Agonistic Politics and Reconciliation in Canada

Hannah Wyile

University of Victoria

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Canada is a unique case in the field of transitional justice studies. Mechanisms of transitional justice have traditionally been employed in countries undergoing processes of democratization in the aftermath of authoritarian regimes or violent political conflicts. Canada, however, through the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement (IRSSA), is employing these mechanisms in a democratic society not widely understood to be in transition. Typically liberal democracies such as Canada are seen as a desirable outcome of transition processes. However, some scholars have pointed to the redress movement for the Indian Residential Schools (IRS) policy and the persistent socioeconomic inequality and racism suffered by Indigenous peoples in Canada as evidence that Canada ought not to be regarded as the "ethical end goal of transitional justice writ large" (Nagy 2012, 22; Green 2012, 129). Indeed, the Canadian case highlights a number of important questions with respect to the relationships between democracy, transitional justice and reconciliation: if a liberal democracy, which is often touted as the desirable outcome of transitional justice, is in fact not devoid of exclusions and injustices and is itself employing mechanisms of transitional justice in order to address a history of violence, how must the concept of transition then be reconceived? Can or ought Canada to be understood as a society in transition? What might this reveal about the nature of reconciliation and the type of politics it requires? In what ways do narrow, teleological conceptions of reconciliation serve to foreclose the possibilities for transition in Canada?

Rosemary Nagy writes that in the Canadian context, reconciliation must be conceived as the decolonization of the Indigenous-settler relationship, and suggests that this will require a multiplicity of mechanisms and processes of transitional justice, extending beyond the components of the IRSSA to include the negotiation of treaties and land claim agreements and addressing socioeconomic structural violence against Indigenous peoples (2012, 12). This

requires a greater critical self-reflection by settler Canadians regarding the colonial nature of Canadian society. In order to foster political change it is necessary to transform attitudes and institutions as well as to enable healing for Indigenous families and communities. As such the IRSSA, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and the government's apology ought to be conceived as steps towards reconciliation rather than the limited policies by which it will have been achieved (2012, 10-13, 17). While these steps are important in constituting the initiation of a process of political reconciliation, they are insufficient for transforming historical relationships that are rife with injustice (Rice and Snyder 2008, 49); indeed, conceiving of reconciliation as a conclusive remedy for historical injustices against Indigenous peoples may be understood as "foreclos[ing] on the colonial past without investing in structural and epistemological 'transition' to a decolonized relationship between Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people" (Green 2012, 129).

In order to instead conceive of reconciliation as transition or decolonization, it is necessary to recognize, that contrary to certain conceptions that frame reconciliation as the restoration of harmony between estranged elements of a previously united polity, the politics of reconciliation cannot presuppose political community but instead must strive towards it. As Andrew Schaap writes, historical injustices that divide societies call into question the very identity of the *demos*, and "the politics of reconciliation in divided societies therefore brings into relief the limits and possibilities of democracy, both as institution and ethos" (2006, 256). He argues that it is thus vital to conceive of reconciliation in political terms in order to resist false impositions of an assumed unity or common identity among the citizens of a society divided by political violence. The tendency to do so is a problematic element common in therapeutic or moral approaches that conceive of reconciliation as "settling accounts," "healing nations" or

"restoring community" (258). Schaap's work on political reconciliation and agonistic politics, and the political theory of Hannah Arendt upon which it draws, offers useful considerations for understanding the idea of reconciliation in Canada as an ongoing process of decolonizing transition. By exploring Arendt's theory of political action and Schaap's Arendtian conception of reconciliation as agonistic politics, it is possible to posit a re-orientation of the politics of reconciliation in Canada. This agonistic approach would understand government redress policies for residential schooling as the invitation to politics in which a space is created for an ongoing negotiation of the terms of association and mutual recognition, rather than the means by which reconciliation is to be conclusively achieved (see Schaap 2005, 2006, 2008).

