future of reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples” (p. 2).

The Truth and Reconciliation Commission interim report, released in February 2012, recommended that individual copies of the apology be delivered to all known residential school survivors, as well as framed copies to all secondary schools in the nation for prominent and public display. The report cites “huge challenges in raising awareness, among non-Aboriginal Canadians, of the residential school history and legacy” (2012, sec 2:9) as the impetus for the apology being displayed in schools. While educating non-Indigenous Canadians about residential schools and colonialism in Canada is of utmost importance, my concern remains about what kind of history the apology tells,
and how it contributes to, as Regan (2012) writes, “our continuing complicity in denying, erasing, and forgetting this part of our own history as colonizers while pathologizing the colonized” (p. 6). It would be essential for the raising of awareness amongst non-Indigenous Canadians that the apology be critiqued, our identities as Canadians deconstructed and our role as the beneficiaries of colonialism and of the residential school system be owned. A simple display of the apology hardly guarantees that more challenging work will be done. We need a critical curriculum to supplement the framed apology, to give further context to the long and ongoing history of colonialism on this land, should this recommendation be implemented; the apology alone will contribute to decontextualizing the Indian Residential Schools, perpetuating both historical amnesia and denial. As Regan (2012) cautions, “how people learn about historical injustices is as important as learning truths about what happened” (p. 11).

As I critique the rhetorical moves to innocence made both in the apology and in celebratory Canadian national narratives more broadly, I must also remain aware of the implicit move to innocence I am making for myself in the undertaking of this project. That is to say, I try, with varying levels of success, to place myself within the frame of my analysis, to avoid pointing towards ‘bad settlers’ without simultaneously pointing towards myself. Sara Ahmed writes in On Being Included (2012), “the presumption of our own criticality can be a way of protecting ourselves from complicity” (p. 4), and for me to avoid reproducing what I have inherited, I cannot protect myself from the complicity of being a beneficiary. As Trudy Govier writes, “through patterns of colonization, land use, racism, disregard for treaties and the residential school system, we
are linked significantly to the institutions that are responsible… As members of the society and as citizens of the state, we share responsibility for these things… we are the beneficiaries of the injustice” (quoted in Regan 2011, p. 35). As someone who shares in the responsibility for the injustice of colonialism and the residential school system, I am complicit in the very system I seek to critique. Fiona Robyn-Ramsey argues that, “if we start with our complicity, we can recognize our ‘proximity to the problems we are addressing’” (quoted in Ahmed 2012, p. 5). My hope is that by trying to place myself within the frame of analysis, I acknowledge my proximity to the problems I am addressing, problems that are neither ‘over there’, or with ‘those people’. I attempt to avoid comforting myself with the peacemaker, humanitarian myth that is always-already available to my position as a white woman settler. Kerstin Roger argues in her dissertation Fairy Fictions: white women as helping professionals (1998) that white women gained elite status through the professionalization of helping activities in the early 20th Century. She argues that the professional use of empathy became a regulatory device for social relations of difference, and this work enabled women to reproduce their own superiority as caring white subjects. She writes, “the practice of helping others… shapes the fantasy of goodness for the white woman” and argues that this requires a disavowal of “seeing or examining how she participates in racist structures” (p. 231) The risk in doing this work is that I reproduce my own superiority as a helpful, caring, innocent white subject, and disavow my own participation in racist structures.

In order to avoid reproducing my own superiority as a caring, innocent white subject, I claim my complicity and position as a beneficiary of colonial relations. But,
claiming complicity could also appear to be reproducing my superiority (‘I claim my complicity and am therefore ‘better’ than those other settlers who do not’). Sara Ahmed (2004b) argues in *Declarations of Whiteness: the non-performativity of anti-racism* that scholars in whiteness studies often reinscribe the concealment of racism through declarations of anti-racism. That is, when white scholars, institutions or states claim to be anti-racist they produce a fantasy of transcendence whereby racism is something that *can* be transcended. Robyn Wiegman makes a similar argument about white moves to innocence in *Whiteness Studies and the Paradox of Particularity* (1999). She argues contemporary white racial identity is formed through a disaffiliation with white supremacist practices *at the same time* as it “aggressively solidifies its advantage” (p. 121). Both Wiegman (1999) and Ahmed (2004b) are concerned with white subjects repositioning themselves as capable of transcending the historic, contemporary and material conditions of white supremacy, and therefore identifying as innocent and anti-racist.

In naming my complicity, I am doing the work of being honest about what I have inherited from my family and my place of privilege in the world, but I am also trying to make a claim about the power of racism and the impossibility of dominant subjects transcending the source of our power at the very same time as we benefit from it. Ahmed (2004b) writes, “to hear the work of exposure requires that white subjects inhabit the critique, *in its lengthy duration*, and to recognize the world that is re-described by the critique as one in which they live” (para. 57). That is, we must remain in the critique and not attempt to or understand ourselves as transcending the conditions that require the
critique in the first place. By making a claim that I am complicit, I remain within the frame of the analysis. I stay implicated in that which I critique. Writing this thesis does not absolve me of my complicity because of the work I have done. On the contrary, it further commits me to a lifetime of upholding my responsibility as a beneficiary of injustice. In this sense, my claiming complicity is performative (a concept I return to with greater attention in Chapter 2); it is an act of implicating myself in that which I critique without the possibility of a fantasy of transcendence. In naming myself as complicit and as a beneficiary of colonial relations, I perform an erasure of naturalized settler entitlement to land, innocence and moral-ethical superiority.

1.2 Interest in Research

There are two main motivations for me in undertaking of this project. On the one hand, I strongly believe that everyone living on stolen land has a responsibility to not only think through the layers of complicity of their own position, but also to be an ally of those from whom the land has been stolen. Or, as Susan Dion articulated it at the William Waters Symposium at OISE in 2013, “If you live on this land, you have a responsibility to Indigenous peoples, whether you like it or not” (2013). On the other hand, for most of my life I have been told stories of my Indigenous heritage. My family has been in Canada, on both my father and mother’s sides, for hundreds of years, and part of this story is that my great-grandmother was of French/Indigenous heritage in Fort-Coulonge, Quebec. My grandmother would tell stories of going to stay on a reserve when the
Coureurs Des Bois came through town for protection. I have always been told that the reason we no longer have connection with this part of our family is due to racism and a reluctance to admit ‘mixed blood’. Whenever I’ve pressed for more information, I’ve been told a strange story that a Catholic priest in Renfrew, Ontario had done work on our family genealogy, but somehow this information was not available to us.

I have dedicated a lot of thought to attempting to understand what all of this means for my position, not only as a researcher, but also in terms of my identity. In my youth, I would include ‘Indigenous’ in my self-location, and I now cringe at the thought of appropriating that identity, with a lived-experience that is entirely bound to white privilege and tenuous substantiation, at best, to support the stories I’ve been told. I used to understand my lack of connection to that side of my family as the result of a combination of racism and misogyny (where racism accounted for the little information available, and misogyny for the lack of importance placed on my great-grandmother’s location and identity), but in the undertaking of this project, I’ve been pressed to reflect on the desire for Euro-Canadian families to claim Indigenous heritage in order to feel entitled to the land. As I have learned about the ways in which Euro-Canadians create narrative and identity in order to secure their perceived authorized and morally acceptable procurement of Indigenous lands, I have become increasingly critical of how my own family’s story parallels the national narrative. I have a responsibility to Indigenous peoples because I’ve lived my entire life benefiting from colonization, and because my personal family story performs the exact moves to innocence I claim allows the perpetuation of injustice, violence and theft in Canada.
1.3 Chapter Summaries

In Chapter 1, I present an introduction to the apology for the Indian Residential School system, contextualize my interest in the apology and position myself in relation to my research.

In chapter 2, I describe and justify my use of critical discourse analysis as my methodology, define my theoretical framework and review the literature on the apology.

In chapter 3, I contextualize the apology by exploring its legal and historical background. I argue that a legal and historical background helps to ground my analysis in material reality, avoiding one of the more problematic potential pitfalls of discourse analysis – that it fails to sufficiently trace language back to the physicality or materiality of power relations.

In chapter 4, I look at the role of shame in the apology and the transformation of that shame into a new pride for both the nation and its citizens. I argue that the apology functions both to assuage the settler subject of guilt and responsibility and to recuperate a national identity of innocent settlers in the aftermath of exposure to the violence and theft of colonialism implicit in the Indian Residential Schools system.

In chapter 5, I look at the concept of white civility and innocence in the creation of the ideal Canadian settler-subject. I explore what subjectivities are made possible by the apology, with a particular focus on how these subjectivities define the contours of national belonging. I argue that, despite the tension created by our identity as belonging to a peaceful, tolerant, multicultural nation, and the exposure to state violence committed
in our names, our identities not only remain intact throughout the rhetoric of the apology, but in fact are strengthened.

In chapter 6, I conclude the thesis, offer suggestions for further research, acknowledge the limitations of the study, and specifically address how I hope the thesis will impact scholars, educators, Indigenous peoples and settlers.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework, Methodology and Literature Review

My methodology is primarily a critical discourse analysis. I am guided by the theorizing of scholars who focus on settler colonialism, whiteness and nationalism, but I employ the methodology of discourse analysis in order to think about the question of how power operates both in and through the discourse of the apology. My methodology and theoretical framework are intimately bound and are not easily separated into two distinct descriptions, and therefore there are moments of overlap and entanglement. For the purpose of this methodological chapter, I will describe my theoretical framework that orients my analysis, delineate the methodological imperatives of the key authors I draw from and review the literature published on the apology.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

I draw from a number of traditions and scholars for my theoretical framework. I begin with the violence of settler colonialism and am informed by the critique of many scholars that Canada is deeply implicated in colonial violence, not just in the past, but contemporarily. To begin with the violence of settler colonialism is a political position that attempts to account for (ir)responsibility, complicity and injustice in the present moment. It asks the important question of what racism and violence have to do with nation building and identity making. These questions “are questions which begin with the violence itself and move outwards in circles of complicity, from those who committed
brutal acts, to those who watched, condoned and covered them up” (Razack, 2004, p. 143).

Patrick Wolfe argues in *Settler Colonialism and the Elimination of the Native* (2006), that settler colonialism requires the continuous physical and symbolic removal of Indigenous peoples from the land in order for settlers to continue to occupy. He argues that “settlers come to stay; invasion is a structure not an event” (Wolfe, 2006, p. 388). In his refusal to see settler colonialism as an event, Wolfe insists on the present tenseness of settler violence. The logic of elimination, Wolfe’s term for the continuous colonial violence inflicted on Indigenous peoples, is also a structuring principle for settler-colonial society and identity (2006, p. 390). That is to say, settler-colonial violence structures not only the lives of those subjected to the violence, but also those who perpetrate the violence. As Thielen-Wilson (2012) argues, “if the violence of settler colonialism is an identity making practice – if identity is at the heart of the settler logic of elimination – then this explains why colonialism is on-going. Colonialism is on-going precisely because this white collective psychic desire is never stabilized, satisfied or sufficiently reassured” (p. 41). Moreover, “dominant discourses (or the narratives which dominant subjects create) about ‘Others’ (those whom the dominant subjects perceive and define as ‘subordinate’) reveals far more about the dominant subject – his or her culture, identity, psychopathology, desires, hopes, fears – than it does about the Other” (Thielen-Wilson 2012, pp. 106-7). This is the very crux of the theoretical framework that informs my analysis of the apology. That is, I read the apology as a dominant narrative that can reveal
far more about the settler-colonizer than it can the subject to whom it is purportedly addressed.

The specificity of the Canadian context is just as important to my theoretical framework as the turn towards an analysis of the dominant subject in the colonial relationship. Canada’s national narrative, foundational myth and production of identity for its subjects all revolve around the idea that Canada is a peaceful nation of benevolent settlers. The denial of not only the history of colonialism, but also the ongoing nature of colonialism, is vehement in popular Canadian culture, education and policy. We need to ask what purpose this serves, and how to attend to the specificity of this context. As Sherene Razack asks in *Dark Threats and White Knights* (2004), “when a nation announces itself as a peacekeeper to the world, and when its national subjects derive from this and related mythologies a sense of self, history, and place, what material structures and practices sustain these beliefs and are, in turn, sustained by them?” (p. 9). These questions help to form my theoretical framework, orienting my analysis towards a critique of the material structures and practices at work within and surrounding the rhetoric of the apology that help to sustain colonial relations.

My analysis of the mechanisms of power at work in the rhetoric of the apology comes in part from critical race scholars’ critique of the modern liberal state. These scholars theorize the way in which modern liberal states claim to be anti-racist, or post-race, while they are predicated on, or engaged in, the sustaining of white supremacy. David Goldberg argues in *The Racial State* (2002) that modern liberal states disavow their participation in the creation and maintenance of race relations. He writes, “social
seams remain sewn with racial threads now purged of all responsibility for their (re)production” (p. 232). This is precisely the kind of double move made in the apology, where the racism that must be apologized for is quarantined to the past even while it reproduces that very racism in the present. Wendy Brown makes a similar point in States of Injury (1995), “the state achieves a good deal of its power through its devious claims to resolve the very inequalities that it actually entrenches by depoliticizing” (p. 109). Again, we can see the way the Canadian state achieves a good deal of its power through the apology’s claim that it is resolving the very inequalities that it is simultaneously entrenching. This critique of the central paradox of the modern liberal state helps to form my analysis of the productive work the apology is engaged in; how the Canadian state, and its ideal national subject, gains power through the disavowal of its participation in the reproduction of colonial relations at the very same time as it is (re)entrenching those very relations.

In terms of accounting for the affective dimension of the work of the apology, I turn to Sara Ahmed’s (2004b) theorizing of declarations of anti-racism and how these declarations make certain subjects feel. This theoretical orientation allows me to think through how the apology is a performance of feeling good for having transcended the conditions that made it necessary in the first place, and to ask, “what is at stake in this performance of good feeling?” (Ahmed, 2012, p. 84). The attention to the feelings produced by the apology allows us to think beyond what the document is saying, to think not just of the language and its material consequences, but also to think of the ways in which affect is produced and used to secure social hierarchies. The turn towards an
analysis of the affective dimension of the apology provides an avenue for analyzing how in modern Canada we are so attached to our identities as benevolent peacemakers even while we are benefiting from colonial social hierarchies. We require protection from the hurt of being charged as racists, even if it risks overlooking the ways in which we are complicit with white supremacy. As Ahmed (2012) notes, “to speak about racism would hurt not just the organization, reimagined as a subject with feelings, but also those subjects who identify with the organization. They would be hurt by what is heard as a charge, such that the charge becomes about their hurt. There is an implicit injunction not to speak about racism to protect whiteness from getting hurt” (p. 147). In the Canadian context, the nation itself is reimagined as a subject with feelings, and those that identify with the national narrative are also at risk of having their feelings hurt by the charge of racism. The injunction to protect Canada, and its national subjects, from getting hurt by the charge of racism is paramount and the apology does the very work required to protect both the national narrative and its subjects.

