

Time as an instrument of settler evasion: Circumventing the implementation of truth and reconciliation in Canadian geography departments

Isaac White

Cultural Studies, Queen's University

Heather Castleden

Impact Chair in Transformative Governance for Planetary Health, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria

Key Messages

- Maintaining settler-colonial market time within the discipline perpetuates geographies of ignorance, which enable departmental evasions against implementing the calls to action.
- Disrupting and decolonizing settler-colonial market time is required to operationalize the TRC's recommendations throughout Canadian Geography departments.
- We call on Geography heads and their respective departments to re-evaluate how they allocate their time and increase their efforts to decolonize the discipline's colonial infrastructure and reconcile their relationships to Indigenous Peoples and the Land.

In 2015, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada released its final report on the Indian Residential Schools system and issued 94 calls to action. Education was identified as core to the reconciliation process. Universities across the country responded swiftly, acknowledging the calls as urgent and long overdue. Institution-wide task forces were established, and glossy reports were produced with directives to faculties and departments. Given Geography's historic and ongoing implication in white settler colonialism, Geography departments were in unique positions to surface the truths, engage in healing, and reconcile their relationships to Indigenous Peoples and the Land. This paper presents findings from an exploratory case study that sought to understand precisely what Canadian Geography departments have been doing to operationalize the TRC's calls to action in the five years since the TRC report was released. Using Foucauldian discourse analysis of semi-structured interviews with Geography department heads, we show how settler-colonial space-time geographies were often used as a scapegoat to circumvent responsibility at the department level. We are calling on Geography departments to take time away from their standing state of affairs to strategically, structurally, and systematically operationalize the calls to action.

Keywords: Indigenous-settler relations, settler colonialism, space-time geographies, decolonization, Foucauldian discourse analysis

This is an open access article under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits use, distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Correspondence to / Adresse de correspondance: Heather Castleden, School of Public Administration, University of Victoria PO Box 1700 STN CSC Victoria, BC V8W 2Y2.

Email/Courriel: castleden@uvic.ca

Le temps comme instrument aux mains des colons : contourner la mise en oeuvre de la vérité et de la réconciliation dans les départements de géographie canadiens

En 2015, la Commission vérité et réconciliation du Canada a publié son rapport final sur le système des pensionnats autochtones qui contenait 94 recommandations. Le rapport a identifié l'éducation comme étant au cœur du processus de réconciliation. Les universités partout au pays ont réagi rapidement, reconnaissant que des actions étaient urgentes et attendues depuis longtemps. À l'échelle des établissements, des groupes de travail ont été mis sur pied et des rapports sur papier glacé ont été produits accompagnés de directives à l'intention des facultés et des départements. Étant donné l'implication historique et continue de la géographie dans le colonialisme, les départements de géographie étaient dans une position unique pour faire ressortir certaines vérités ainsi que de s'engager dans la guérison et la réconciliation de leurs relations avec les peuples autochtones et la terre. Ce texte présente les résultats d'une étude de cas exploratoire qui a cherché à comprendre précisément ce que les départements de géographie canadiens ont fait pour rendre opérationnels les recommandations de la Commission vérité et réconciliation. En utilisant l'analyse du discours foucauldienne des entretiens semi-structurés avec les directeurs des départements de géographie, nous montrons comment les géographies spatio-temporelles des colons ont souvent été utilisées comme bouc émissaire pour contourner la responsabilité au niveau du département. Nous encourageons les départements de géographie à prendre le temps de mettre en oeuvre les recommandations de manière stratégique, structurelle et systématique.

Mots clés : analyse du discours foucauldienne, colonialisme de peuplement, décolonisation, géographies spatio-temporelles, relations entre autochtones et colons

*All my days I wake up, open my eyes
Beneficiary of a genocide
Drive to work all day
Go to sleep at night
Beneficiary of a genocide
All of my life
I turned a blind eye*

Lyrics to "Beneficiary" by Wintersleep (2019).