Hannah Arendt's work is particularly salient for thinking through how to conceive of reconciliation in the wake of grievous injustices because her own efforts to grapple with the history of Western philosophy and its legacies in the mid-twentieth century were a reaction to the horrors of the Holocaust and an attempt to conceive of a theory of politics wherein it was possible to reconcile oneself to a world in which such atrocities had occurred and be able to realize freedom and human dignity (Berkowitz 2009; Isaac 1993). Hers is a mode of politics that recognizes the boundlessness and unpredictability of human action, and the fact that because of the risk of politics wherein we have no control over the consequences of our actions, it is inevitable that we will sometimes hurt each other. As such, maintaining the possibility of politics – acting in concert with each other to build a world in common – requires the twin faculties of promising and forgiving. This is not a politics of forgive and forget, though, as Arendt is also deeply committed to remembrance at the same time as she seeks to preserve the capacity of people to begin again and act in new and unexpected ways (1959, 164-167). This capacity is crucial for any politics that seeks to transform relationships affected by a history of violence and

oppression into relationships of equality and mutual respect or what Andrew Schaap calls "civic friendship" (2005).

Faced with the way totalitarianism had stripped individuals of their human dignity and sought to destroy human plurality in the pursuit of an ideal civilization by any and all means necessary, Arendt set out to establish a model of political action that was "above all, an effort to understand how the dreams of modern ideologues had produced monstrous nightmares and how it might be possible to reconstitute human dignity and freedom in a world laid waste by such nightmares" (Isaac 1993, 539). The orientation of this type of politics is decidedly both non-instrumental and deliberative, as Arendt saw a rupture between thinking and action and end-means justifications as lying at the root of totalitarianism (537). The concepts that make up her theory rely on unconventional redefinitions of familiar words, and fully grasping her thought requires careful, close reading. Only once her particular meanings of these words are clear is it possible to understand the unique vision of the political that she presents in contradistinction to traditional understandings of politics as the rule by those with a monopoly on the use of force.

The foundation of Arendt's theory of action is laid out in her 1958 work *The Human Condition* and is further developed through the rest of her writings until her death in 1975. For Arendt, human activity can be divided into three broad categories: labour, work and action. Although her discussions of labour and work are interesting and thought provoking in their own right, and work in particular may have useful bearing on thinking about particular elements of reconciliatory politics such as commemoration projects, an in-depth exploration of these concepts is beyond the scope of this investigation. For the present purposes, the important distinction is that labouring and work take place in the private sphere and are concerned with the production of objects, while action takes place in and indeed is constitutive of a public sphere in

which people come together to speak and act in concert and give rise to a shared human reality. Labour is that which is concerned with the biological necessities of the human being and comprises processes related to survival and reproduction (Arendt 1959, 86). Work entails a different type of production, the fabrication not of use objects such as food but of the objects that reify human stories, deeds and ideas into the tangible things that collectively make up the world in which human affairs occur (83). Arendt makes a distinction here between the natural or biological world in which humans exist as a physical space, and this world of a public realm comprised of the combination of both human artifacts and of the interactions of those who enter into it through speech and action and who thus give life to a shared reality (48). In Arendt's view, it is only by virtue of this appearance through action in the public realm of human affairs that human beings transcend "mere bodily existence" to live what she considers a truly human life (156). This is due to the human conditions of natality and plurality.

It is natality that accords humans their capacity to act, to begin something new and unexpected. If labour is conditioned by our mortality, the fact that we must sustain ourselves physically to remain alive, then action is conditioned by our natality: the fact that we are each the birth of something new in the world, which is what allows humans to live. Like physical birth, action is also the introduction of something new into the world – it "is initiation, characterized by its unexpectedness or novelty, its unpredictability" (Young-Bruehl 2006, 86). This life beyond physical existence requires the presence of other people, for action, unlike labour and work, cannot occur in isolation; action for Arendt is to begin something new – as she writes, "the person who begins something can embark upon it only after he has won over others to help him" (2005, 127). Thus action and speech occur in what she refers to as a web of human relationships and are "surrounded by and in constant contact with…the acts and words of other men" (1959,

167). As such human interactions are inherently shaped by the incredible diversity of humanity, and it is only through the revelation of the variety of perspectives in the sphere of action that a shared worldly reality can appear:

> For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it, and the location of one can no more coincide with the location of another than the location of two objects. Being seen and being heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position (52).

The experience of a common world is then a process of coming together with others and "see[ing] sameness in utter diversity" (53), for while we share the same space we each hold a particular perspective within it and it is only through encounters with the diverse particular perspectives that others bring to bear on that space that a fuller sense of the reality of the world emerges (2005, 128).