Another essential component to my theoretical framework is the idea of accountability and of implication. I am, for the most part, critiquing the very subject position from which I write. That is, I benefit from the very colonial relations I seek to critique. I attempt to heed the warning of scholars to avoid producing a narrative of my own innocence. As Razack (2004) argues, “when we hide our own implication and stand outside of history, preoccupied with our own pain, we stake out the colour line, producing ourselves as individuals and as a nation on the civilized side of things” (p. 24). Ultimately, it is essential for me to remember that we are each accountable for “violence
that is done in our name” and that, “whether we participate directly in it, observe it, condone it, or simply fail to name it for what it is” (Razack, 2004, p. 57) we are responsible.

2.2 Methodology

Discourse analysis takes as its fundamental premise that language can be seen as a form of action, or, as Fairclough (2001) writes, “discourse is social practice” (p. 9). It assumes that power is both expressed through language and that language helps to produce and sustain hierarchical social relations. It calls for the dismantling of dominant discourses through attention to, and deconstruction of, the ways in which discourse reproduces and naturalizes certain systems of power and meaning. It requires that we recognize that discourse is “more than ‘mere words’; it is controlling the contours of the political world, it is legitimizing policy, and it is sustaining power relations” (Fairclough, 2001, 90). This is a particularly useful method for understanding the apology because it allows for the serious contemplation of how the apology controls the contours of the politics of the nation, legitimizes policy and sustains colonial power relations. That is to say, it allows for the contemplation of how the narrative the apology trades in actually (re)produces subject positions and their material and historical possibilities.

Discourse analysis is interested in “how forms of discourse institute, solidify, change, create and reproduce social formations” (Wetherell & Potter, 1992, p. 3), and
ultimately is concerned with how knowledge is constituted. The stakes in the constitution of knowledge are emphatically high, particularly with regards to race, where the production of racialized knowledge has consistently naturalized and justified violence, both literal and epistemic, against the ‘Other’. Wetherell and Potter (1992) write, “Patterns of meaning become fixed in clumps or ‘articulations’ of practices and discourses which specify agents and their social interests. These nodal points acquire stability and solidity, creating power through the forms of knowledge and ‘truth’, the types of actors and forms of subjectivity constituted” (p. 172). That is, “the power in language links to, and stems from, other external, material and tactical forms of power” (Hook, 2001, p. 528). But, this is also the reason that critical discourse analysis can contribute to the dismantling of systems of domination. Discourse lies at the very crux of the production of knowledge. Fairclough (2001) argues that, “critical language awareness is a facilitator for ‘emancipatory discourse’ which challenges, breaks through, and may ultimately transform the dominant orders of discourse, as a part of the struggle of oppressed social groupings against the dominant bloc” (pp. 239-40). That is, critical discourse analysis can be the deconstructive lever that brings the whole house of knowledge down.

Discourse analysis is also a particularly useful tool for scholarly work on the apology because “people are not conscious of being socially positioned subjects, and standardly see their own subjective identities as somehow standing outside and prior to society” (Fairclough, 2001, p. 105). Or, as Pierre Bourdieu writes, “it is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning
than they know” (quoted in Fairclough, 2001, p. 41). That is, a project that engaged with popular responses to the apology, or in how subjects understand their subjective identities in relation to apology, is a different, albeit valuable, project. As a recent New York Times article put it, “in modern America we believe racism to be the property of the uniquely villainous and morally deformed, the ideology of trolls, gorgons and orcs. We believe this even when we are actually being racist.” (Coates, 2013). The same holds true for Canada, although perhaps even more emphatically because of our national identity as uniquely morally heroic. This phenomenon of an identity based in the denial of racism and colonialism is the very reason discourse analysis (rather than say, interviews or focus groups), grounds my analysis. It allows me to critique the production of an anti-racist settler identity in the context of ongoing colonialism and white supremacy.

The apology is a particular kind of discourse and requires attention to the specificity of the kind of meaning it claims to produce. Apologies are utterances that already claim to do something. That is, apologies claim to perform rather than merely state. They are performative statements, or as J.L Austin (1962), in his influential work on speech act theory, How to do Things with Words, called them illocutionary acts. Austin argued that ‘performatives’ are words that produce the effects they name (i.e. in a marriage ceremony where ‘I do’ produces a married couple), and that they should be analyzed differently than words that do not claim to produce the effects they name. But, an important caveat, there are conditions that must be met in order for the performative to work (or, as he put it, to be a ‘happy’ performative). Austin categorized apologies as performative speech acts and argued that in order for an apology to be a ‘happy’
performative, the condition that must be met, is that the person on the receiving end of the apology must accept the apology. Austin’s work is an important stepping-stone for Sara Ahmed (2004b) in her piece, Declarations of Whiteness: the non-performativity of anti-racism, which is a central component of my theoretical framework for this thesis. As Fairclough (2001) argues, “the conventions for speech acts which form part of a discourse type embody ideological representations of subjects and their social relationships” (p. 158). The conflation of discourse analysis with speech act theory allows me to analyze both the effective and affective dimensions of the apology with regards to the production of subject positions.

One of the most common and important critiques of most models of discourse analysis is that they fail to sufficiently address the material and the historical. Derek Hook’s (2001) piece Discourse, Knowledge, Materiality and History: Foucault and Discourse Analysis provides important methodological imperatives that warn discourse analysts of the traps of not sufficiently tracing language back to the material. He writes that the, “various systems through which knowledge is qualified/disqualified… are not traced far back enough to the material conditions of possibility, to the multiple institutional supports and various social structures and practices underlying the production of truth” (Hook, 2001, p. 525). “As a result”, he argues, “discourse is not sufficiently grasped in its relation to power; the power of discourse is insufficiently engaged, and discourse analysis becomes more of a project of reading the text than of engaging the discourse.” (pp. 525-6). In order to avoid the trap of insufficiently engaging the discourse, I trace the historical and legal background to the apology, showing the very
tangible materiality of the discourse, and I attempt to focus my analysis of the discursive moves in the apology on the extra-discursive. As Hook (2001) notes, Foucault “demands that one does not reduce the analysis of discourse to the ‘markings of a textuality’, but that one fixes it also in the physicality of its effects, in the materiality of its practices” (p. 537). While the apology is undoubtedly a text that can be analyzed as such, to focus solely on the text, or the mere ‘markings of textuality’, and not the production of subject positions, the legitimizing of racist and violent policy, and the sustaining of naturalized theft of Indigenous lands and resources, is to miss the political opportunity of engaging the discourse.

In order to attend to the material physicality of the discourse, a particular kind of reading of texts must be employed. Hook (2001) refers to this kind of reading as horizontal analysis. He writes, “the discourse analyst must be prepared to search for similar functions across a variety of different forms (language, practices, material reality, institutions, subjectivity)” (p. 534). Furthermore, “rather than following linear successions of development (vertical patterns of analysis), the discourse analyst must trace a laterality, mapping parallels of regularity (horizontal, ‘sideways’ patterns of analysis)” (p. 534). I heed Hook’s call and approach the discourse of the apology with a constant ‘sideways’ glance at the meaning produced by the statement in terms of settler colonialism, whiteness and nationalism. I map the parallels of the apology with the pattern of regularity that is white supremacy. I take seriously Hook’s (2001) warning that:

“if the critical efforts of the discourse analyst are to possess any real political weight, than these analyses will need be substantiated with reference to a different
epistemological order than that of textuality. The point here is that one needs reference one’s analytical conclusions, wherever possible, to a double epistemology; to corroborate findings to extra-textual dimensions, like those of space (geography), time (history), architecture or material forms of practice” (p. 539).

2.3 Literature Review

A number of analyses have now been published with regard to the Indian Residential Schools apology (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qo5cG-RjE8Y). Scholars have consistently been critical of the ways in which the apology reinforces the national narrative of the benevolent and peaceful settler-state, discursively situates the violence of colonialism in the past, and enables the continuing theft of Indigenous lands, and the reproduction of colonial social relations, in the present. While these critiques of the apology are difficult to contain categorically, as they overlap and intertwine, I have attempted to organize them along these lines in order to trace the themes that emerge in the literature. The following review surveys journal articles, dissertations and independent Indigenous news sources in order to trace the scholarship and critical discourse explicitly written about the apology. All of the sources reviewed below provide the foundation upon which my analysis rests.

Canada’s foundational myth of a diplomatic and non-violent frontier expansion, a vital component to national identity, has been rewritten and reframed over and over to conceal the violence that secured (and continues to secure) the legitimacy of land occupation by settlers. Scholars have repeatedly critiqued Canada’s national narrative as
an impediment to justice for Indigenous peoples, and the apology is no exception to this narrative, despite its putative admission of wrongdoing; it continues to do the work of concealing colonial violence in Canada at the expense of both truth and reconciliation.

The Canadian government has issued three apologies to the survivors of residential school. In 1991, Assistant Deputy Minister for Indian Affairs, Bill Van Iterson, apologized at a conference in Vancouver on the legacy of Indian Residential Schools. In 1998, then Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Jane Stewart, offered a ‘Statement of Reconciliation’ in response to the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* at a lunchtime ceremony on Parliament Hill (with then Prime Minister Jean Chrétien notably absent). And, finally, in 2008 Stephen Harper delivered his ‘Statement of Apology’ in the House of Commons. Matthew Dorrell (2009) argues that the need for the repetition of apologies from the Canadian government to survivors of residential schools suggests the difficulty of preserving the dominant narrative of Canada as a progressive, peaceful and inclusive nation, while responding to longstanding and ongoing state violence committed against Indigenous peoples (not just limited to the past, or to residential schools themselves). However, despite the difficulty of preserving this narrative, requiring glaring omissions and celebratory revisions of history, the narrative of the apology continues to insist on the benevolence of Canada and constructs ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Canadian’ identities in relation to this imagined peaceable nation.

However, even within the Canadian narrative of the progressive, benevolent nation, the state can admit *certain* mistreatments of *certain* groups of people into the national historical archive (carefully circumscribed acknowledgements of historical
‘mistakes’), though the limits are set at what might threaten the identity of Canada as a progressive beacon for the world (i.e. the violence and theft that both founded, and continues to sustain, the nation). Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (2009) argue that the admittance of these ‘mistakes’ (limited to mistreatment or bad policy), in fact, secure the Canadian mythology of benevolence by assuring Canadians that they are part of a nation that can recognize and then transcend their historical ‘mistakes’. They argue that this is exactly the work of the apology, it admits mistreatment and bad policy, suggests it can transcend these ‘mistakes’ precisely by having admitted them, and does so in order to secure the identity of the nation and its citizens.

A.L. McCready (2009) is also critical of the way the apology traces the regrettable original violence of the residential school system, through past ‘misunderstandings’ and unfortunate ‘mistakes’, to present day post-racial enlightenment. She argues that the apology tells the history of residential schools in this way in order to confirm the narrative of progressive settler attitudes and values.

Scholars are consistently critical of the way in which the apology discursively situates the violence of colonialism in a remote and distant past. In quarantining the violence of colonialism, and of residential schooling more specifically, to the past, the apology functions to conceal contemporary violence against Indigenous peoples, to recuperate contemporary Canadian humanitarian identity from the exposure to our racist ‘past’, and to separate the Indian Residential Schools from the broader colonial project.

Matthew Dorrell (2009) argues that in confining the abuses of the residential school system to the past, the apology removes the contextual information necessary to
understanding the school system as a part of a larger and ongoing colonial project. Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham (2009) argue that in the rhetoric of the reconciliation, and in the apology itself, the focus on residential schooling functions as a part-for-whole substitution, whereby Indian Residential Schools become isolated from the broader and multifaceted project of colonialism in Canada and is understood simply as malpractice. A.L. McCready (2009) also notes that the apology functions to comfortably locate colonialism in the past. Mike Krebs’ *The Harper Apology – Saying ‘Sorry’ with a Forked Tongue* (2008) argues, just three weeks after the June 11th apology, that the speech should be judged for how it addresses, and provides redress for, the entire history of Canadian colonialism, which, he argues, it fails to do. Once again, the separation of the Indian Residential Schools from the broader project of colonialism is central to Krebs’ critique of the apology. He reminds us that the key role of the Indian Residential Schools in Canadian colonialism cannot be overestimated.

By decontextualizing the residential school system and refusing to explicitly name the Indian Residential Schools as part of a long and ongoing project of colonialism in Canada, the apology allows us to recuperate our identities as peaceful settlers in the present, and to ignore contemporary violence against Indigenous peoples. Ultimately, the apology allows the continuation of the denial of colonialism, enabling the perpetuation of theft of Indigenous lands and the reproduction of colonial social relations in the present. This is precisely the point where scholars connect the rhetoric of the apology, and of reconciliation more broadly, to the real social, political and material concerns of Indigenous peoples in Canada.
A.L. McCready (2009) draws on data collected by Angus Reid showing the fluctuations in Canadian public support for the issuing of an apology to residential school survivors. Support for the apology grew from 42 percent to 53 percent before the apology, and then drew support from two thirds of those surveyed after the apology was delivered. McCready shows how the growing support of the apology was simultaneous with the open (and sometimes hostile) lack of support for other contemporary Indigenous claims to justice. She argues that the paradoxical support for symbolic forms of redress (i.e. apologies) with simultaneous hostility towards material forms of redress only makes sense within the logic of recuperating the national narrative of civility and benevolence.

Mike Krebs (2008) makes the connection between the continuing pursuit and theft of Indigenous lands and the apology explicit when he argues that the apology was issued at this particular moment in Canada’s history in order to subdue Indigenous resistance to intensified resource extraction. Krebs’ argument not only places an important emphasis on the political, economic and social implications of the rhetoric of the apology, but also insists on the significance of Indigenous resistance to colonialism in Canada as a central part of the story of the apology. Not only does Krebs trace the organized resistance to the theft of Indigenous lands and resources, and the mechanisms that enabled the Canadian settler state to enact that theft (i.e. the Indian Residential Schools), but, he argues, it is in that very context that we must understand the apology. That is to say, Krebs shifts the discourse on the apology from the centrality of the Canadian settler state, its’ actions and discursive moves, to the centrality of Indigenous resistance. He argues that the continued resistance of Indigenous peoples to the Canadian
government, and its neo-liberal capitalist agenda, should be understood as one of the main factors influencing the decision to issue an apology.