Introduction

Geographers have occupied and continue to occupy an active role in shaping the settler-colonial enterprise in what is now known as the Canadian state, subjecting Indigenous Peoples to colonial and racist violence, as well as ongoing Land dispossession (Hunt 2014; Daigle 2016). As Kobayashi and Peake (2000, 399) outline, "From its origins in exploration and scientific classifications, the discipline played a founding role in establishing the systems of imperialist expansion and colonial power through which the western world became a dominant center and its white inhabitants became normative, authoritative, and privileged." Their critique is not simply about a few individual geographers who may have done "a few bad things back in the day." Illuminating the origins of the relationship between the discipline

and the early colonial encounter is important because the white settler colonialism that Kobayashi and Peake described historically continues to play a structural role in shaping existing academic institutions, policies, and practices today (Wolfe 2006). Such a structural role can be understood according to what Mackey (2014, 240) calls "settler 'structures of feeling' ... [which encompass] individual and collective emotions ... [that] reflect and/or reproduce foundational conceptual frameworks that are essential to settler colonial and national projects." These structures generate "illogical fantasies of possession ... [and] fantasies of entitlement ... [informed by past, present, and future] settled expectations of certainty" (Mackey 2014, 242), especially regarding the industry of white settler power over "Indigenous [knowledge], politics, governance, and territoriality" (Rifkin 2011, 342).

Canada has been called upon to act—to address its colonial and racist systems and structures—for quite some time. In 1996, after a five-year Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples that was conducted in response to the 1990 Mohawk Resistance at Kanesatake, a report on the status of Indigenous-settler relations was released with 440 recommendations, calling for sweeping changes to this historic and contemporary relationship, to right the wrongs of white supremacist policies and

practices in all sectors of Canadian society. Nearly 20 years later, with the Idle No More Movement and a federal apology for the Canadian Indian Residential Schools system, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (TRC 2015) released its final report on residential schools and issued 94 calls to action. Reconciliation became a rallying cry across the country, and education was identified as critical to the reconciliation process. Universities across the country responded swiftly, acknowledging the calls as urgent and long overdue. Institution-wide task forces were established, and glossy reports were produced with directives to faculties and departments. The discourse of reconciliation quickly “emerged as a potent and alluring form of utopian politics,” serving multiple socio-political functions in settler-colonial societies where issues of knowledge production, cultural rights, Land and territory claims, genocide, and calls for redress are “urgently contested” (Edmonds 2016, 1). The discourse of reconciliation has been adopted and embraced within the academy: reconciliation is everywhere, all the time. But is it? Or is it just talk? Is there action too? How is action taken; is it systematic or haphazard? How much time does it take to see real and lasting change? How much time *should* it take (and according to whom)?

Universities have also been called upon to act, as have the disciplines. Geography, on the one hand, can maintain the status quo of western ways of knowing entrenched in epistemic violence and empire expansionism (Hunt 2014). On the other, Geography has an opportunity to reconcile its relationship to Indigenous Peoples and the Land (e.g., water, air, other-than-human species, spirit). Considering that the discipline has historical culpability in the colonial project and ongoing complicity in white settler colonialism, and considering our positionalities as white settler scholars wanting to disrupt our own complicity and interrupt Indigenous-specific racism, our exploratory research sought to understand the extent to which the calls to action are understood and operationalized in Geography departments across Canada. To do this, semi-structured interviews were conducted with Geography department heads throughout the country.

Applying a Foucauldian discourse analysis to the data, we illuminate how settler-colonial space-time geographies were often used as a

scapegoat to circumvent responsibility at the department level. Specifically, we show that the ways in which reconciliation materializes (or not) within Geography departments is influenced by a settler-colonial temporality upholding the status quo of white settler authority, knowledge production, and futurity, that is, “the cultural structures and narratives that ensure and envision a future for settlers” (Hickey 2019, 166). Our analysis reveals that the particular temporal structure underpinning departmental reconciliation efforts is settler-colonial market time: a “modern” western linear temporality structured on settler colonialism and capitalist modes of operation that support settler futurity and agendas of progress (Castree 2009; Rifkin 2017; Awâsis 2020).

As geographers, we study place, location, human-environment interactions, movement, and regions across time and space. Given our disciplinary expertise to dig deep in these areas, we have the knowledge, skills, and unique tools to also make space, allocate time, and produce efforts for transformative and decolonial action to challenge and disrupt the settler-colonial system through which the discipline and the academy operate. While we acknowledge the difficulties and complexities of implementing the calls to action against the daily forces of settler-colonial market time within the academy, we urge geographers to reflect on and consider the ways that they can decolonize their time and space to create opportunities for truth and reconciliation and the calls to action in their academic duties, teaching, and research. Ultimately, the purpose of this paper is to foster deep and critical reflection, thinking, debate, and action, and to urge Geography departments to work towards strategically and systematically operationalizing the calls to action. What follows is a brief review of the literature on settler-colonial market time and wilful settler ignorance before we outline our case and methodological approach, and then detail our findings and a discussion of their implications.