These different perspectives make their appearance in the world through what Arendt describes as the revelatory character of action, which refers to the manner in which identity is revealed through action. Arendt distinguishes here between those elements of a person's identity that refer to 'what' they are – easily perceived qualities and traits such as membership in a certain group – and those that have to do with 'who' they are, which refers to "those intangible qualities which make a person unique, which cannot be predicted or controlled, but only revealed through speech and action" (Parekh 2004, 45). Action can only have meaning if it is attached to a 'who,' and this revelation of identity through action is only possible "where people are with others and neither for nor against them – that is, in sheer human togetherness" (Arendt 1959, 160). As Elisabeth Young-Bruehl puts it,

> action reveals *who* a person is, as distinct from every other person but related to all, related, potentially, to all humankind. Acting persons reveal their self or, really, it would be more concrete to say reveal their self in relation to others, with whom and for whom the doing or talking (the acting) is performed (2006, 86).

In circumstances where people must be for or against each other, such as in a war or under totalitarianism, this revelation is prevented by the instrumentalisation of speech and action, as they become means towards the ends each side holds as their objective against their enemies (Arendt 1959, 161). People interact on the basis of *what* they are instead of coming together to reveal *who* they are in order to build a world in common.

The public realm, the space of politics, exists wherever people come together to speak and act in this manner that allows them to reveal their unique identities to each other and thus realize a world in common, but because it is not only the space in which action occurs but is constituted through action itself, it exists only so long as action remains possible and people continue to come together to constitute and reconstitute it (178). Contrary to other definitions that are bound up with the notion of sovereignty, this, for Arendt, is the meaning of political freedom: freedom is the reason for politics; it is rooted in the capacity to begin anew and is manifest through action (Arendt 2006, 149). She writes that, "action, to be free, must be free from motive on one side, from its intended goal as a predictable effect on the other" (150). It can only remain free so long as it maintains the possibility for unexpected change through the initiation of new beginnings, through which people are able to reveal their unique selves to each other.

It is the nature of action that it takes in a web of already existing relationships, and therefore every new beginning that a person initiates and the identity that is revealed through doing so has consequences, as this action affects others and they react to it (163). Since all others in this web of relationships in the public sphere are also subject to the condition of natality and capable of initating new and unexpected beginnings in response to an individual's action, and there is no way to know how they will be affected and choose to react, it is the nature of action

that it is boundless and unpredictable (170-171). In this manner, it is free – a freedom, it must be remembered, that Arendt conceives in contradistinction to the lack of freedom that exists under totalitarian regimes that seek to predetermine consequences by instrumentalizing action to expediently achieve certain ends, rather than allowing it to be oriented by guiding principles or goals that are not concrete.

Rather than pursuing ends deemed superior to politics (for politics would merely be the means by which those ends were to be achieved), Arendt would have us partake in political action for its own sake, in order to actualize human natality and plurality, to establish and preserve a world in common that will endure beyond our individual mortal lives. Because the outcomes of action are always boundless and unpredictable, and the public realm must be continually reconstituted through action, action cannot have determinate ends but can only be oriented by goals, which are "never anything more than guidelines and directives…[that] are never cast in stone, but whose concrete realizations are constantly changing because we are dealing with other people who also have goals" (Arendt 2005, 193). These goals constitute the standards by which action can be judged, but action does not become meaningless or pointless by virtue of not achieving its goals, for example, in the way that particular means might be deemed useless or inexpedient if they did not effectively serve to achieve certain ends. As Arendt writes, action

> cannot be pointless because it never pursued a 'point,' that is, an end, but has only been directed at goals, more or less successfully; and it is not meaningless because in the back-and-forth of exchanged speech – between individuals and peoples, between states and nations – that space in which everything else that takes place is first created and then sustained (193).

In this conception, politics is an ongoing process of interaction between a diverse plurality of people who bring their unique perspectives to bear on the world as they reveal themselves in

acting together to bring into being and maintain a world in which they can continue to speak and act together. While Arendt describes this politics as being about the preservation of the world rather than the preservation of life, it is also rooted in a commitment to preserving the plurality that gives rise to this world, for "the more people there are in the world who stand in some particular relationship with one another, the more world there is to form between them, and the larger and richer that world will be" (176). Conversely, any action that attacks this plurality, annihilating a specific human group with a unique worldview, destroys a part of the common human world that can never again be revealed (175).