Leslie Thielen-Wilson’s (2012) dissertation *White Terror, Canada’s Indian Residential Schools and the Colonial Present* argues that the apology exposes discursive moves on the part of Canada that obscure both its past colonial objectives and recuperate and perpetuate anew the social relations between colonizer and colonized in the present. She argues that the subject positions that are rendered possible within the discursive framework created by the apology, and the rhetoric of reconciliation, more broadly, undermine the possibility of anti-colonial relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada.

Thielen-Wilson’s work is helpful in theorizing how the apology functions to produce subject positions that secure colonial relations in the present. While other scholars show how the apology masks on-going colonial violence and theft, Thielen-Wilson attends to how particular subjectivities and collectivities are discursively produced to maintain this ongoing colonial project.

Eva Mackay (2013) argues that the apology erases the links between residential schools and the larger land theft process. By concealing the connections between the Indian Residential Schools and the colonial theft of land and cultural genocide, MacKay argues the apology is appropriated into a future-looking and unifying discourse which does not require Canada or non-Indigenous Canadians to account for the benefits they have inherited in the process. MacKay looks to the *Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples* for insight on what a genuine and respectful version of reconciliation might look
like and finds RCAP’s reminder that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada are treaty peoples particularly helpful. She argues that the notion of all Canadians as ‘treaty peoples’ disrupts settler entitlement to land and brings the political and social aspects of colonialism into present-day in a manner that recognizes the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples.

Roland Chrisjohn, Andrea Bear Nicholas, Karen Stote, James Craven (Omahkonkiaayo i’poyi), Tanya Wasacase, Pierre Loiselle and Andrea Smith’s article An Historic Non-Apology, Completely and Utterly Not Accepted (2008) emphatically rejects the apology as communication with the intent to obscure historical truths. They note that Stephen Harper is the head of a political process that has had, since its origin, the elimination of Aboriginal peoples as its consistent policy (of which the Indian Residential School system was just one example among many, although, they note, a particularly effective example), and that this fact of genocide is meticulously avoided in the rhetoric of the apology. In order to show how the apology was insufficient in addressing, and providing redress for, the history of the residential school system, the authors outline the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and find that Canada is in violation of at least two of the subsections of Article 2. Further, the authors point to Canada’s omission of subsections (b), (d), and (e) in the implementation of the UN Convention, Canada’s justification being that provisions in domestic law already covered the prohibition of murder and manslaughter, not only reducing genocide to outright killing but also limiting the possibility of future liability (domestic law is subject to a statue of limitations, whereas the Genocide Convention is not). Ultimately, the
authors show how an apology that not only evades the central issue (genocide), but attempts to obscure the historical truths of what occurred in the schools, what the schools were intended to produce and who the perpetrators were, is at best a pseudo-apology and at worst a continuation of the violence. The authors end the piece with a call to attend to the apology, a call this thesis heeds. They write:

Those of you who saw clearly and immediately the farce that was being played out; those of you who felt in your heart of hearts that the whole orchestration was out of tune but couldn’t identify the offending instruments until now; and those of you who were misled until you brought the powers of your own intellect to the examination of this exercise in rhetorical excess; whatever your history is that led you to complete this overlong commentary; we invite you to join in the task of building what ultimately must replace this charade, some kind of response authentically committed to truth in this history and justice in its resolution. (p. 11).

In the *Windspeaker* issues following Harper’s apology, Christine Fiddler and Lorraine Flatfoot both published responses to the apology. Fiddler’s piece documents a wide range of both Indigenous leaders and survivors’ responses. What emerges is a clear call for accountability, for action rather than just words and a concern that misrepresentations of Indigenous peoples and histories still run rampant Canadian culture. Flatfoot, writing on behalf of the Aboriginal Healing Strategy, states the two main concerns of the AHS, one being that the history of residential schools be included in a meaningful way in the curriculum of public schools across the nation, and the other being the missing accounting of monies distributed for the Common Experience Payment as part of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement. Flatfoot documents a vast discrepancy between the funds made available as part of the settlement agreement and those actually paid out to survivors. Flatfoot’s insistence on the importance of material
and pedagogical issues in response to the apology serves as an important imperative for thinking through the apology and its material and pedagogical implications.

All of the sources reviewed employ a version of what could broadly be described as discourse analysis, with varying theoretical frameworks and disciplinary orientations informing the investigation. As a methodological tool developed to critique the way language and power are intimately bound, discourse analysis seems an obvious choice for an evaluation of a political speech like the apology. As Henderson and Wakeham (2013) argue, “historical injuries are framed and redress claims made in language and discourse” (p. 15), and so an approach that takes the intersection of language, discourse and power as its primary object of inquiry is a natural fit. All of the scholars, leaders and activists draw from different sources of evidence to show the way in which the apology perpetuates colonial social and power relations, and definitively fails to do what it claims to do.

In surveying the literature published on the apology, the theme of the critique of the national narrative of the benevolent and peaceful settler-state proves paramount. A concern is mounted again and again that the apology disavows the violence of the colonial present, as well as the history of the Indian Residential Schools as the history of colonial violence and the pursuit of Indigenous lands. While my thesis concurs with and contributes to this particular strand of theorizing of the apology, it also addresses a gap in the scholarship around the question of affect and of what Sara Ahmed (2004a) calls the “emotionality of the text”. A question left unanswered that this thesis attempts to address is, how do emotions circulate through the text of the apology, and the subjects it claims to
speak on behalf of, or to speak to, in order to produce innocent settler-subjects? That is, how do emotions do the work of securing colonial social relations? And, how is this a pleasurable experience for the dominant colonial subject?
Chapter 3: Historical and Legal Background

If part of the productive work of the apology is the obscuring of historical realities and the repudiation of settler responsibility, then an important part of resisting the propagation of the apology’s benevolent, peacemaker myth lies in revealing the historical and material realities of residential schools, in particular, and Canadian colonialism more broadly. Attending to the historical background of the apology is imperative if we are to understand the work it is engaged in. The apology has a history in and of itself, with failed apologies preceding it, but it also speaks intertextually to other important historical documents and policies. As Fairclough (2001) argues, “the concept of intertextual context requires us to view discourses and texts from a historical perspective, in contrast with the more usual position in language studies which would regard text as analyzable without reference to other texts, in abstraction from its historical context” (p. 155). In order to ensure that my analysis of the apology is rooted in historical context and material realities, this chapter begins with a brief historical explication of how the Indian Residential Schools was a central mechanism in Canada’s violent colonization of Indigenous peoples, then explores the relationship between the apology and the Indian Act, the fiduciary duty of the Crown to Indigenous peoples, and the legal ramifications of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement.
3.1 Indian Residential Schools Historical Background

The Indian residential school system, which operated for over a hundred years (1879-1996), was instrumental to Canada’s colonial project of nation building for white settlers on Indigenous land (Thielen-Wilson, 2012, Chrisjohn et al., 1997/2000, Churchill, 1997, 2003, 2004). It was not, as the discourse of the apology suggests, an educational project gone awry or improperly controlled, but rather an explicit and directed project of colonial violence (discussed further in Chapter 4). As Leslie Thielen-Wilson (2012) argues in her dissertation, the residential school system “can be understood as a settler identity project which sought to sever Indigenous children from their families and cultures, and attempted to disrupt the inter-generational transference of knowledge of the land” (p. 3). Furthermore, “the violence of Indian Residential Schools—whether child abduction, sexual abuse, physical abuse, medical experimentation, exposure to disease, death, the extermination of languages, the destruction of families, the elimination of cultures (Kelm, 1998)—can be fully understood only within this context of the colonial quest to control land and resources in the interests of a dominant white collective (settler occupiers)” (Thielen-Wilson, 2012, p. 3). That is, our fundamental orientation towards the history of Indian Residential Schools should be to understand it as a mechanism for the accomplishment of a violent colonial project of land acquisition, in the name of settlers. As Roland Chrisjohn et al. (1997) argue in The Circle Game “the relentless burden of life in Indian Residential School was a deliberate, well thought out, long-practiced policy, undertaken to achieve particular results” (p. 87).
The schools were grounded in violence and were the instrument of the explicitly violent assimilation policy embraced by the Canadian Government. They were one of, if not the, most important apparatus to make Duncan Campbell Scott’s prerogative to “get rid of the Indian problem” and 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” (as quoted in Milloy, 1999, p. 46), succeed. Indeed, this was achieved through both the ‘softer’, epistemic violence of forced assimilation, and the more literal, corporeal violence that resulted in the deaths of as many as 50,000 children, either at the schools or shortly upon their return home (Kelm, 1998). Grand Chief Matthew Coon Come, speaking at a Truth and Reconciliation event held in Winnipeg in June, 2010, argued that the very term ‘residential schools’ obscured the reality of the violence of these institutions. He noted:

“‘Residential schools’ is a terrible euphemism. This term obscures and cleanses the truth about these terrible places and the shocking program of political and cultural destruction of which they were a central pillar. The places to which we were taken were places of involuntary childhood internal exile and, frequently, systematic maltreatment. Their larger purpose was not to house or educate us, but rather to separate whole generations of Indigenous children from their parents and communities and traditional lands and resources. The chilling overall policy idea was to ultimately eliminate our peoples by assimilating the Indigenous children while allowing time for parents, grandparents and nations to die off alone in their traditional lands, thus clearing the country for settlement, agriculture and resource extraction by the Crown”.

Coon Come makes clear not only the explicit violence of residential schools and the reason for their existence, but also why this policy was undertaken, to make space for the settler. His statement insists that we acknowledge not only how the residential schools were instrumental to the project of Canadian colonialism, but also why.
The operational contours of the schools changed throughout the tenure of their existence. The schools shifted their emphasis from assimilation in the 1840s through 1910, to segregation from 1911-1951, and then integration from 1951-1970 (Llewellyn, 2002). And yet, regardless of the emphasis of the schools, the intent that remained constant was to “kill the Indian in the child”. They were a deliberate genocidal institution, propagated by a conceptual worldview on behalf of the settler that was (and continues to be) bent on making Indigenous peoples disappear, whether through assimilation or more explicit, corporeal forms of violence.

This violent conceptual worldview of Indian Residential Schools remains, unchanged, and indicates the importance of recognizing the historicity of the present. That is to say, the historical specificity of the Indian Residential Schools can be parsed through a genealogy of the present, mainstream settler-Canadian understanding of the Indian Residential Schools. As Chrisjohn et al. (1997) note in *The Circle Game*, “The conceptual worldview that gave rise to the genocide of Aboriginal Peoples remains in place, unchallenged; its lineaments invade all aspects of present majority thinking about Indian Residential School” (p. 23). They go on to argue that, “unless this worldview is recognized, and the damage it has done and continues to do is brought into focus, the long-term agenda of Indian Residential Schooling will succeed, even while we congratulate ourselves on having met it head-on and defeated it” (p. 23). Chrisjohn et al. (1997) seem to have predicted exactly what occurred years later in the rhetoric of the apology, that is, the self-congratulating of having met and defeated the ‘old’ attitudes of residential school policy whilst propagating the very same worldview.
3.2 The *Indian Act*, Enfranchisement and the Apology

The legislative apparatus that has consistently shaped the contours of the Canadian nation-state vis-à-vis Indigenous peoples is the *Indian Act* and its promotion of, and propagation of, both voluntary and involuntary assimilation. The *Indian Act* is federal Canadian law that governs matters relating to Indian status, bands and reserves. It is a body of laws and a “regulatory regime” (Lawrence, 2003) that authorize the Canadian government to regulate and administer the day-to-day lives of status Indians and reserve communities. The very concept of the *Indian Act* was, and continues to be, based in the attempt to assimilate Indigenous peoples into the body politic of Canada. It functions to divide and segregate Indigenous peoples with status, and therefore a political identity outside of citizenship to the Nation, from those without, assumed to have been assimilated (this is not to suggest that Indigenous peoples without status have assimilated, but only to point to the intent of the legislation). Sunera Thobani (2007) argues “the invention of the Indian as a lawless political identity was legislated and bureaucratized by the colonial state through the ‘legal apartheid’ that is the *Indian Act*” (p. 14). The choice, within this ‘legal apartheid’, is to assimilate into the settler-citizenry or to remain bound by the legislation in the Act. The apology continues to rest on this logic of assimilation and enfranchisement. By assuming that the goal of the apology, shared by both Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada alike, is to build “a stronger Canada for all of us” (House of Commons, 2008), the apology reiterates the sovereignty of Canada and not the sovereignty of Indigenous nations. That is to say, it assumes the
assimilation of Indigenous nations into the Canadian nation-state, at the same time as it apologizes for the forced assimilation that the Indian Residential Schools, officially mandated by the Indian Act, represents. As Thobani (2007) notes, the Indian Act creates a “framework for the governance of Indians on the basis that they needed protection and could be civilized through assimilation”, the Act “defined which Native peoples were to be eligible for Indian status and which were to be denied status… it was driven primarily by the goal of eliminating Native populations” (p. 49). Seen from this perspective, the implicit invitation to assimilation that the apology espouses is far more insidiously violent than it initially appears to be. Assimilation is driven by a desire to eliminate Indigenous populations, whether literally or epistemologically, and the apology’s suggestion that assimilation into the nation-state is a desirable outcome of reconciliation shows how the conceptual worldview that led to the Indian Residential Schools continues to abound.

The Indian Act is the very legislation that sustained the pre-Confederation Imperial control of Indian affairs and enforced the Indian Residential Schools. The Act was amended in 1920 to make the attendance of residential schools mandatory for all Indigenous children. The Indian Act (of 1927, para 32) gave Canada a statutory duty for the “education of Indian children” and paragraphs 32 and 34 give Canada the right to hire officers to ensure the mandatory attendance of residential schools (Thielen-Wilson, 2012, pp. 160-61). The rhetoric of the apology, which never explicitly acknowledges the Act, makes this very crucial legislation into a kind of absent referent, which names only the “effects of a past violent colonial project of nation-building” (Thielen-Wilson, 2012, p.
289) and not the mechanisms which brought the Indian Residential Schools into existence. In order to expose the concealed history of the residential schools within the rhetoric of the apology, it is necessary to trace the claims made to the material and historical apparatuses that secured their existence in the first place. The importance of linking the apology with the Indian Act legislation is the very crux of explicitly linking of the past to the present (which the apology so painstakingly attempts not to do) (Thielen-Wilson, 2012, p. 285). By making explicit the way in which the apology reiterates the logic of assimilation and of enfranchisement (which has its strongest force in Indian Act legislations), and therefore undermining self-government and the sovereignty of Indigenous nations, we have the opportunity to reveal the continuing colonial project within which the apology was uttered.