Settler-colonial market time

While peer-reviewed literature about time as a geographical construct from Indigenous scholars

is only beginning to emerge, Sákihitowin Awâsis (2020) underscores that on the Land, for Anishinaabe, there is nothing intrinsic in the flow of time that signifies linearity. In Anishinaabe contexts, understandings of temporality “are not only cyclical (same species, different individuals) but circular (same individuals in the present, past, and future),” which is a critical distinction “for understanding how Anishinaabe people engage with nonhuman agency; human and nonhuman nations exist in the present through our past and future intersocial relations” (Awâsis 2020, 845). Indigenous understandings of temporality are thus heavily predicated on a set of interconnected relationships to Land (Deloria 2001) because it is Indigenous Lands that “animate temporal processes” (Awâsis 2020, 832). However, Indigenous ways of knowing and being that centre such complex perspectives and relationships to time and space have been profoundly displaced through colonial law and policy and superseded by a Euro-western frame of reference (Rifkin 2017).

Upon early European arrival to this country, the reconfiguration of time according to settler conceptions of modernity served as a colonial mechanism that not only marginalized and disavowed Indigenous claims to Land and territory but situated Indigenous Peoples on a downward temporal slope to erasure as they were seen as antithetical to settler sociality and progress (Al-Saji 2013). Through the thrust of colonial law and policy, Indigenous Peoples were anachronized and subjected to systematic reorganizations of their pre-existing relationships to time and space, “to remake them in ways that fit non-native timescapes of expansion and dispossession” (Rifkin 2017, xi). The imposition of settler sovereignty is problematic because it permitted the social construction of political and temporal borders, which continue to manipulate the geopolitical and spatiotemporal landscapes throughout so-called “Canada” (Denis 2020).

In Canada, our institutions function according to a settler-colonial temporal structure that encompasses, and is constrained by, capitalist modes of operation (Castree 2009). What is especially problematic about the relationship between settler-colonial market time and capitalism is the way it dictates and naturalizes the (white) supremacy of one temporal structure over others (Awâsis 2020). The perpetuation of settler-colonial market time

not only reinforces the capitalist structures undergirding nation state agendas of Land and resource expropriation (Pasternak 2015), but limits and regulates Indigenous self-determination and forms of governance according to settler modes of temporality (Rifkin 2017). Ultimately, settler-colonial market time dismantles and reconfigures non-western temporalities in relation to the needs of white settler economies (Al-Saji 2013; Mahadeo 2019).

Post-secondary education (within authoritative, standardized, evaluative, competitive, and assessment-based universities) has largely manufactured knowledge as a marketable product that is “rated, bought, and sold” (Mbembe 2016, 30). The very idea of knowledge as product, as commodity, as something that can be used to generate wealth, is inextricable from the intersection of truth and power that shape its value in the first place (Foucault 1980). Within the confines of settler-colonial market time, social cooperation in our institutions creates a “new political economy of life,” wherein the “creative capacities,” “intellectual work,” and “knowledge making” that constitute the life of settler society come under the regulatory power of capital (Tadiar 2012, 785–786). Bearing this in mind, “settler colonialism should not be seen as deriving its reproductive force solely from its strictly repressive and violent features, but rather from its ability to produce *forms of life* that make settler colonialism’s constitutive hierarchies seem natural” (Coulthard 2014, 152; italic in the original). This distinctively entails that settler colonialism and the forms of life, ways of knowing, and hierarchies of knowledge it produces within the academy, are influenced by settler-colonial market time.

Geography departments are clearly implicated in reproducing such settler-colonial structures, which can be seen through their limited engagement with different ways of knowing and doing. If only we (read: white geographers) relinquished such control, we could surpass the limitations and normativities of Euro-western knowledge production and practice. Just as Land was and continues to be stolen by white settler states, so too does time (Kidman et al. 2021), and this can be identified in the settler inability to commit time, space, and effort to engaging in meaningful truth, healing, and reconciliation practice. We see this wilful evasion arising in our own dataset, described in our Findings section below.