In recognizing that action, because of its boundless, unpredictable and irreversible nature, can have adverse or harmful consequences, Arendt identifies two remedies for mitigating these risks of politics: promising and forgiveness. While she only devotes a short section of *The Human Condition* to discussing these two redeeming faculties of action, Arendt's thought on the role of promise making and forgiveness in a form of boundless political action that seeks to preserve human dignity, plurality and freedom is particularly thought-provoking for the purposes of grappling with questions of political reconciliation in the wake of mass injustice and human rights violations in what Schaap calls a "divided society" (2006).

Promise making and forgiveness are both faculties of action and as such are both "a type of relationship, an expression of the human condition of plurality," because they cannot occur in isolation, and are as unpredictable and unexpected as any other action (Young-Bruehl 2006, 97; Arendt 1959, 213-216). In forgiving, we recognise the natality of other people by "undo[ing] the meaning of the deed as evidence of the identity of the other" and "suspend[ing] our judgment of the other as our enemy in the present so that she might reveal herself as a friend by acting anew" (Schaap 2005, 111; 7). While forgiveness tempers the irreversibility of action by allowing people

to be released from the consequences of their previous actions, promise making is a remedy for unpredictability through which people can establish tentative certainty in the future. This action of making promises or establishing contracts is the form of action that maintains the existence of the public realm once it has been constituted and is "the only alternative to a mastery which relies on domination of one's self and rule over others" (Arendt 1959, 220).

Arendt is clear, however, that the boundlessness of action cannot be overridden entirely and that promises ought to constitute "isolated islands of certainty in an ocean of uncertainty" rather than being used to achieve a sense of certainty that strives for a determinate future (220). The role of promises that she envisions is clarified by her distinction between goals and ends – promises can guide politics and mitigate some uncertainty, but to attempt to predetermine the whole of the future would eradicate freedom in politics. Indeed, even promises and forgiveness can only do so much to redeem the risks of action, because of the "basic unreliability of men who can never guarantee today who they will be tomorrow, and … the impossibility of foretelling the consequences of an act within a community of equals where everybody has the same capacity to act" (219). As such, Arendt recognizes that morality in her conception of politics is wholly dependent on good will on the part of those present in the public realm to be willing to change their minds and act anew, to seek forgiveness when they trespass against others, forgive those by whose actions they are harmed, and make and keep their promises (216, 221). This ability is afforded to people by virtue of their natality, but cannot be expected.

Thinking about the role that promises and forgiveness can play when we choose to approach politics as an ongoing and open-ended process for addressing historical injustice and building political community that does not circumscribe the boundaries of reconciliation at the outset can serve to address some of the conceptual critiques of contemporary reconciliation

processes in Canada and elsewhere. An agonistic approach to political reconciliation resists impulses to seek closure and respects the value of diverse and conflicting perspectives but also does not require us to entirely abandon mechanisms of transitional justice such as compensation payments or the Truth and Reconciliation Commission because of their perceived flaws. Instead, we must readjust our understanding of the role they play in reconciliation, as aspects of an ongoing process of political change whose guiding principle is reconciliation, rather than the means by which reconciliation will have been achieved. For Andrew Schaap, this means practicing reconciliation as politics rather than reconciliation as ideology.

In a 2008 article entitled "Reconciliation as Ideology and Politics," Schaap outlines six prominent critiques of reconciliation and demonstrates the ways in which an agonistic approach is capable of circumventing these drawbacks. He writes,

> The concept of reconciliation stands accused of being: too *vague* to form a coherent political project; *illiberal* because it looks forward to an ideal of community that is not compatible with the pluralism of modern societies; *question-begging* since it aims to restore a prior state of harmony that never actually existed; *assimilative* in that it represents the political claims of the ruled only in terms commensurate with the interests of the rulers; *quietist* insofar as it demands resignation to the injustices of the past and forgoing resentment of their continuing legacy; and *exculpatory* in that it provides an opportunity to redeem the good conscience of the nation primarily through symbolic gestures (249).