Ultimately, the apology can be read as an invitation into the nation, an invitation that comes with the caveat of a national narrative that denies the continuing colonial project it is engaged in.

3.3 The Apology and Fiduciary Duty

The issue of the Crown/government’s fiduciary duty to Indigenous peoples is one that circulates in and around the apology. There remains a longstanding confusion for both the Canadian state and settler Canadians between fiduciary duty and a colonialist paternalistic drive. Understanding the difference between the two allows a critical turn
towards the apology and the colonial project more broadly. The state’s fiduciary duty to ‘Indians’ has its roots in the *Royal Proclamation of 1763*, which “‘differentiated’ Indian title from non-Indian title… it recognized the existence of Indian nations and the need to negotiate with them; it defined Indian title as collective, not individual, reducing this title to ‘use rights’; it stipulated Indian title could only be transferred to the Crown; it recognized ‘fiduciary’ duty of the state to Indians, and a duty to protect them” (Thobani, 2007, p. 47). The crux lies in the interpretation of what ‘fiduciary duty’ means. The history of the legal interpretation of fiduciary duty is long and complicated (and ongoing), because it is ultimately about legally sanctioned land transfer. Not only does fiduciary duty require the legal proof of the existence and nature of Indian title, it also stipulates that the Crown is liable for how it acts in the interest of Aboriginal peoples if their title is surrendered. Many court cases have contributed to the evolving definition of the Crown’s fiduciary duty to Aboriginal peoples, most notably *Guerin v. R*, which established that Aboriginal title was a *sui generis* right and that the fiduciary duty of the Crown could or did entail legal consequences, and *R. v. Sparrow*, which established a “general guiding principle” for section 35 of the constitution, namely that the honour of the Crown is at stake in all legislation and action vis-à-vis Aboriginal peoples (Hurley, 2000). While the judicial interpretation of fiduciary duty insinuates that the state has a responsibility to act in the best interest of Indigenous peoples, and to negotiate with Indigenous peoples and nations for those best interests to be ensured (and, indeed, it is law), the colonial imagination has rendered ‘fiduciary duty’ as the state’s right to act paternalistically towards Indigenous peoples (*Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples*,)
1996), negotiated out of its own racial logic that views Indigenous peoples as incapable of handling their own affairs. The apology emerges from this latter conception of ‘fiduciary duty’ and reiterates the racist logic of the Indigenous subject as a child to which the state has paternal duties.

The trope of the parent-child relationship between the state and Indigenous peoples circulates in and through both the apology and the Indian Residential Schools litigation from which it emerged. The failure of the settler state, and of individual settlers, to perform their ‘parental’ duties is frequently cited as the failure of the Indian Residential Schools. Thielen-Wilson’s *White Terror* (2012) shows the return again and again to this misinterpretation of fiduciary duty in the Indian Residential Schools litigation. She argues, “despite all the testimonies which they will have heard, judges frame the Indian Residential Schools as failed attempts of carrying out fiduciary duties (not between nations, but between guardians and children)” (Thielen-Wilson, 2012, p. 255). This framework of viewing the fiduciary duty as that between guardians and children and not between nations is reiterated in the apology. Harper apologizes for the state’s failure to protect Indigenous peoples and simultaneously for the undermining of “the ability of many to adequately parent their own children” (House of Commons, 2008). By apologizing for failing to protect Indigenous children and for undermining the ability of Indigenous peoples to parent their own children, Harper misses the fundamental point that ‘fiduciary duty’ does not necessitate and justify paternalistic, patronizing colonial attitudes: attitudes that gave rise to the Indian Residential Schools in the first place. Indian Residential Schools were not an exercise in failed parental duties; they
existed because the settler state and individual settlers believed (and continue to believe) in their own moral and ethical superiority, a “time worn strategy of infantilizing the Indigenous collective” (Rifkin, 2009) that helped to secure settler entitlement to land. That is, the very attitude that produced the Indian Residential Schools in the first place is reiterated in the state responses to being held accountable for the production of such a violent, destructive institution. Patricia Monture-Angus argues, if Canada and Indigenous nations were to create respectful relations between nations we would first need to “eradicate all traces of the preoccupation – overt and embedded – that the Crown and the people represented by the Crown have had with superiority. If this is not possible, then the full legal potential of the fiduciary relationship will not be realized” (Monture-Angus, 2002, pp. 158-9, quoted in Thielen-Wilson 2012, p. 316). To relinquish the sense of superiority held by settlers and the state alike is to find the potential of the fiduciary relationship between sovereign nations and to relinquish the long-held colonial trope of the Indigenous subject as the puerile, inferior subject in need of the settler’s saving and the settler’s state. Ultimately, we need to be critical of the apology and its insistence that the negative impact of Indian Residential Schools is “the inability of generations within the Indigenous collective to parent their own children...[because] such a portrayal will call upon the settler to act paternalistically” (Thielen-Wilson, 2012, p. 286), allowing the continuation of the very worldview that produced the Indian Residential Schools in the first place.
3.4 Legal Background

“Think about everything that First Nations people have survived in this country: the taking of our land, the taking of our children, residential schools, the current criminal justice system, the outlawing of potlaches, Sundances, and other ceremonies, and the stripping of Indian women (and other Indian people) of their status. Everything we survived as individuals or as Indian peoples. How was all of this delivered? The answer is simple: through law”


Fundamentally, Canada imagines itself as a nation founded on principles of lawfulness, populated with law-abiding (settler) citizens. Canada imagines itself in this way despite the violence of conquest that is at the heart of the settlement of the land. The legal system that allows settlers and the state to identify as essentially lawful, while at the same time condoning the violence and genocide of Indigenous peoples, produces a scenario whereby the “Indian body is the site of exception to the law” (Thobani, 2007, p. 48). And yet, the national narrative insists upon its foundational lawfulness. Sunera Thobani argues that “the claim of the lawfulness of the foundation of nationhood… and of national subjects as essentially law-abiding… is sustained, if not strengthened, by the process of confession, expressions of profound regret, and celebrations of the constitutional and legislative inclusion of Aboriginal peoples into the embrace of the law” (2007, p. 35). The relationship between Indigenous peoples and the law is reiterated through the rhetoric of the apology. Not only is Canada concerned with ensuring that it is not held legally accountable for the crime of genocide the Indian Residential Schools represents, but it also strengthens its claim of moral and ethical superiority through the
confessional expression of regret of the apology, which was not, significantly, legally mandated. Indeed, the Canadian legal system has always been “a regime of racial power” (Thobani, 2007, p. 54)

The events that led up to the June 2008 apology, and the signing of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, require a socio-legal lens in order to understand the ways in which both the apology and the agreement itself serve to sustain Canada’s national narrative as a legitimate sovereign nation of benevolent peacemakers, over and above the interests of the victims of the Indian Residential Schools. In 2005, the Assembly of First Nations brought together the largest class action suit in Canadian history, known as the Baxter class action suit, on behalf of Indian Residential Schools survivors, seeking damages for physical, emotional, psychological and sexual abuse; loss of language and culture; deprival of love and guidance from their families; inadequate education; and, inadequate living conditions. The class action suit was originally brought against the federal government, but then was expanded to include church organizations when the federal government named them as third parties in the action. The Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement was in turn offered as settlement, negotiated over a period of six months, leading to the Agreement in Principle in November 2005. Then, the court-approved Settlement Agreement was implemented on September 19, 2007. Thielen-Wilson (2012) argues that “Canadians should know that the IRSSA is the product of over a decade and a half of Indigenous activism unfolding simultaneously on both political and legal fronts”, adding that, “Canadians should also know that the Government of Canada (whether liberal-led or conservative-led) fought it all the way” (p.
246). However, there are very important distinctions between the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement and the original Baxter class action suit, distinctions that illustrate the Government of Canada’s resistance to be held accountable for the Indian Residential Schools.

Central to the Baxter action was the claim of loss of language and culture, which gets subsumed under the Common Experience Payment (CEP) in the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement. However, the Baxter claim of loss of language and culture and the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement CEP differ in important ways. On the one hand, the Baxter class action claimed that loss of language and culture was directly the result of a sustained effort on behalf of the Canadian Government to commit cultural genocide, while on the other, the signing of the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, which does not explicitly admit to cultural genocide, instead claiming a common negative experience, illustrates the resistance on behalf of the government to be held accountable. As Thielen-Wilson (2012) argues, “had the Baxter class action proceeded through the courts, it would claim that Canada is directly (rather than merely vicariously) responsible for the cultural genocide. In signing the IRSSA the Government of Canada explicitly withholds admitting to the crime of cultural genocide.” (p. 278).

_Baxter v. Canada_ posed a challenge not only to the national narrative of the peaceful benevolent settler state, but also to the very sovereignty of Canada itself. Baxter “points to the wider colonial policy and legislation which gave rise to the Indian Residential Schools institutions, and claims that this policy and legislation is itself a
violation of human rights, a form of genocide” (Thielen-Wilson, 2012, p. 233). The Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, conversely, never explicitly named Canada’s sustained effort at the elimination of Indigenous peoples, allowing the continuation of the national narrative that Canada was both legitimately and peacefully settled. As Thielen-Wilson argues, “a nation built on genocide is a nation with an undeniably illegitimate claim to sovereignty” (2012, p. 227). Baxter made explicit the violent colonial project upon which Canada was built, threatening to unravel the very foundation of the nation. Baxter v. Canada posed a challenge to the very “constitutionality of the Indian Act, claiming that the Crown breached numerous Treaty obligations, as well as the United Nations Genocide Convention, the ‘Convention against torture and other civil, inhuman or degrading treatment’ and International Conventions regarding the rights of the child” (Baxter Amended claim 2006, p. 14 quoted in Thielen-Wilson). The Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement, on the other hand, was much more in line with the rhetoric of the apology which claims the Indian Residential Schools institutions were educative malpractice, a series of mistakes, perpetrated by a few bad apples, that led to a regrettable (though certainly not systemic or intentional) amount of violence and destruction in the lives of Indigenous peoples. The difference between these two claims boils down to the difference between acknowledging and denying the colonial, genocidal drive that led to the Indian Residential Schools. As Roland Chrisjohn et al. (2008) note in their response to Harper’s apology, there is no statute of limitations on the act of genocide, and so Canada had to deny its sustained genocide against Indigenous peoples in order to ensure it would not be held legally
accountable in the international arena in the future. This is how the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement manages to appear to admit wrongdoing while denying the particular wrongdoing outlined in the Baxter class action suit. While the Indian Residential School Settlement Agreement is still a victory for Indigenous peoples, it “enables Canada to recuperate or reinstall ‘settler and native’ within a contemporary colonial order” (Thielen-Wilson, 2012, p. 227).

3.5 Failed and Repeated Apologies to Indian Residential Schools Survivors

“with respect to the apology, survivors want and need a full apology delivered by the Prime Minister on the floor of the House of Commons… Such an apology would provide much-needed recognition, validation, and acknowledgement of abuses suffered in schools, a necessary step for the healing process to begin. For an apology to work, it must be understood and performed symbolically in terms of the ritual that it is. It must offer the potential for transformation of all involved. With a nationally imposed system like the residential school system, transformation cannot occur unless the key players in the ritual are involved – the apology, the Prime Minister, and the House of Commons… With respect to lump sum compensation, survivors are entitled to and want financial redress for the pain and suffering – loss of language and culture, loss of family and childhood, loss of self-esteem, addictions, depression, and suicide – we’ve endured. The residential school system failed to educate Aboriginal peoples, condemning us, for the most part, to the ranks of the unskilled labourer, the resource industries, and the social welfare system… Add in cultural discontinuity and racism, and a genocidal cocktail ensues… We need you to look, listen, and do something”


The call for an apology was an ongoing activist project for Indigenous leaders, organizations and survivors for nearly two decades before the June 2008 apology. A longstanding denial of the abuses that occurred in residential schools pervaded Canadian
consciousness. Once high profile figures like Phil Fontaine, former three-time National Chief of the Assembly of First Nations, began to disclose their experiences of abuse in the schools, the denial became harder to maintain. Calls, like the one quoted from above, conveyed the need for the recognition of the genocide, from a respectful place of honouring nation to nations relations. The June 2008 apology, however, was not the first of its kind. In January 1998, Jane Stewart, then minister of Indian and Northern Affairs, delivered a “Statement of Reconciliation” to Indigenous leaders and government workers at a lunchtime meeting held in a government meeting room in Ottawa (Corntassel & Holder, 2008). The Statement was received with mixed reactions from Indigenous leaders, with many dismissing it immediately as insincere. For many leaders, including Chief Joseph quoted above, nothing short of a full apology from the Prime Minister in the House of Commons would suffice (Corntassel & Holder, 2008). The Statement, like the later apology from Harper, sought to bring an end to the ‘sad’ legacy of Indian Residential Schools. It, like the later apology form Harper, carefully avoided the words genocide and colonialism. In fact, the Statement only apologized to the victims of physical and sexual abuse, and not for the institution itself. The statement “offered an explicit apology but only to those who suffered the ‘tragedy of sexual and physical abuse at residential schools’—apparently the residential school policy itself or other cultural, political, social, economic, and psychological impacts did not warrant an apology” (Corntassel & Holder, 2008). The Statement failed to satisfy as an adequate response to the violence of the Indian Residential Schools, and while the Harper apology had a more ceremoniously satisfying dimension, the fact that it, again, carefully avoided apologizing
for what is really at issue, the sustained attempt at genocide for the purpose of land acquisition and nation-building, suggests that it fails to adequately respond.