Wilful settler ignorance and evasion

According to Schaepli and Godlewska (2014, 1–2), wilful settler ignorance is structural and self-interested because it is the result of “not-knowing,” that is consciously or unconsciously “deployed in ways that perpetuate privilege and domination.” In its structural form, ignorance is shaped according to the interests and aspirations of the dominant—white settler—group (Mills 2007). With this in mind, there exists a crucial task that Regan (2010) has described as “unsettling the settler within.” However, and considering that some, if not myriad Canadians “hold a deep emotional and cultural investment in the status quo” (Davis et al. 2017, 399), it is difficult to reshape existing settler-Canadian consciousness. To do so requires non-Indigenous Canadians accepting that they are the beneficiaries of past and ongoing injustices of Indigenous dispossession and occupation on stolen Lands (Davis et al. 2017).¹ Problematically though, many settlers understand and experience the world through a settler-colonial lens (Rifkin 2017); they “experience its temporalities and understandings of space as natural and so, beyond questioning” (Cook 2018, 19).

As a discipline implicated in imperial and colonial violence, Geography’s direct and complicit forms of ignorance can be identified in geographic strategies to undermine Indigenous Peoples’ identities and territories (Godlewska et al. 2013). We see this in settler-colonial cartographies and the remapping of Indigenous territories according to European-defined political borders (Wolfe 1999). We see this in the renaming of Indigenous place names in ways that honour European homelands, explorers, military, and church leaders (Simpson 2008). We see this in colonial and racist policies that have displaced Indigenous Peoples from their traditional territories through geographies of allotment and dispossession (Harris 2004). And we see this in the continuum of geographic formations of time and space that privilege non-Indigenous, settler-colonial ways of being and knowing that enable epistemological and ontological violence against Indigenous Peoples (Hunt 2014).

¹We encourage readers to listen to Wintersleep’s (2019) recording of “Beneficiary,” from their album “In the Land Of.”

The production of Euro-western ways of knowing that privilege its geographical knowledge in the discipline is an issue of wilful ignorance and settler evasion, a conscious systematic ignorance sanctioning social exclusion and the perpetuation of white settler authority and knowledge production within the social hierarchy (Schaepli and Godlewska 2014; Tuck and Yang 2012). In the academy, power is extensively embedded in the pursuit and production of Euro-western “truth,” the knowledge that not only rewards white settler wealth and power, but also serve the capitalist interests and futurity of white settler-colonial society.

Research context

In this light, the 2015 TRC calls to action informed Castleden’s commencement of a course-based research project to explore the issues detailed throughout this paper with two cohorts: a fourth-year course on “Geographies of Reconciliation” and a graduate course on “Critical Modes of Inquiry.” The goal of the course-based research project was to understand the extent to which Canadian Geography departments are addressing the TRC’s recommendations, and how they are going about doing so. White, a graduate student in the latter course, was later recruited to carry out an in-depth analysis of the rich dataset that was collected by the students in these courses.

Methods

Recruitment and data collection

According to the institutional memberships listed on the Canadian Association of Geographers’ website in 2020, there are 50 Geography departments (that may be otherwise named; that is, “Geography” may not have appeared in the department’s title) at 44 universities across Canada. This became the inclusion criteria for recruiting participants to our study. The recruitment process started in February 2020, just before the beginning of the COVID-19 lockdown in Canada. Of the 50 initial invitations sent out, 21 agreed to participate, 9 declined, and 23 did not respond. Worth noting, of the nine who declined at the outset, five indicated they were too busy to participate, one indicated they were going

on sabbatical, one declined because they had a physical science background, one perceived that they would be in a conflict of interest position, and one stated that “our school is not considering and/or implementing the Calls to Action, thus, the answer is that I would not be willing to participate as I have no perspective on the matter.”

A second round of emails were sent to those who did not initially respond. In that round, 2 responded, agreeing to participate, and 21 did not respond. With 23 participants in total, we achieved a near 50% response rate of Geography department heads. We used semi-structured interviews to elicit department heads' responses to several key questions, including:

- How did they view their department's responsibility to respond to the TRC calls to action and to what extent did they make any changes to address the calls?
- What challenges and successes did they encounter in implementing desired changes?
- How did they view the role of Geography in contributing to Indigenous genocide? and
- What were their hopes regarding truth, healing, and reconciliation for their department?

Analysis

We used Foucauldian discourse analysis (FDA) to analyze the interview transcripts. FDA is recognized as an interpretive approach to “identify sets of ideas, or discourses, used to make sense of the world within particular social and temporal contexts” (Waitt 2016, 288). Doing FDA is not about unveiling what is and is not “true”, rather it is about revealing the structures of power and social processes that shape and govern what counts as truth, who can speak truth, and how truth sanctions specific conditions and normalizing actions within a given society or culture (Macias 2015).