This list mirrors the variety of critiques of the state-led reconciliation process in Canada that a) challenge the notion that there is a previous state of conciliation between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous Canadians to which they might return; b) argue that the scope is too narrow because it is limited to redress for the IRS policy and does not address the broader context of harmful colonial relationships that produce ongoing structural violence; c) reject approaches to reconciliation that focus on guilt or therapeutic models of healing instead of restitution; and d) highlight a lack of political accountability (see Amagoalik 2008; Alfred 2009; Chrisjohn and

Wasacase 2009; James 2010; Regan 2010; Green 2012; Nagy 2012). In response to these types of critique, Schaap notes that it is important to make a distinction between the *concept* of reconciliation, and different *conceptions* of reconciliation. While the former denotes the general idea of reconciliation – as Schaap phrases it, "a public reckoning with a history of political violence and oppression and their legacy in order to enable people divided by that past to coexist within one political community and to recognize the legitimacy of its law" – the latter posit ways in which this ought to be achieved (2008, 250). He argues that reconciliation must be understood as a politically contestable concept, and that the ambiguity that arises as a result of competing conceptions of reconciliation is fruitful for ongoing contestation and in fact enables the constitution of a political space in which this contestation can occur.

In this iteration, reconciliation is a guiding principle for action, rather than the end of a limited set of political actions. As Trudy Govier writes,

> It is crucial not to confuse the various *means* that may be employed in the question for reconciliation with reconciliation itself. In practice, the very notion of reconciliation as some kind of *end* or *goal* is somewhat hazardous. It may lead us to regard reconciliation as some kind of end state. That is an illusory notion… (2006, 21).

Though Govier employs the language of means and goals slightly differently than Arendt, for whom acts of reconciliation would not be regarded as means because action in her account is not instrumental but undertaken for its own sake in order to preserve a world in which continued action is possible, Govier's analysis of what is required to establish sustainable peace in the aftermath of political violence articulates a similar politics to both Arendt's theory of action and Schaap's Arendtian theory of political reconciliation.

In *Political Reconciliation* (2005), Schaap examines a series of political theories and seeks to apply them to grappling with reconciliation in divided societies: Carl Schmitt's

friend/enemy distinction, John Locke's ethic of toleration and Charles Taylor's politics of recognition. He determines that what he calls Arendt's ethic of worldliness provides a better political framework for approaching reconciliation than these approaches because it resists finality or closure; it does not require the presumption of a previous state of social harmony to which society can return but rather looks forward to a "we that is not yet" (2005, 6); it allows for the transformation of historical relationships without seeking to erase or obscure the past; and it allows for potentially incommensurable perspectives to establish and share a world in common. Schaap finds Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction to be reductive because it conceives of politics as being defined by being for or against others and lacking in the appreciation that Arendt's account provides of the ways in which being *with* others (which Arendt refers to as "sheer human togetherness") shapes "the world-disclosing potential of politics" (57). He is further critical of an ethic of toleration for reducing the value of political association to maintaining security. A politics of recognition is insufficient in that it presumes the existence of community rather than recognising it as a contingent outcome of political interaction (39; 55). An Arendtian ethic of worldliness, on the other hand,

> suggests that political reconciliation requires a fragile holding together of two contending moments of politics, one in which a common world is disclosed between former enemies and the other in which this world is called into question. As such, it entails a fractious interaction that seeks to delimit a common horizon that might encompass former enemies while affirming their freedom to unsettle the terms in which this horizon is constituted (6).

When conceived of politically and agonistically in this manner, reconciliation is capable of avoiding the ideological traps outlined in Schaap's later article.

Arendt's work is steeped in a preoccupation with the notion of reconciliation and occasionally invokes the concept directly, particularly with respect to the idea of reconciling oneself to a world in which atrocities such as the Holocaust have occurred (see Berkowitz 2011).

Schaap is writing three decades after Arendt's death, during which time the world has seen the rise of the politics of reparations and reconciliation. While for her it is the spirit that animates her conception of politics, for him, reconciliation can be understood as a particular form of agonistic politics to which Arendt's conception of action can be applied. He invokes the idea of beginning, stemming from Arendt's discussion of human natality, to describe the constitution of a political space between former enemies that is initiated from the promise of "never again" in reference to previous wrongdoing, and suggests that this space is sustained by the willingness of the victims of this wrongdoing to forgive their transgressors, or at least to seek grounds for forgiveness (2005, 7). The interaction in this space strives towards a sense of political community as the encounter between diverse perspectives on the world and diverse perspectives on the historical relationships between enemies discloses a potential sense of commonality. However, there is no presumption that a common identity that can be restored existed in the past, nor that such an identity will necessarily be the outcome of reconciliatory politics in the future. The possibility that such a 'we' could exist in the future is what allows for politics in the present – this is the promise of politics, but it is conditioned by the risk inherent in the unpredictability and boundlessness of action, that such reconciliation may not come to pass. "While the aspiration for reconciliation conditions the possibility of politics in the present, any ultimate reconciliation in the future is itself a political impossibility" (6). Again, following Arendt's non-instrumental vision of politics, reconciliation must be a goal that orients politics rather than being understood as the inevitable outcome. As such, we might then understand ourselves to be "living in reconciliation" rather than seeking "to be reconciled" (Schaap 2008, 259).