In 2006, when the Conservatives came to power, Harper not only rejected the Kelowna Accord, a series of agreements that were the result of a long negotiation process between the Canadian Government, provincial governments, and Indigenous leaders to address issues of poverty, education and living standards, but also was critical of the IRSSA. Upon taking office, Harper openly stated that he had no intention of honouring the Liberal Government’s promise of an official apology to Indian Residential Schools survivors. He “initially refused to deliver an apology to Indian Residential Schools survivors, but eventually succumbed to pressure to do so” (Thielen-Wilson, 2012, p. 262). The final push came from Gary Merasty, a former Liberal Member of Parliament and the first status Indian to be elected in Saskatchewan (University of Saskatchewan 100 Alumni of Influence, n.d.), who introduced a motion in Parliament to call on the Prime Minister to apologize ‘for the trauma’ of Indian Residential Schools. The motion passed unanimously 257 to 0. Thielen-Wilson (2012) notes that, “after such pressure, P.M. Harper agreed to deliver an apology at the end of the five year Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), waiting, he implied, to see what exactly he was apologizing for” (p. 277). However, further pressure forced Harper to agree to make the apology at the start of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Harper’s sustained reluctance to apologize, to “look, listen and do something” as Chief Joseph so eloquently entreated, fundamentally calls into question the sincerity with which his statement was uttered.
Chapter 4: From Recognition of Wrongdoing to Transcendence of Colonial Shame; the Work of the Apology

The 2008 Indian Residential Schools Apology, reproduced in its entirety here, claims to pave the way for reconciliation, to recognize a historical mistake and take responsibility for it, but it also does different and more work. In order to trace the work that the apology does, I begin with an exploration of the concept of apologies themselves. I then move to an examination of to whom the apology is addressed and finally I offer an analysis of the emotionality of the text of the apology. I argue that the apology functions both to assuage the settler subject of guilt and responsibility and to recuperate a national identity of innocent settlers in the aftermath of exposure to the violence and theft of colonialism implicit in the Indian Residential Schools system. I show how the stakes of insisting that the apology ‘pave the way for reconciliation’ are high and that, to borrow Sara Ahmed’s (2004a) words, “the gap between saying sorry and being sorry cannot be filled, even by a ‘good performance’ of the utterance” (p. 114). Here is the text of the speech as delivered on June 11, 2008 and reproduced in the CTV news archives (retrieved from www.ctvnews.ca).

4.1 Statement of Apology

Mr. Speaker, I stand before you today to offer an apology to former students of Indian residential schools.

The treatment of children in Indian residential schools is a sad chapter in our history.
In the 1870s, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools.

Two primary objectives of the residential schools system were to remove and isolate children from the influence of their homes, families, traditions and cultures, and to assimilate them into the dominant culture.

These objectives were based on the assumption aboriginal cultures and spiritual beliefs were inferior and unequal. Indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, ‘to kill the Indian in the child.’ Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country.

Most schools were operated as ‘joint ventures’ with Anglican, Catholic, Presbyterian or United churches.

The Government of Canada built an educational system in which very young children were often forcibly removed from their homes, often taken far from their communities.

Many were inadequately fed, clothed and housed. All were deprived of the care and nurturing of their parents, grandparents and communities.

First nations, Inuit and Metis languages and cultural practices were prohibited in these schools.

Tragically, some of these children died while attending residential schools and others never returned home.

The government now recognizes that the consequences of the Indian residential schools policy were profoundly negative and that this policy has had a lasting and damaging impact on aboriginal culture, heritage and language.

While some former students have spoken positively about their experiences at residential schools these stories are far overshadowed by tragic accounts of the emotional, physical and sexual abuse and neglect of helpless children and their separation from powerless families and communities.

The legacy of Indian residential schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today.

It has taken extraordinary courage for the thousands of survivors that have come forward to speak publicly about the abuse they suffered.
It is a testament to their resilience as individuals and to the strength of their cultures. Regrettably, many former students are not with us today and died never having received a full apology from the government of Canada.

The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation.

Therefore, on behalf of the government of Canada and all Canadians, I stand before you, in this chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to aboriginal peoples for Canada’s role in the Indian residential schools system.

To the approximately 80,000 living former students, and all family members and communities, the government of Canada now recognizes that it was wrong to forcibly remove children from their homes and we apologize for having done this.

We now recognize that it was wrong to separate children from rich and vibrant cultures and traditions, that it created a void in many lives and communities, and we apologize for having done this.

We now recognize that, in separating children from their families, we undermined the ability of many to adequately parent their own children and sowed the seeds for generations to follow and we apologize for having done this.

We now recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled, and we apologize for failing to protect you.

Not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience, and for this we are sorry.

The burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a government, and as a country.

There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian residential schools system to ever again prevail.

You have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are now joining you on this journey.

The government of Canada sincerely apologizes and asks the forgiveness of the aboriginal peoples of this country for failing them so profoundly. We are sorry.
In moving towards healing, reconciliation and resolution of the sad legacy of Indian residential schools, implementation of the Indian residential schools settlement agreement began on September 19, 2007.

Years of work by survivors, communities, and aboriginal organizations culminated in an agreement that gives us a new beginning and an opportunity to move forward together in partnership.

A cornerstone of the settlement agreement is the Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission.

This commission presents a unique opportunity to educate all Canadians on the Indian residential schools system.

It will be a positive step in forging a new relationship between aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.

God bless all of you and God bless our land.

4.2 Tracing the Many Meanings of ‘Apology’

As an entry point into the complexities that Stephen Harper’s speech entails, I’d like to begin with the word ‘apology’ itself. The word “apology” has multiple and contradictory meanings both in its etymology and in its contemporary usage. Part of the reason the apology is so fraught with contradiction and tension is because the concept of apology itself is so complex. On the one hand an apology is, in its commonly used contemporary meaning, a regretful acknowledgement of an offence or failure. But, on the
other hand, we have the traces of the history of the word, the meanings that are repressed within the word. The etymology of apology comes from the Greek word ‘apologia’ and refers to a speech in defense, a self-excusing speaking in one’s own defense. If we look even closer at the word, the prefix, ‘apo-’, can, amongst its many meanings, encompass ideas of completion, departure, cessation, removal and finishing. The base word, ‘-logy’, refers to logos or speech. An apology, then, can also mean an utterance that reaches towards completion, departure, cessation, removal and finishing.

If we begin with the first meaning, that an apology is an acknowledgement of an offence, it also claims to do something. That is, the contemporary common usage of the phrase ‘I/we apologize’, or ‘I am/we are sorry’, seeks to perform an action. It seeks to acknowledge an offence, to describe a feeling of regret, sorrow or shame, and to be forgiven for that offence (where forgiveness can also mean transcendence of the feelings of regret, sorrow or shame). Stephen Harper’s apology certainly acknowledges some offences and seeks forgiveness for those offences, but which offence the apology specifically addresses requires a close reading. The document uses the phrase, “we now recognize that it was wrong” (House of Commons, 2008), to refer to the separating of children from their family, homes and culture, the specific policy of assimilation that the Indian Residential Schools system was tasked with completing, and for having not yet already apologized. In declaring that the Canadian government “now recognizes” that it was wrong, the speech both acknowledges an offence and functions as a declaration of shame. Sara Ahmed addresses the complexities of this particular duality in the meaning of apologies in *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (2004a), where she argues that, “whether
an apology is received as a declaration of emotion or an admission of responsibility is dependent on the context in which the statement is given and received as well as the wording of the utterance” (p. 116).

The declaration of shame is clear from the beginning of the apology through to the end (I will return to a larger discussion of the role of shame in the apology further along in this chapter). However, the question of to what extent the apology functions as an admission of responsibility is not as clear. Harper apologizes for the government’s “role” in the Indian Residential Schools system, refusing to claim full responsibility for the enforcement of the policy, and refusing to name the policy as explicitly genocidal. The document reads, “indeed, some sought, as it was infamously said, ‘to kill the Indian in the child’” (House of Commons, 2008). By claiming that “some” used the Indian Residential Schools system as an instrument to “kill the Indian in the child”, Harper completely elides the fact that the explicit policy of the Indian Residential Schools system was to provide a ‘final solution’ to the ‘Indian Problem’. That is, Harper refuses to name or acknowledge that the Indian Residential Schools comprised a singular and systematic destructive force. In fact, the document explicitly eschews responsibility in one of the opening sentences, “In the 1870’s, the federal government, partly in order to meet its obligation to educate Aboriginal children, began to play a role in the development and administration of these schools” (House of Commons, 2008, my emphasis). The federal government, in this revisionist history, only played a role in developing and administrating the Indian Residential Schools and even that role was only played because the government was trying to honour the promises made in the treaties. The fact that
residential schools were made mandatory by law in 1920s, and that “forceful removal was backed by the Indian Act from 1920 to 1951” (Thielen-Wilson, 2012) is concealed within the revisionist pedagogy of the apology. Harper’s claim that the government of the 1870’s developed and administered the residential schools in order to fulfill its obligation to educate Aboriginal children insinuates that the Indian Residential Schools was the only option for fulfilling that mandate. This revisionist history fails to account for the education system Indigenous leaders were lobbying for when they insisted education be included in the treaties. For example, throughout the 1840’s and 1850’s, Ojibwa leaders were pushing for “a comprehensive package of educational and intellectual reforms, which included a written language, books in Ojibwa, a self-directed educational system staffed by Ojibwa, and a high level of education” (MacLean, 2005, p. 128).

Towards the end of the apology, Harper declares that, “We now recognize that, far too often, these institutions gave rise to abuse or neglect and were inadequately controlled” (House of Commons, 2008). By suggesting there were anomalies in the abuse and neglect, that the very foundation of the system was not intended to give rise to conditions ripe for abuse and neglect, Harper fails to address the institutional and singular assimilationist drive of the schools, and more crucially, the ubiquity of the violence (government medical inspector P.H Bryce reported in 1922 anywhere from 47% to 75% of students died in the schools or shortly after returning home [Milloy, 1999, p. 99]). Moreover, the suggestion that the abuse and neglect were borne of the ‘inadequacy’ of control in the system is disingenuous, at best. Roland Chrisjohn et al. (1997) argue that,
“the relentless burden of life in Indian Residential Schools was a deliberate, well thought out, long-practiced policy, undertaken to achieve particular results” (p. 87).

Even within this first consideration of the meaning of the word apology, we can see that there is tension. The apology is at once an acknowledgement of an offence and a resistance to take full responsibility for it. The apology declares the shame of the nation and seeks forgiveness as a closure to end this ‘sad chapter’ in the nation’s history. We can see how the utterance of “I/we recognize that I/we were wrong” is fraught with complexities beyond what the statement claims to be.

However, we must also keep in mind that an apology in the context of this first meaning is conditional. An apology requires that the addressee accept the convention invoked by the addressee. That is, the addressee must accept the apology in order for it to perform its intended function. An apology itself, according to J.L. Austin (1962) in How to Do Things with Words, is troublesome precisely because of this conditionality and unfinishedness (p. 151). Without the convention being accepted (or explicitly rejected) by both parties, the action of the speech act remains suspended and unfinished (or, as Austin would describe it, without the convention being accepted by both parties, the performative is ‘unhappy’). That is, it only does or acts when the apology is readable as an apology to the addressee. Otherwise, it is a non-performative statement that is troublesome because of its claim to be the opposite.

Even within common contemporary usage of the term, there exists another meaning. When we utter, “I/we apologize”, or “I am/we are sorry”, we can be referring to an acknowledgement of an offence, but we also could be acknowledging a failure. The
text of the apology repeats the word ‘failing’ [2] as many times as it does the word ‘sorry’ [2] (House of Commons, 2008). With equal emphasis placed on both words, one begins to wonder if this was the focus and intent of the apology, to simultaneously acknowledge an offence and to acknowledge a failure. If the apology refers specifically to the acknowledgement of a failure, then we must begin to ask to which failure this acknowledgement refers. The most generous reading of the failure to which the apology refers, is that of the failure of the government to properly function as a good paternal force. The first time the word failure appears in the text, it invokes the brutal history of the Canadian government’s paternalistic approach to Indigenous people. Harper declares, “We apologize for having failed to protect you”. The failure to protect Indigenous people (from whom?) erroneously claims that the government had the best interests of Indigenous people at heart, and simultaneously dismisses any agency on behalf of Indigenous people. That is, the apology is for the failure to protect, not the failure to see that protection relies on the colonial trope of the savage and puerile ‘Indian’ in need of the white paternal safeguard, guidance and law. Fiduciary duty, which the Crown has a legal responsibility to uphold, states that Canada must act honourably towards Indigenous nations; it does not, however, require that this relationship be seen as a relationship between dominant and subordinate nations and peoples. (I address the issue of fiduciary duty and the apology at greater length in Chapter 3).

Another, less generous, reading of the failure to which the apology refers is that of the government failing to assimilate the ‘Indian’ completely. If the Indian Residential Schools policy had worked, if Duncan Campbell Scott, former head of the Department of
Indian Affairs from 1913-1932, had his way and there was “not a single Indian in Canada” that was not absorbed into the body politic, then there would be “no Indian question, and no Indian department” and, ultimately, no Indian (As quoted in Milloy, 1999, p. 46). Chillingly, if this were indeed the case, there would be no need for an apology. While the apology refers to the ‘inadequacy’ of proper control of the instruments of the policy, and the failure of ‘this policy’, it never commits to a condemnation of a policy of assimilation in the first place. While the apology does address this policy of assimilation, it fails to name the Indian Residential Schools as a part of the larger colonial project of violence and theft. As Roland Chrisjohn et al. note in *The Circle Game* (1997), “assimilation is genocide” (p. 63). By addressing the profoundly negative consequences of the Indian Residential Schools without addressing the inherent genocidal violence in assimilationist policies themselves, the apology remains ambiguous with regard to the ethicality of assimilation. That is, it names the Indian Residential Schools as a bad kind of assimilation, but the possibility of a good kind remains. There remains, within this logic of assimilation, a chilling question: is the failure the apology addresses the failure of the state to assimilate the Indian completely, and the failure to forever rid the nation of its pesky ‘Indian problem’?

If we turn to the etymology of the word apology, and attend to the levels of meaning that have an absent presence in the word, we find a very different meaning altogether. As mentioned above, the etymology of apology traces the word back to the Greek word *Apologia*, which refers to a formal speech in defense, a speech in which one defends oneself against an accusation, or alternatively, a speech in which one defends and
justifies a given position on a matter (frequently the latter refers to a defense of religion). Even within the etymology of the word, there exists a tension. On the one hand, we have the legal tradition of the word, exemplified by Socrates’ rebuttal to his prosecutors in Plato’s *Apology*, which refers to the defendant’s response to prosecution. While on the other hand, we have the literary tradition of the word, exemplified by Philip Sidney’s *Apology for Poetry*, an early modern piece of literary criticism in poetic prose that argues for the superiority of the form of poetry, which refers to the defense of a particular position in an argument. While I do not wish to stretch the reading too far, an apology as a formal speech, and one that, at times, defends the actions of preceding governments, lends legitimacy to a reading of Harper’s apology as a formal *apologia*. At times Harper’s apology reads like a defense against accusations, specifically when he insists that it was only “some” who sought to “kill the Indian in the child”, or when he insists that “some” Indigenous people had pleasant experiences at residential schools. That is, Harper defends the government against accusations that the Indian Residential Schools was part of a singular violent colonial project aimed at dispossession and destruction.