According to Waitt (2016, 289), FDA “allows geographers to expose how inequalities and injustices are sustained by the resilience of certain underlying normative categories.” In the context of our research, FDA afforded the tools to interpret Department heads' speech to understand if, how, and the extent to which their perspectives foster time and space for truth and reconciliation or uphold dominant categories of knowledge that maintain inequities and injustices throughout the

discipline. Namely, doing FDA provided the means to interrogate and disentangle the complexities of knowledge and power that perpetuate certain (i.e., Euro-western) modes of thinking, being, and doing, while other possibilities are marginalized and averted (e.g., Indigenous Peoples, Black people, racialized people, LGBTQ2S+ people, etc.) (Macias 2015; Waitt 2016).

Working within an interpretive paradigm to code data from the interview transcripts, we employed FDA to read within and between participants' language-in-use to search for the social processes that shape the construction of certain truths and their social effects and implications (Macias 2015). We used a two-staged analytical process to organize and analyze the data. During the first read-through of the interview transcripts—the organization stage—we developed a set of descriptive codes that captured perceived challenges and barriers, individual and departmental successes, and hopes for moving forward with respect to truth, healing, and reconciliation. This initial stage of coding assisted in the preliminary process of understanding our who, what, where, when, and how questions in relation to Department heads' perspectives and experiences of engaging with the calls to action at the department level.

Constructing descriptive codes provided a good starting point to organize the data and identify common themes. But to read within and between participants' language-in-use—the analysis stage—we needed to read each of the 23 transcripts three additional times in order to develop a set of analytical codes to catalogue text that reflected our preliminary interpretations of participants' speech. In FDA, analytical codes “typically provide insights into why an individual or collective holds particular sets of ideas by which they make sense of places, themselves, and others” (Waitt 2016, 303). We formulated three analytical codes including “settler colonialism,” “settler ignorance,” and “upholding the status quo.”

“Settler colonialism” was used to categorize statements that perpetuated foundational structures, knowledges, and feelings of entitlement that are essential to white settler colonialism, including comments about insufficient time, perspectives on academic freedom, and speech acts that reinforce settler authority over geographical knowledge

production across all domains of the discipline. “Settler ignorance” was used to categorize perspectives that differentiated the degree of truth and reconciliation responsibility between Human and Physical Geography domains, and speech acts regarding individual and departmental incapacity to implement Indigenous content, knowledges, and perspectives in geographical curricula. “Up-holding the status quo” was used to categorize perspectives regarding inadequate direction, guidance, and leadership, as well as statements surrounding the inability or unlikelihood of the department to institute course and curriculum changes that engage with broader than existing western content.

These codes are not mutually exclusive, but they helped to organize the data and draw connections between excerpts of speech to understand if/how particular structures of feeling and normative categories of knowledge influence department heads' current perspectives and practices with respect to what they have done, or not, to systematically implement the TRC's recommendations and reconciliation initiatives. Our findings reflect the general scope of what participants shared in terms of operationalizing the TRC calls to action in their departments.

Findings

Culpability and correction

All participants stated that Geography departments have a responsibility to respond to the calls to action. In line with the question of responsibility, some participants highlighted the unique position of the discipline to address the issue. For example, one participant said: “I think Geography in particular, as a discipline rooted in the colonial project, has perhaps more responsibility than most to correct its historical culpability” (P-26). Another participant stated: “I think Geography is a discipline that's at the centre of doing this type of work, implementing the actions. Yet we haven't really formalized what that looks like, what action on the ground means” (P-47).

Across the board, participants recognized the duty of the discipline to make changes that implement the TRC calls to action. However, they also exposed the notion that they lacked the time

needed to commit to truth, healing, and reconciliation. They acknowledged the insufficient strategic effort that had been put in place to date with respect to operationalizing the calls in their respective departments. Some participants noted that there had been departmental discussions and an upsurge of awareness around reconciliation and Indigenous issues. But while dialogue may have existed on the subject, these discussions, in many instances, had not materialized or translated into any direct and systematic action. For example, one participant stated:

Now that you make me talk about it, I do feel a bit inadequate actually. I do feel there's been a deepening of interest and attention in reconciliation and Indigenous issues in the last few years. But when we're sort of put on the spot and asked about what we are doing and what policies we have in place, the reality is, not that much. (P-26)

Another participant emphasized: “I would suggest that it's probably overdue that we start putting actions behind our words” (P-01). As these comments show, many Geography heads have not taken the time to make strategic space or room for the calls to action in their departments, which illuminates the effect that settler-colonial market time has over stagnating truth and reconciliation initiatives at the department level.