Andrew Woolford has pointed to a similar distinction between being reconciled and engaging in reconciliation in his work on treaty making in British Columbia (2005), which seeks

to conceive of a space "between justice and certainty" in which treaty negotiations might be approached as "reparations as justice making" (178). In a vision of reconciliation that mirrors Schaap's argument to resist the impulse of imposing closure, he writes that reconciliation

> requires a process of ongoing engagement with the Other. This is not a melding of two worlds into bland sameness, nor is it a mere act of tolerance whereby two parties grudgingly accept their differences. It is, rather, a living relationship that involves sharing and cooperation. In this sense, it requires more commitment than 'big bang' negotiations, as the act of negotiating will be continuous throughout the parties' relationship (180).

Woolford's work constitutes an important link in considering the relationship between Nagy's call to broaden our understanding of reconciliation as decolonization to encompass processes beyond the IRSSA such as treaty negotiations, and Schaap's agonistic conception of political reconciliation. Though such an exploration is beyond the scope of this paper, treaty negotiations, as an example of institutionalized promise making, present an interesting case study for considering the ways in which Arendt's work on judgment, forgiveness and promising, as well as her writings on thoughtlessness and bureaucratic regimes, might be used both diagnostically and normatively to understand current negotiation processes and to seek to reorient them towards reconciliation as decolonization. Upon an initial reading, Woolford's arguments seem to be in line with Schaap's resistance to closure and Arendt's description of promise making as allowing for a modicum of predictability and reliability in human interaction (1959, 220) in a number of ways: he suggests that the BC treaty process suffers from over-determination and a power imbalance that privileges government actors' interests in achieving economic certainty; he argues that treaties ought instead to "reflect the contingency of life rather than impose an absolute and final relationship" (12); and he calls for substantive guideposts by which to orient negotiations (172). Arendt's reminder that the enterprise of promise making becomes self-defeating when it is "misused to cover the whole ground of the future and to map out a path

secured in all directions" echoes in Woolford's descriptions of the ways in which over-determination in treaty making in fact leads to greater rather than lesser uncertainty for Indigenous groups (Arendt 1959, 220; Woolford 2005, 12).

In Schaap's account, the space in which political community is negotiated and renegotiated between former enemies is sustained by the willingness of those who have been wronged to forgive their wrongdoers. Forgiveness is presented as something that must be accorded to the perpetrators by the victims in order to sustain a public realm in which they might act in concert to build a common world and work towards a 'we' that is not yet. However, when considering the way such political spaces might be constituted in which Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada seek to reconcile, such as TRC hearings or treaty negotiations, a number of questions arise. One is the issue of how power imbalances shape these spaces and what is possible within them, which Woolford addresses in his work on the BC treaty process. Another question relates to what motivation people who have been wronged might have to forgive their wrongdoers or at least to seek grounds for forgiveness.

For Schaap, forgiveness is spurred by the constitution of political space through the promise of 'never again'. Yet, as Govier notes, reconciliation requires a great degree of trust and "that trust cannot be commanded into existence" (2006, 18). In the Canadian context where the relationship between Indigenous peoples and the government is widely regarded as consisting of a legacy of "hundreds, perhaps thousands, of broken promises, broken treaties, unfulfilled obligations, and commitments" that continue into the present day, one would wonder how promises made by the government might generate the necessary trust to motivate Indigenous peoples to be willing to seek grounds for forgiveness (Amagoalik 2008, 94). In Govier's account, trust is built through demonstrations by government leaders and citizens that they are genuinely

pursuing "moral repair" in acknowledging and seeking to provide redress for past injustices (2006, 18).