Simultaneously, the apology can be read as a defense of a position, the white settler subject’s position. Harper stands in for the white settler subject, as a representative of the nation, and defends the innocence of the nation(al)’s actions, policies and, ultimately, entitlement to Indigenous lands.

Finally, the word Apology is a compound of the prefix ‘apo-‘ and the base word ‘–logy’. The prefix ‘apo-‘, comes from the Greek word for away, and can also mean completion, departure, cessation, removal and finishing. The base word, ‘–logy’ refers to
logos or speech. An apology, then, can also mean an utterance that reaches towards a conclusion. This returns us to the troublesomeness of the speech act of an apology; apologies seek to finish an action, but do not finish an action without the participation of another subject. I will return to this argument in my conclusion, but I think this suspension between the apology and reactions to the apology, is the very entry point for the opening up a space for resistance. That is, there is political potential in the transformation of the action left undecided by the apology.

Throughout this thesis, my analysis of Harper’s apology is informed by an attempt to tether together all of these multiple, and at times contradictory, meanings of the word apology. The apology is at once an acknowledgement of a very particular offence, an acknowledgement of multiple layers of failure, a defense in the name of the white settler subject and an attempt to finish this colonialism business once and for all (without restitution for lands seized). My argument is that all of these meanings are present in the apology and are crucial to an analysis of how the apology functions. They also provide a useful entry point for an analysis of the complexities of what it is the apology is trying to do, what it does, and also, what it fails to do.

4.3 To Whom is the Apology Addressed?

Stephen Harper begins his apology by addressing the Speaker of the House of Commons. He says, “Mr. Speaker, I stand before you to offer an apology to the former
students of Indian Residential Schools”. While this is primarily ceremonial, and is necessarily in congruence with the convention of speaking in House, it nonetheless speaks to an interesting tension in presenting the apology in the chamber. While Indigenous activists fought for the apology to be presented in the chamber, largely in order to bring more official recognition to the atrocities committed in the schools, Harper’s address has the effect of speaking over the Indigenous leaders and survivors in the room to the nation. On the one hand, Harper is directing his apology towards the former students of Indian Residential Schools, and on the other hand, Harper is directing his apology towards the House of Commons, and more broadly, to the nation. The duality in this address speaks to the larger duality at work in the apology. That is, the apology is both an apology for Indian Residential Schools and a defense of the tradition and nation that produced the need for the apology in the first place. In clearly demarcating whom he stands before, he illuminates towards whom this apology might truly be addressed. While Harper names the former students, he stands before the Speaker, with an explicit mission of building “a stronger Canada” (House of Commons, 2008) suggesting that he is responsible primarily to the nation and to a project of reinventing the nation, and secondarily to the victims of Indian Residential Schools.

If Harper’s apology is committed to a project of redefining Canada as a nation, we must pay attention to how this reimagining works and what kind of a national narrative is being produced. The apology functions to create a new ‘we’, one that recognizes “some-body as a shared member of a community through or against the bodies of strangers” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 22). When Harper speaks of forging a new relationship between
Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians through a “renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us” (House of Commons, 2008), he is doing the work of multiculturalism (where ‘multiculturalism’ can also mean ‘racelessness’). That is to say, he is reimagining the nation as inclusive of cultural difference, which, “evokes and then erases particular histories of racial differentiation” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 95). Harper’s consistent reference throughout the apology to ‘all Canadians’ is the work of this multicultural discourse that evokes and erases racial difference. This ‘new relationship’ is one of neoliberal multicultural inclusion, otherwise conceived as the ‘post-racial’, which is inherently violent in its commitment to erasing histories and differences under the pretense of doing the opposite. We must then ask, “what happens to the nation when ‘strange cultures’ are not only let in, but are redefined as integral to the nation itself?” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 97). The text of the apology redefines Indigenous culture (a singular homogenous ‘culture’ according to the text) as integral to the fabric of Canadian nationhood. What happens, in this reinvention of the nation, is the very concealing of differences through the logic of inclusion.

Remarkably, in the same paragraph quoted above, Harper notes that this new relationship will be “based on the knowledge of our shared history” (House of Commons, 2008). The history to which he refers is not pluralized, so we must wonder, whose history and whose knowledge? Clearly, a history that diverges from the ‘shared’ hegemonic national narrative is not welcome in this new relationship. Indigenous histories get included as part of Canadian history, but only insofar as they do not contest the official
national narrative. In particular, the history of theft and violence must be concealed so that the presence of settlers is naturalized, so that Canadian history produces an always-already narrative of settler entitlement to the land. Ahmed argues that liberal multicultural settler states produce another kind of violence when they claim to include Indigenous histories. She writes, “the diversity of Indigenous peoples is mentioned, or indeed claimed, as part of ‘our’ history of cultural diversity of migrant cultures… such a narrative not only overlooks histories of violence, but it also performs its own violence” (2000, p. 112). Harper claims that the history is ‘ours’, that it belongs to the nation, performing its own violence whereby any history that refuses to conform to this imagined ‘we’ of the national narrative is aggressively expelled.

Harper also makes clear the spatialization of the imagined nation when he declares; “I stand before you, in this chamber so central to our life as a country, to apologize to Aboriginal peoples for Canada’s role in the Indian Residential Schools system” (House of Commons, 2008). The putative centrality of the chamber not only reinforces the settlers’ entitlement to the land, but also reifies a discourse of marginality and centrality, where “Aboriginal peoples” are welcomed, or rather coerced, into the centre in order to hinder resistance. This discourse of spatial arrangement seeks to reestablish boundaries and borders. It speaks to how subjects inhabit the space of the nation. The spatial arrangement in the apology, gestured towards by the claim that the House of Commons is the centre of the nation, “is a mechanism for the demarcation of the national body, a way of defining borders within it, rather than just between it and an imagined and exterior other” (Ahmed, 2000, p. 100). The nation requires the proximity of
“Aboriginal peoples” as both familiar figures and strangers, or as assimilable and unassimilable others. This functions as a way of defining the limits of the nation. Those who can be coerced into the centre, or assimilated, are defined against and through those who cannot be assimilated, those who remain on the border, or those who refuse to acknowledge the chamber as central to ‘our’ life in this country.

The apology reproduces the discourse of normative kinship formations in demarcating whom it deems appropriate to invite into this reinvented nation and, furthermore, what the limits of this nation are. The apology directs its attention towards the reproducing subject. Harper specifically addresses his apology to those that were undermined in their ability “to adequately parent their own children” (House of Commons, 2008), and apologizes for undermining the ability of Indigenous folks to sow “the seeds for future generations to follow” (House of Commons, 2008). He then goes on to declare that, “not only did you suffer these abuses as children, but as you became parents, you were powerless to protect your own children from suffering the same experience” (House of Commons, 2008). Not only does this construct the Indigenous person as always fragmented, traumatized and ‘powerless’ (an argument I will return to further along in this thesis), but it also suggests that the subject he is apologizing to is the subject that reproduces. Moreover, this is a masculine subject he is addressing, the subject that sows seeds. As Jasbir Puar argues in *Terrorist Assemblages* (2007), the tolerable ethnic subject, or in Ahmed’s terms the assimilable other, must be heterosexual (p. 25). The apology fixates on the reproducing subject in a way that excludes (and includes) the homosexual, or two-spirited, Indigenous subject as the limits of the nation.
The queer Indigenous subject is the unassimilable other and as such cannot be grieved or apologized to, and is therefore expelled from the invitation to national belonging the apology represents.

Harper’s apology, then, is primarily concerned with reinventing the nation against and through the unassimilable other, who is constructed as inhabiting shifting borders within the nation, and secondarily with the survivors of Indian Residential Schools (and their families). It is an apology geared towards some-bodies and not others, and through its articulation of who matters it establishes the boundaries and borders of the nation-state.

4.4 Shame and the Nation

The apology is undoubtedly an institutional declaration of emotion and specifically an expression of shame. What does it mean for a nation to express shame and declare itself shameful? Sara Ahmed notes in The Cultural Politics of Emotion (2004a), “the word shame comes from the Indo-European word for ‘to cover’ which associates shame with other words such as ‘hide’, ‘custody’, ‘hurt’ and ‘house’” (p. 104). She goes on to argue that, “shame in exposing that which has been covered demands us to re-cover, such a re-covering would be a recovery from shame” (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 104). Harper’s apology is precisely concerned with the shame of exposure to the history of the Indian Residential Schools, and works to re-cover the violence at the heart of the colonial project. Harper explicitly refers to recovering in the apology when he declares, “You
have been working on recovering from this experience for a long time and in a very real sense, we are joining you on this journey” (House of Commons, 2008). In this declaration we can read the word “recovering” in at least two ways, on the one hand, Harper is joining in re-covering the experience of violence, and on the other hand, he is “in a very real sense” recovering from the shame of the violence. The recovery from shame is the conversion of shame into pride (Ahmed, 2004b, paragraph 27). In the transformation of shame into pride the violence gets concealed.

This transformation of shame into pride does more than conceal the violence; it also provides “the very grounds for claiming national identity” (Ahmed, 2004b, paragraph 24). The text of the apology is structured through the transformation of shame to pride. It begins with a declaration that the Indian Residential Schools were a “sad chapter in our history” (House of Commons, 2008); it proceeds by detailing the depravity of the conditions in the schools, the tragic deaths of some of the children (notably not owning up to the devastating mortality rates in the schools), and lists all of its actions and policies it “now recognizes” were wrong. The exact moment the tone of the language switches from shame to pride is after Harper declares that the burden is that of the government and the country to carry. By the end of the speech it is clear that the shame of the past has been transformed into the promise of a future ideal. The language in the last paragraph of the apology is overwhelmingly proud; it culminates in the utterances of the “desire to move forward together”, “to forge a new relationship”, marking a “new beginning” and an “opportunity for partnership” (House of Commons, 2008). This language does the work of recuperating national identity. Canada may have been forced
to go through being exposed to the dark and sad ‘chapter’ of its history, but it recovers from the shame and re-covers the violence, and in doing so returns Canadian national identity to its place of pride. Crucially, this new recovered national identity is exponentially more proud precisely because it has transcended the momentary destabilization of identity that the claiming of shame produced.

The apology places the responsibility for justice for the survivors, their families and communities in the intangible and elusive hands of the “government” and the “country”. Harper declares that, “the burden of this experience has been on your shoulders for far too long. The burden is properly ours as a government, as a country” (House of Commons, 2008), creating a scenario whereby no individual is responsible for bearing the brunt of the shameful past (or, for that matter, any acts of violence and theft in the endless pursuit of land in the present). This is precisely how national shame works “to acknowledge past wrongdoings, whilst absolving individuals of guilt” (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 101). He explicitly replaces individual burden with a national burden. Despite the fact that individual settlers have benefitted from the dispossession and destruction that the Indian Residential Schools were intended to bring about, the apology absolves those settlers of any guilt or sense of responsibility for their wealth accumulated from Indigenous lands. The duality of Harper’s address, where the apology is directed towards both the national citizen-subject and the survivor of Indian Residential Schools, suggests that the “you” who has been carrying the burden for far too long is both the survivor of Indian Residential Schools and the settler subject who has been burdened with the guilt of theft and violence. Harper assures both that now the burden of the experience is relieved,
“allowing the endless deferral of responsibility for injustice in the present” (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 120), and assuaging the guilt of the settlers’ violence and theft.

Harper declares that, “The government recognizes that the absence of an apology has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation” (House of Commons, 2008). By apologizing for having not already apologized, Harper not only suggests that the apology itself does far more efficient work than it may actually do. That is, that it does the work it claims to do. But, it also witnesses its own lack of shame as shaming. Ahmed writes, “the shame at the lack of shame is linked to the desire ‘to be truly proud of our country’, that is, the desire to be able to identify with a national ideal”. (Ahmed, 2004b, paragraph 25). By expressing shame at having not felt sufficiently shamed, the nation gets to relieve itself not only of the shame of the “sad chapter” of Canadian history but also of the shame of having not felt shame. Harper simultaneously expresses that both the impediment to reconciliation created by the absence of an apology is now solved, that the apology works to pave the way for reconciliation, and that the claiming of national shame, and shame at a lack of previous expressions of shame, is “reconciliation as self-reconciliation”. (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 109). The nation emerges from the apology as assuaged of the guilt of the Indian Residential Schools, the violent colonial drive that produced the Indian Residential Schools in the first place and the shame of having not previously declared shame. That is, the nation emerges from the apology having successfully converted all shame into pride.

In Chapter 4, I have offered an exploration of the work apologies perform, an examination of to whom Harper’s apology was addressed, and an analysis of the
emotionality of the text of the apology. I have argued that the apology functions both to assuage the settler subject of guilt and responsibility and to recuperate a national identity of innocent settlers in the aftermath of exposure to the violence and theft of colonialism implicit in the Indian Residential Schools system. In the next chapter, I turn to questions of national belonging and the production of subjectivities that sustain the narrative of Canadian innocence and civility.
Chapter 5 Innocence and Civility: The ideal Canadian settler subject

The apology trades in the production of subjectivities that sustain the narrative of the peaceful benevolent nation of Canada. In the rhetoric of the apology, not only is the nation imagined as a subject with the attributes of civility, benevolence and ethical superiority, but also its citizens are invited to join in imagining these attributes as their own. National belonging itself requires that subjects identify with the narrative for inclusion and citizenship. In the previous chapter, I argued that the role of shame in the apology functioned to transform the exposure of the nation to the violence of Indian Residential Schools into the pride at having transcended the conditions that made the apology necessary in the first place. In this chapter, I delve more deeply into exploring what subjectivities are made possible by the apology, with a particular focus on how these subjectivities define the contours of national belonging. I argue that despite the tension created by our identity as a peaceful, tolerant, multicultural nation, and the exposure to state violence committed in our names (effectively exposing our identities as fictive or phantasmatic), our identities not only remain intact throughout the rhetoric of the apology, but are also strengthened. I return to the emotionality of the text and argue that it is this identity of civil Canadian subjects, reified in the apology, which produces the pleasure of superiority for the dominant subject through the abjection of the Indigenous other.
5.1 White Civility and the Ideal Subject

Canada has a very particular attachment to its national identity as the proud, peaceful and polite nation, which stands in stark (imagined) contrast to the United States. Daniel Coleman theorizes this attachment to national identity as civility in *White Civility* (2006). He writes, “White Canadian culture is obsessed, and organized by its obsession, with the problem of its own civility” (Coleman, 2006, p. 5). Coleman argues that this obsession with civility is the obsession of white Canadians with their own moral and ethical superiority. Coleman’s theorizing of the obsessional nature of Canadians with notions of their own civility and superiority helps to elucidate some of the rhetorical moves made in the apology. Not only is the utterance of the apology in itself a claim to moral and ethical superiority, but also there are a number of specific moments throughout the apology when Harper alludes to the moral-ethical superiority of the white Canadian settler. Most notably, the final words of the apology, “God bless all of you and God bless our land” (House of Commons), function to reify the moral-ethical superiority of the Judeo-Christian (white) tradition, while simultaneously suggesting that this moral-ethical superiority is all the justification required for this to be “our land”. The stakes of the claim to moral and ethical superiority are the very stakes of who can claim the land. That is, the stakes of claiming settler moral and ethical superiority are intimately bound with the history of land appropriation and the compulsion to ‘civilize’. Coleman traces the history of the link in the settler worldview between the cultivation of the land and the idea of the cultivation of virtuous, superior character. He argues that, “the cultivation of
wilderness into private lands, in this system of values, becomes the training ground as well as proof of virtuous character” (2006, p. 112). The apology, from beginning to end, is an expression of this self-proclaimed moral-ethical superiority of the white Canadian settler subject, enabling claims to land. ‘Sorry’, a word civil white Canadians know themselves by, gets redeployed on a national level, and much like its use in everyday contexts, it both means much less than it claims to, and simultaneously forms the basis of national identity.

Coleman (2006) argues that the white Canadian attachment to civility, and the performance of it, “is a way to manage our traumatic history” (p. 29). That is, that “Canadians demonstrate their civil sensibilities through mourning the traumatic, but supposedly necessary, losses that were inevitable along the path to progress” (Coleman, 2006, p. 29). Harper manages the traumatic history of violence in the Indian Residential Schools, and colonial violence more broadly, by suggesting that Canadians are now morally and ethically superior to Canadians of the past. He declares, “Today, we recognize that this policy of assimilation was wrong, has caused great harm, and has no place in our country” (House of Commons). He reiterates this argument at the turning point of the speech, when the shame of exposure to the violence of Indian Residential Schools gets converted into the pride of ‘progress’. Immediately after proclaiming the burden of the traumatic past to now be that of the government, and the country at large, he declares, “There is no place in Canada for the attitudes that inspired the Indian residential schools system to ever again prevail” (House of Commons). In repeating this argument twice, Harper reveals the obsessional nature of white Canadian civility, he must
return to it again (and again). This is also the moment in the speech where Harper receives the most emphatic applause. After declaring that the attitudes will not “ever again prevail”, the chamber thunders with ovation. One can feel the tension mounting throughout the ‘sad’ portion of the apology, where Harper details the faults and failures of the Indian Residential Schools, but at the very moment when shame is converted into pride, the chamber explodes with affect, pleasure in perceived moral-ethical superiority and the relief of anxiety. This performance of affect is a performance of white civility and national belonging; it is a racialized and moralist spectacle. Coleman (2006) argues that the civil white Canadian settler subject “feels an anxiety of belatedness that he must hurry and catch up, to leap from primitive, colonial incivility to advanced, modern civility” (p. 16). The anxiety in the chamber leading up to the moment Harper converts shame into pride is tangible. These civil white Canadians (whether or not they are in fact white, their membership in the House of Commons signifies that they are inhabiting a settler subject position, one that accepts the narrative of the legitimacy of Canada as a nation at the cost of the recognition of the sovereignty of Indigenous nations), cannot wait for Harper to “hurry and catch up” with the modern Canadian identity of civility and ethical-moral superiority.

The apology reminds civil white Canadians of the memories they need to remember to forget in order to maintain their moral-ethical superiority. The detail of the violence of Indian Residential Schools functions as the cherishing of the “evil memories of the necessary losses that have been incurred so that an enterprising, cultivated society could come into full flower” (Coleman, 2006, p. 30). By cherishing these evil memories,
the settler can imagine himself or herself as (relatively) peaceful, not responsible for the violence of the past and therefore morally and ethically entitled to continue living on stolen lands guilt-free. Coleman (2006) writes, “civility simultaneously demands that settlers mourn the violence that established their presence in North America and requires that this violence be redeployed to quarantine the uncivil past from the civil present” (p. 34). This is precisely the logic of the apology. The Apology begins by explicitly quarantining the violence and trauma of the Indian Residential Schools to the past. Harper claims that this was just a “sad chapter” of Canadian history. By suggesting that the colonial violence of the Indian Residential Schools was simply a “sad chapter” in history, Harper suggests that we can just close the book and the violence will remain confined to the past. That is, he suggests that residential school-like assimilation projects have no contemporary manifestations and that the violence implicit in those projects can be temporally confined to one specific moment in history. Harper’s insistence that Canada is “no place” for the attitudes that produced the Indian Residential Schools “ever again”, both spatially quarantines those attitudes to an elsewhere, and temporally quarantines those attitudes to the past, allowing the settler to safely dabble in the traumatic history of white supremacy without having any of the feelings of guilt, sorrow or responsibility stick in the present.

The emphasis on the new attitude of the new Canadian demonstrates how the concept of civility, “combines the temporal notion of civilization as progress that was central to the idea of modernity and the colonial mission with the moral-ethical concept of a (relatively) peaceful order” (Coleman, 2006, p. 10). The apology invokes the
temporal notion of civilization as progress when it claims, twice, that the speech marks a movement forward. In fact, as Leslie Thielen-Wilson (2012) points out, the emphasis on this insistence that present day Canada is not only unlike the Canada of the past, or the Canada of residential schools, but remarkably more socially progressive, is repeated “nine times in the course of under fourteen minutes, largely through the repetition of the words ‘we now recognize’” (p. 285). The language throughout the apology relies on the temporal and social notions of progress, and includes phrases like, “in moving towards healing”, “a new beginning and an opportunity to move forward together”, “a positive step in forging a new relationship” and, “a desire to move forward together” (House of Commons, 2008). When Harper claims that white civil Canadians are now joining Indian Residential School survivors and their families on the journey towards healing, you can almost hear the beat of the constant march of forward progress, shepherding the audience to join the federal government’s ‘healing’ project or risk being left behind in the pre-modern and uncivil past. Coleman (2006) calls this the “pedagogy of white normativity” (p. 3), and argues that this, “education in civility shepherds people onto the path of progress because it names a future ideal as if it were a present norm” (p. 11). The apology exemplifies this pedagogy of white normativity, executing the shepherding onto the path of progress. Further, the insistence that the attitudes that produced the Indian Residential Schools in the first place are no longer a part of Canadian culture or governance is to name a future ideal as if it were a present norm.

By privileging European modernity and the notion of progress, civil white ‘sorry’ Canadians reify the binary of barbarism/civilization, and along with it, the discursive
slippage between moral and racial criteria for conforming to civility. Part of what white
civility does is the work of reproducing the binary of savage/civil in a way that appears
less racist and more morally sound. That is, white civility claims to be concerned with
morality but refuses to acknowledge that it is complicit in producing the discursive
slippage between morality and race; it performs an erasure of its own racialized
genealogy.

Through the reification of these Enlightenment dichotomies, the Indigenous
subject gets confined to the category of ‘other’, and is discursively produced as
uncivilized, stuck in the pre-modern past and doomed to extinction. Sunera Thobani
argues in Exalted Subjects (2007) that Indigenous peoples, “having been officially
declared by the sovereign to be primitive life, devoid of civilized, politico-legalistic, form
defining human life as European life, they could be destroyed with impunity. And
although Indigenous peoples were declared as doomed to extinction for the ‘sin-crime’ of
indigeneity, they were also simultaneously valorized as sacred in the western
imagination” (p. 39). The tension between the categorization of Indigenous peoples as
irretrievably pre-modern, and therefore subject to a different set of laws (as wards of the
state), and the valorization of Indigeneity as sacred in the Western imagination hinges on
the same discourse. It is the very discourse that justifies the violence and the theft of land,
and while ostensibly a mea culpa with regard to that very worldview, the apology also
hinges on this discourse.

Gassan Hage argues in White Nation (1998) that, “part of the work of the
nationalist practice is to construct the other into as much of an object as possible” (p. 20).
In the Canadian white civil context, this must be done in a way that appears moral and ethical. The apology provides an example of how the construction of the other into as much of an object as possible can appear ‘civil’ and is done in a way that contributes to the narrative of the tolerant, benevolent nation. This is accomplished through the construction of the Indigenous subject as always fragmented, traumatized and broken, and therefore in need of the white civil saviour. When Harper declares that, “the legacy of Indian residential schools has contributed to social problems that continue to exist in many communities today” (House of Commons, 2008), he invokes the discourse of Posttraumatic Stress Disorder without explicitly naming it as such. And while indeed the legacy of violence contributes to issues in traumatized communities and individuals, the pathologization of historical trauma suggests that the problem is not the history of violence, or even the perpetrators of violence, but the individual or community who becomes ‘sick’ as a result. The onus in a discourse of ‘legacies’ is never political or social justice in the present (again, the connotation of the Indian Residential Schools as confined to a distant past is at work here), but on the victims to ‘get over it’.

Furthermore, white settler subjects can “move beyond the detritus of historical trauma” (Wiegman, 1999, p. 133), while Indigenous people are configured as being stuck in the detritus of that same trauma (although Indigenous peoples were the targets of the violence, whereas the white settler subjects were the perpetrators). Here we have the discourse of responsibility and rescue. The Indigenous person must always be constructed as broken, fragmented and traumatized so that the white subject and white institutions (including the state itself) can always rescue them from their “social problems”. The
apology represents a kind of rescuing of the Indigenous subject from their perpetual trauma, and yet it must fail to heal, and it must insist on continual social problems, so that white subjects and institutions can save them from themselves. Also, as Thielen-Wilson (2012) notes, “marking the Indigenous collective as inherently damaged, reconstitutes the settler collective as legitimate occupiers of land”. (p. ii) The indigenous subject that is granted national belonging is configured in the rhetoric of the apology as the one who needs and accepts the saving of white institutions; constituting the settler as a legitimate occupier of the land, and settler institutions as well-intentioned helpers. This is also the moment in the apology that invites white settlers to experience the pleasure of their dominance. Anthony Farley (1997) writes in The Black Body as Fetish Object that, “race is a form of pleasure in one’s body which is achieved through humiliation of the Other, and, then, as the last step, through denial of the entire process” (p. 464). The rhetoric of the traumatized Indigenous person, the “lasting and damaging impact on Aboriginal culture, heritage and language” (House of Commons, 2008) and the “social problems that continue to exist in many communities today” (House of Commons, 2008), produces the abjection of Indigenous subjects and pleasure for white subjects in their morally superior culture and communities. The inherently damaged Indigenous collective is constructed through this rhetoric and, then, is denied as a construction. Farley (1997) writes, “the racist creates his inferiors but the racist cannot admit that his inferiors are the product of oppression and not nature without destroying the illusion of natural inferiority upon which his pleasure is based” (p. 501). While the destruction and damage to Aboriginal culture is attributed to the legacy of residential school, the implication that Indigenous
cultures were naturally susceptible to damage, and are now incapable of moving beyond the detritus of historical trauma, is clear. This rhetoric sustains the illusion of the natural inferiority of the Indigenous collective upon which the pleasure of settler collective is based.

5.2 The Family as Nation

Moreover, the way in which the ‘social problems’ of Indigenous communities are parsed in the rhetoric of the apology construes the impact of the residential schooling as the undermining of the “ability of many to adequately parent their own children” (Debates, 2008). While, on the one hand, the impact of residential schooling on the intergenerational transmission of parenting skills was and is significant, it was also intentional, and the passive language of ‘undermining’ refuses to acknowledge the intentional and direct attempt to fragment families and communities. But also, on the other hand, this explanation functions to reify colonial social relations, as Leslie Thielen-Wilson (2012) argues, “the negative impact of Indian Residential Schools is narrowly construed as the inability of generations within Indigenous collectives to parent their own children,” warning that, “such a portrayal will call upon the settler to act paternalistically” (p. 285). The concern over the pernicious paternalism of the settler and the settler state is well grounded. Not only does the paternalism of the settler state have a long and arduous history, it remains a pervasive strategy, sustained by a racist narrative that imagines Indigenous peoples as childlike, and European settlers as benevolent patriarchs.
responsible for overseeing governance, education and, ultimately, protection of the ‘children’ of modernity. As *The Report of the Aboriginal justice inquiry of Manitoba* (1996) notes, “the history of Canada’s Indian legislation goes back to Britain’s paternal and patronizing concern for the disadvantaged of the world”, and it is a history of legislated injustice, propelled by this very production of subject positions in kin-like relations under the rubric of the nation.