As such, it seems that something more than promise making must be necessary for generating the trust required to accept the risks of engaging in political reconciliation: a demonstration of promise keeping, otherwise understood as a new beginning that highlights the possibilities afforded to us by virtue of our natality. Following Arendt, engaging in this type of political action requires acting in a way that connects word and deed and making judgments based on considering the perspectives of those with whom we build a world in common. It also necessitates that we uphold the freedom of others by sustaining a space in which we can reveal our perspectives and identities to each other. This involves keeping our promises, seeking forgiveness when the effects of our actions harm others, and being willing to forgive others by recognising their ability to begin anew. In this regard, while the impulse to achieve closure in reconciliation must be resisted in the form of predetermining the terms of association and negotiation or understanding reconciliation as an achievable end, sustaining a space in which reconciliation is possible may require a certain kind of reliability in the future in the form of an ethical commitment to keep reconciliatory promises made to those who have been wronged.

In line with Govier and in the face of a treaty process wracked by over-determination, Woolford calls for an "ongoing relationship that is always open to scrutiny and reassessment" (178). He argues that reconciliation is not something that can be achieved by constructing an exhaustive definition of the relationship between Indigenous nations and non-Indigenous governments, but rather requires a foundation of mutual knowing and trust that is "built and rebuilt through sustained interaction" (178; 180). The building of trust and understanding necessary to reconciliation through ongoing negotiation can be understood in an Arendtian sense

as being akin to the manner in which the public sphere where action takes place is constituted through action itself: the building of trust through continuous negotiation is what sustains the space in which this negotiation is possible. This approach is reminiscent of James Tully's agonistic conception of constitutional democracy, wherein a dialogical civic freedom is the key to a just system of governance. Tully argues that all norms of mutual recognition must be subject to "review and possible renegotiation in the future" and that all citizens must be able to participate in a "multilogue" over the terms of association and governance to which they are subject (2004, 99; 92). Like Schaap and Woolford, he suggests that there can be no final determination because no agreement will suit everyone perfectly or apply effectively to all future circumstances, and as such he concludes, "reconciliation is thus not a final end-state but an activity that inevitably will be reactivated from time to time" (98).

Tully and Woolford's observations about the imperfect and inexhaustive nature of the results of negotiations constitute one aspect of an argument for living in reconciliation rather than seeking to be reconciled. Another aspect comes from recalling that the limited predictability and reliability that promise making can afford in political action rest entirely on the good will of political actors to keep their promises (Arendt 1959, 221). Living in reconciliation means that the goal of reconciling must be reinscribed in every new action, because the possibility to rupture the sense of new political community that is constituted by the initiation of a political reconciliation exists in every subsequent action. John Torpey and Rosa Sevy's work on reconciliation between Japanese-Americans and the American government following the internment of Japanese-Americans during the Second World War demonstrates this possibility of rupture in their discussion of the outrage and concern Japanese-Americans showed in reaction to the government's treatment of Muslim Americans after 9/11 (Torpey and Sevy 2006, 102).

This is not to say that Japanese Americans had not achieved a sense of justice from the redress package they received from the government, so much as that the ethical commitment initiated by that redress settlement – the promise of 'never again' – left open the possibility of upholding or breaking this promise every time the government acts anew in a web of human relationships that includes but is not limited to Japanese American citizens. Because the possibility of breaking the promise to uphold the spirit of living in reconciliation always exists, reconciliation is not an end that can be attained.

An example of this notion in the Canadian case is demonstrated in Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham's discussion of National Chief Shawn Atleo's rejoinder to Prime Minister Stephen Harper after he claimed in a speech to the G20 that Canada had no history of colonialism. This occurred only a matter of months after Harper had apologized to the survivors of residential schools for the harm they had suffered as a result of the IRS policy, promising that the nation would from then on be responsible for bearing the burden of their suffering. Atleo pointedly reminded the prime minister that the commitments he had made in the apology ought to inform all future speech and action, in keeping with the notion of living in reconciliation (2009, 2). Robyn Green points to the government's position on the supremacy of Canadian law vis-à-vis international law following its ratification of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the failure of Prime Minister Harper to attend the first TRC National Event as further examples of failing to live in reconciliation through connecting the words of the apology with the deeds of practicing reconciliatory politics (2012, 131).