The figure of the child circulates throughout the apology, both as the subject to whom the violence of residential school directly targeted, and therefore the subject for whom the apology was necessary, but also, conversely, as the figure through whom the state articulates its ethical-moral superiority and civility. On the one hand, the apology discursively produces the child subject of residential school as a helpless, vulnerable victim, in need of increased protection from the state. On the other hand, the state performs its ethical-moral superiority and civility through its admission and condemnation of its ‘past’ violence against children, allowing Canadian citizens to identify as folks who repudiate violence against children, even though violence against Indigenous children was a central component of the colonial project of land acquisition. Again, the discursive production of colonial violence targeted against children as a thing of the past, as an inherently pre-modern phenomenon, allows Canadians to come to know ourselves as having progressed beyond racism into good natured, civil humanitarianism. This discursive construction produces the very condition of individual and state non-complicity.
5.3 The New formation of Canadian Settler Identity

If the apology is the expression of white civility, whereby the settler’s moral-ethic superiority is reified and the violent past is contained, then what emerges is a new formation of white identity that is, “newly innocent” and claims to be responsible for the creation of a “postracist society” (Wiegman, 1999, p. 121). The apology represents a celebration of this new white identity that takes shape in the “rhetorical, if not always political, register of disaffiliation from white supremacist practices and discourses” (Wiegman, 1999, p. 119). The consistent repetition of the phrase, “We now recognize”, in Harper’s speech delivers precisely the register of disaffiliation with white supremacist practices that Wiegman (1999) theorizes as essential to the new formation of white identity. By listing the practices and discourses of the Indian Residential Schools, and containing those practices and discourses to the Indian Residential Schools as a traumatic historical event (fixed to a particular time and location that is perpetually elsewhere, and in another time), Harper disavows the possibility of those practices and discourses occurring in the present. In celebrating the absence or rejection of a certain kind of violence (namely, the violence of Indian Residential Schools), the settler gets to feel good about “coming to terms with their past” (Ahmed, 2004b, paragraph 24), and in feeling good about coming to terms with our past, we disavow any inheritance of violent white supremacy, an inheritance that would likely make us ‘feel bad’. As Sunera Thobani (2007) argues that in dominant Canadian discourse, “specific forms of violence or acts of disenfranchisement are also publicly denounced, but are mediated with reminders that
these misbegotten acts were not perceived as such in centuries past, that they should be judged from the vantage point or ethos of the present” (p. 34), providing yet another avenue for the avoidance of naming both the contemporaneousness of colonial violence and the complicity of settlers benefiting from both past and present violence and theft.

Wiegman (1999) argues that, “seldom has whiteness been so widely represented as attuned to racial equality while so aggressively solidifying its advantage” (p. 121). The apology represents this whiteness that claims to be attuned to racial equality while aggressively solidifying its advantage. This discursive strategy is perfectly executed in the last paragraph of the apology:

“It will be a positive step in forging a new relationship between Aboriginal peoples and other Canadians, a relationship based on the knowledge of our shared history, a respect for each other and a desire to move forward together with a renewed understanding that strong families, strong communities and vibrant cultures and traditions will contribute to a stronger Canada for all of us.” (House of Commons, 2008)

The claim to racial equality is articulated through the assertion that this new relationship is based on “respect for each other” (glossing over Indigenous calls for honouring treaties, recognition of sovereignty and reparations. That is, what arguably could actually constitute building a relationship based on “respect for each other”). Ensnconced in the discourse of progress, and the insistence that Indigenous people need to “move forward” towards modernity to build a stronger Canada, this claim to racial equality (without any shift in power relations) is the very reformation of white power in the guise of the universal desire to progress. This functions to affirm, “not only that all racial debts have been paid (and hence that the historical is itself irrelevant) but that there is finally no
privileged linkage between the protocols of universality and white racial embodiment” (Wiegman, 1999, p. 134).

Throughout this chapter, I have tried to show how the production of subjectivities in the apology secure colonial social relations and that the attachment to the identities these subjective positions provide are the very impetus for both claiming and feeling non-complicity. The apology not only reiterates hundreds of years of racist rhetoric, under the guise of claiming to do the opposite, but also strengthens the identity-making process for white settlers as innocent, civil and progressive anti-racists, making the denial of the colonial present and the denial of complicity an integral part of the ideal subject/citizen of Canada.

In the next and final chapter, I conclude with a summary of my argument, address the limits of the study, make recommendations for further research and suggest the possible impacts this study could have on various institutions, communities and individuals in Canada.
Chapter 6: Conclusion

The apology functions to reproduce multiple discourses of settler-colonialism, allowing the continuation of white supremacy while claiming to do the work of reconciliation. There is clearly a gap between the state, and those it claims to represent, saying sorry and being sorry, if ‘sorry’ even counts as a legitimate response to the Indian Residential Schools and colonial violence more broadly. The apology is at once an acknowledgement of an offence (and a concealment of others), an acknowledgement of a failure, a defense of the white settler subject and an attempt to finish the question of Canada’s colonial sovereignty once and for all. It is reinventing the nation through and against the bodies of Indigenous peoples. It is a declaration of shame that is converted into pride, a cherishing of evil memories, and a reminder to remember to forget. It names a future ideal as though it were a present norm, severs the ‘violent’ past from the ‘peaceful’ present, and sings the praises of the constant progression towards civilization. It constructs the Indigenous person as irretrievably traumatized in order to have endless opportunities for the white subject and white institutions to save them from themselves. And, finally, it produces a new formation of white identity that disavows and disaffiliates itself from white supremacist practices and colonial violence. The apology emphatically, “does too much work in the uncertainty of the work it is doing” (Ahmed, 2004a, p. 120).

Let us return to the question of the conditionality of the speech act of an apology, a question I posed in Chapter 4 of this thesis. As a performative utterance, the apology seeks to finish an action. In light of my analysis, the action it seeks to finish is the very naturalization of colonial violence and theft. But, the apology requires the acceptance of
the conditions of its action if it is to act. If the action remains unfinished, we must seek a transformation of the action that bears witness to the violence of both Indian Residential Schools and the greater colonial project, but also, that bears witness to who settlers are, what settlers have done, and what settlers have inherited.

The question of responsibility is the crux of the way we interpret the conditionality of the apology. That is to say, if we accept the apology and its corresponding narrative, we accept that the conditions are in place for the declaration to do what it claims to do, which, as this thesis argues, amounts to safely quarantining the violence of the Indian Residential Schools in the past and severing it from an analysis of both historical and contemporary colonialism in Canada. However, if we refuse to accept that the conditions are in place for the apology to do what it claims to, and are not rushed from the indictment of a history of racial violence to the quick resolution of that violence, a resolution that secures our national identity over and above considerations of social justice, we can think through what a responsible and meaningful reparative and reconciliatory process would look like. While ultimately it is beyond the scope of this thesis for me to suggest what that would look like, I suspect it begins with recognition of complicity and of the benefits and resources settlers secure through ongoing colonial relations, particularly under the rubric of being members of a benevolent, humanitarian and ‘tolerant’ nation.

Paradoxically, an apology is something that, in Gayatri Spivak’s (1996) words, “one cannot not want” (p. 28). That is, it is necessary that both the Canadian state and its citizens recognize, and are implicated, in the history of residential school, the inheritance
of that system, and the contemporary manifestations of colonial violence, and indeed take
responsibility for it. And while state apologies are ostensibly about doing exactly that, in
practice they tell a very particular version of history and perform the appearance of regret
while avoiding responsibility de facto. This is not a strictly Canadian trend; apologies
from states around the globe (though, particularly ‘post’-colonial states) perform similar
erasures, revisions and celebratory moves to innocence. Kevin Rudd’s (2008) apology to
the Stolen Generations provides a prime example of how, despite being sought after by
Indigenous people in Australia, state apologies can validate just enough of the suffering
of those they have harmed in order to enable a celebratory narrative of its progress. And
yet, the demand for holding states accountable for their actions must remain. This is why
we need a persistent critique of the rhetorical moves made in state apologies, without
suggesting that they, and reconciliation efforts more broadly, should be abandoned.

It is important to bear in mind that the apology was “less the product of a
magnanimous government and more the result of extraordinary political mobilization…
by Aboriginal organizations such as the Assembly of First Nations as well as the
Congress of Aboriginal Peoples, the Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, the Metis National Council,
and the Native Women’s Association of Canada” (Henderson & Wakeham, 2013, p.4). The
demands by Indigenous organizations, leaders and activists for the apology, a
struggle that spanned nearly two decades of political action (Thielen-Wilson, 2012, p. 1),
complicate my analysis in an interesting way, and my intention is not to diminish that
struggle, or the intended goal of that struggle, in any way. However, I am interested in the
political differences between the call for the apology and the utterance of the apology. In
The Cultural Politics of Emotion (2004a). Sara Ahmed addresses the demand for apologies as a specific utterance that calls for political action, “the demand for an apology exposes the history of the violence to others, who are now called upon to bear witness to the injustice” (p. 119). She argues that the demand demands rendering the concealed history of violence visible. The insistence on rendering the concealed history of violence visible is one criterion upon which we could evaluate the meaningfulness of the apology. That is, one of the ways the apology could have been successful and useful for reparative justice would be rendering the historic and contemporary violence against Indigenous peoples in Canada visible.

A number of the critiques of the apology point to how the apology could have been meaningful and reparative. Roland Chrisjohn, Andrea Bear Nicholas, Karen Stote, James Craven (Omahkonkiaayo i’poyi), Tanya Wasacase, Pierre Loiselle and Andrea Smith note in An Historic Non-apology: Completely and Utterly Not Accepted (2008) that “an apology is not made an apology by the person offering it saying it is an apology; it is only an apology when those who have been offered it accept it as an apology” (p. 1). By focusing on the acceptance of the apology as the essential criteria for the apology’s success, Indigenous peoples’ demands are centred as the organizing principle. The demand for an apology was a demand for more than just symbolic gestures; it was a demand for recognition of, and accountability for, historic and ongoing colonial violence, for inclusion of the history of Indian Residential Schools (accurately portrayed as a genocidal project) in Canadian curriculum (Flatfoot, 2008), for justice and self-determination. These demands were clearly outlined in the final report of the Royal
Commission of Aboriginal Peoples in 1996, and for the utterance of a successful and meaningful apology the symbolic gesture must be accompanied by material and political change.

If we cannot go back to before the apology was uttered, sit with and bear witness to the demand for an apology, with the violence of Indian Residential Schools unconcealed and visible, perhaps we have to choose not to accept it while continuing to demand acknowledgement of, and reparations for, violence; to attend to what the apology does without accepting its conditions, to refuse to forget the violence of the settler (whether explicit or not) and to disrupt celebratory narratives of the now proud again Canada.

6.1 Limits of Study and Further Research Recommendations

While the version of critical discourse analysis used in this study heeds Pierre Bourdieu’s warning that, “it is because subjects do not, strictly speaking, know what they are doing that what they do has more meaning than they know” (quoted in Fairclough, 2001, p. 41), this positioning simultaneously marks the limits of the study. That is to say, I have avoided the use of personal interviews or personal testimony in order to think through what subjectivities are produced through the rhetoric of the apology, rather than exploring what individual subjects think and feel about the apology. This approach leaves me open to critiques of undermining individual agency, and of a kind of intellectual arrogance, because, of course, I am also implicated as a subject produced
through the rhetoric of a benevolent and humanitarian Canada. The crux is the difficulty in claiming that I am a subject who knows how to deconstruct the rhetoric, while simultaneously being implicated as a subject who benefits from the colonial relations I seek to help dismantle. I critique the rhetorical moves to innocence made by the apology, while simultaneously carving out a position of innocence for myself, regardless of how hard I have tried to avoid claiming that innocence. There is a fundamental limit to this study implicit in that paradox that I am as yet unable to think beyond, and perhaps my inclination towards theoretical answers is the very problem.

The apology performed another kind of work that my reading does not sufficiently address. On the day the apology was delivered to a full House of Commons, Indigenous and non-Indigenous people across the nation watched as Canada recognized its involvement in the Indian Residential Schools as a tragic mistake. While this rhetoric is problematic and insufficient in addressing the violence of the project (as my reading contends), it did finally acknowledge, formally and aloud, that this history had, and continues to have, an impact on Indigenous peoples and communities and that the Canadian government was, and is, responsible. The response of many survivors, and their families, displayed on camera, was deeply felt; many were in tears. Canadians were exposed to the deeply painful legacy of the Indian Residential School system that day, and even if they returned to ignoring the persistent violence of colonialism on this land, there was a moment of being reminded. In trying to show how the apology failed, I have insufficiently acknowledged the ways in which it was successful, marking another limit to this study.
The apology and its ramifications for settlers, Indigenous peoples, residential school survivors and their families, as well as educators and scholars requires more attention than the scope of this thesis allows. It would be helpful to attend to individual responses to the apology, to create an archive of responses, in order to trace the affective and political impact of the apology itself. This project could focus on settler responses (with particular attention to the potential differences between white and racialized peoples’ responses), and/or Indigenous responses in order to contribute to the dialogue of ethical relations, the deconstruction of the benevolent, humanitarian narrative of Canada, and anti-colonial strategies specific to the Canadian context.

The apology also, I think, needs additional research in the aftermath of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. As the putative paving of the way to reconciliation, it would be useful to return to the apology in order to hold the settler-state accountable, and in order to trace how the ongoing attachment to the myth of Canadian innocence impedes a reconciliatory process.

6.2 Impact of Study on Educators, Scholars, Indigenous Peoples and Settlers.

The intended impact of this study is more focused on a shift of perspective for educators, scholars and settlers, than for Indigenous peoples and survivors. Throughout this thesis, I have read the apology from the perspective that it says far more about settler culture and colonial power than it does about the people to whom it was purportedly
addressed. From this perspective, it follows that the impact would be far greater for settlers and settler institutions than for Indigenous peoples and survivors. I hope that Canadians reading this thesis will think twice about the national narrative of benevolence, and will seek to dismantle it in their own lives in order to acknowledge the persistent reality of colonial violence and theft that this narrative sustains. I hope that educators reading this thesis are compelled to teach from a perspective that connects the material conditions of the nation to the historical, that acknowledges the way narratives produce power relations, and recognizes the ongoing nature of colonialism, especially those educators who may potentially have a framed copy of the apology on their wall, should the Truth and Reconciliation Commission interim report recommendation be implemented. Eva MacKay (2013) refers to the recommendation made in RCAP that “settler Canadians and their governments need to be reminded that we are all ‘treaty peoples’” (p. 52). She argues that, “‘Treaty’ seen in this way, potentially disrupts settler senses of entitlement to land”, because “seeing all of us as ‘treaty peoples’ brings material and social aspects of colonial pasts into the present in a manner that recognizes the ongoing sovereignty of Aboriginal peoples and the ongoing treaty relationships in which the settler nation-state participates as a beneficiary of past land agreements, not as the assumed sovereign” (MacKay, 2013, p. 52). I see this fundamental shift in perspective as an intervention that educators could make in the way Canadians understand their relationship to land and to the people from whom it was taken. I hope that Canadian scholars continue, in some cases, and start in others, to become aware of the impact of stories of civility, of humanitarian benevolence, and of innocence on the
production of knowledge, and that they consider their own relationships with claiming these qualities, (after having seen the potential result of the danger in claims of moral superiority, attention to its impact on the production of knowledge seems imperative). And, ultimately, I hope this thesis contributes to the dialogue of how to go about acknowledging and then dismantling the ongoing colonialism in Canada, which, of course, would hope to prevent both literal and structural violence against Indigenous peoples in Canada.
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