Green's critique of the government's approach to the IRSSA is similar to Woolford's frustrations with the government's approach to treaty negotiations: in both cases, there is a critique of an inclination towards closure and towards circumscribing the terms of negotiation

from the outset. She suggests that the state's approach has mistakenly and inappropriately construed the redress package provided in the form of the IRSSA and the apology as a "'cure' for the experiences of trauma and loss suffered by IRS survivors or as the endpoint for Indigenous-settler reconciliation" (2012, 146). Furthermore, it mischaracterizes Indigenous discourses of healing by conflating them with its therapeutic conception, thus undermining the transformative power of these discourses as critiques of a narrow approach to reconciliation. Contrary to state discourses that present reconciliation as a cure, Indigenous conceptualizations of healing that include "cultural and language revitalization, decolonization, the redistribution of land, and the introduction of Indigenous methodologies into the public sphere" might be more in line with Nagy's conception of reconciliation (136). Thus while the IRSSA and the work of the TRC might be understood as initial steps towards reconciliation (146), or what Schaap might call an invitation to politics, they must not be understood as a conclusion to the suffering of Indigenous peoples or as the achievement of reconciliation.

In contrast with narrow approaches that conceive of reconciliation as a limited set of policies that will serve to cure the illness of historical injustice, Schaap presents us with an invitation to politics that does not require pre-existing agreement on the meaning and form of reconciliation. Instead, the initiation, implementation and contestation of reconciliatory actions constitute an ongoing process of political transformation or decolonization, from relationships of enmity to civic friendship. Agonistic politics does not provide a straightforward solution for transforming the oppressive relationships of the past into civic friendship through reconciliation, though, as it relies on good will, which cannot be expected or predicted. However, recalling Arendt's assertion that action that does not achieve its goals is neither pointless nor meaningless, the virtue of agonism in this regard is that it resists closure and allows for gradual change

through diverse political actions and reactions in unforeseen ways, even when individual actions do not seem particularly successful for the purposes of generating positive change. In this account, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission with a five-year mandate is not something that can succeed or fail at generating reconciliation, but is rather something that plays a role in constituting a space in which different perspectives regarding Indigenous-settler relationships can be brought to bear on discussions about the nature of political community in Canada.

Schaap's work points to a tension in Arendt's thought, wherein her conception of action is simultaneously conservative and revolutionary; as he describes it, action is both "world-delimiting" and "world-rupturing". This is the constructive challenge of agonism: it constantly calls the terms of association between human beings into question, even as it seeks to preserve the space of appearance in which that association is made possible (2005, 131). By attending to these dual qualities of action, which Arendt locates between past and future and which Woolford might situate between justice and certainty, political reconciliation "thus always involves this constant back and forth between sustaining politics with the promise of reconciliation and holding open the horizon of reconciliation by assuming the risk of politics" (Schaap 2005, 151). In this sense, while it does not provide any clear-cut solutions, and indeed posits that there may be no such thing, Schaap's work on political reconciliation points us to the ways in which Arendt's theory of political action can give us some hope in the face of narrow ideological conceptions of reconciliation that seek to foreclose the ongoing negotiation of relationships through politics. She reminds us that even in the wake of gross injustice or what seem like failed attempts at making change, we always possess the capacity to begin anew, to begin something new.

As we seek to live in reconciliation, to constitute and maintain a space wherein transition is possible and we might come together to form a new political community based on civic friendship, Arendt's work can serve as a guidepost for our actions. By heeding her concerns about pursuing goals rather than ends and not instrumentalising action, we can pursue a form of reconciliation that is not instrumental, but instead is committed to building a common world that celebrates and preserves plurality and includes diverse and sometimes conflicting perspectives, rather that attempting to incorporate or assimilate them into a presumed notion of common identity. We can attempt to identify when our actions violate the freedom of others by treating them on the basis of what they are and not who they are and thus denying their ability disclose their unique identities, and then seek forgiveness for these actions and begin anew. This commitment to upholding the freedom of others by engaging respectively with their diverse perspectives in order to preserve our collective political freedom in the world we share in common also serves to inform the actions we choose to initiate as we undertake the project of political reconciliation. Engaging in this type of agonistic politics requires embracing the ambiguity inherent in a process that simultaneously requires preservation and the initiation of new and unexpected beginnings, as the promise of politics must always contend with the risk of politics. By approaching reconciliation in this manner, we might avoid the drawbacks of imagining that narrowly construed conceptions will allow us to be reconciled, without needing to forego the potential benefits that limited reconciliatory policies might have to offer an ongoing process of transition through political reconciliation.

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