At the time that data were collected, it had been nearly five years since the calls to action were released, and while participants voiced a duty to address the issues raised, their speech drew explicit attention to the inadequate efforts, time, and space to operationalize change at the department level. This can be seen in the following participant's statement: “As of right now I wouldn't say that as a department we've made any changes yet” (P-13). Another participant noted: “I do not remember discussing the TRC at the department level over the past five years ... We haven't really looked at ways that we could address this at the departmental level” (P-15).

In recognizing that not much had been done about instituting the calls to action, despite some talk to that effect, many participants noted that addressing reconciliation and operationalizing the TRC's recommendations demands time. For example, one participant outlined: “That's what I think a lot of times it takes ... it just takes time to

build these programs into something very robust” (P-48). While truth and reconciliation are ongoing processes that demand time, space, care, and commitment, some participants underscored that time poses a particular barrier to implement desired changes. For example, one participant said: “Well, I think it’s just time. Lack of time and, and maybe leadership. We need to get people on board to help out with these changes” (P-52). Another participant stated:

I think there’s also as always, with everything in universities, an issue with time. Everybody is trying to do so many things and it’s one of those things, and so time is another... some degree of impediment. ... We have had a lot of other things on our plate in terms of curriculum changes and what have you ... I think now we’re moving into a place where we can start focusing more on some of these other issues, including Indigenizing the curriculum more broadly and thinking about experienced learning and racialization. (P-06)

Whether it was implicitly or explicitly discussed by participants, insufficient time was identified as a key barrier for many with respect to addressing the discipline’s culpability and ability to self-correct concerning the implementation of the calls to action in Geography departments. The inadequate time spent on operationalizing the calls to action over the five years between when the TRC report was published and our interviews were conducted speaks to the influence that settler-colonial market time and geographies of ignorance have over constraining Departments’ care and capacity to implement course and curriculum changes that engage Indigenous content.

Geographic ignorance: (We) care and (yet we don’t develop the) capacity

While lack of time and space for truth and reconciliation appeared to inhibit processes of operationalizing the calls to action, participants also highlighted capacity issues, primarily in the context of changing the curriculum. For example, one participant emphasized: “One of the challenges will be that... and it is about undergrad teaching and about incorporating Indigenous content into it. ... And the faculty members do have the desire to do that, but they need more training,

more education on how to properly” (P-53). Another participant outlined:

I think we can do a lot more with, you know, the proviso again that we are a small department, and we have a capacity to modify our curriculum especially. But in terms of radical changes, I don’t see that in the near future, in terms of having to cover a broad gamut of a discipline that we do. (P-20)

On continuing the discussion of department size and capacity, this participant stated:

We don’t have the capacity to offer a lot of very specialized, topically speaking, very specialized courses. The idea of that and Indigenous geographies and decolonization type of a course means we are making choices about what does or doesn’t get offered next year, and what does or doesn’t get included in our program. Whereas in bigger Departments, it’s just an “okay this is an elective,” or make it a requirement if you go that far, that’s possible as well. But at the very least it’s easy to add one more elective, and if it’s interesting to the students, lots of students will take it and that’s great. But we don’t have the luxury of adding electives anytime we feel like. (P-13)

The unlikelihood of changing Geography curricula in the near future, if at all, was apparent for some participants, especially in the case of small-scale Geography departments. But as those participants focused their discussions on the (in)capacities of the department to implement curriculum changes, there is also a question that arises for some about whether there is a faculty-wide willingness to engage, even nominally, Indigenous perspectives and knowledges. This can be seen in the following participant’s statement: “I think the ongoing, maybe ongoing challenges would be how do you, in a packed curriculum ... *how do you add some Indigenous viewpoints to some areas?* ... I don’t know that all our faculty members would necessarily support that in their courses, right? So that could be a challenge” (P-51, emphasis added).

The perceived capacity issues detailed by participants are structured on the constraints posed by department size, existing faculty expertise, and the need to cover the curriculum that the discipline currently offers. In other words, the challenges identified by participants to change geographical curricula are influenced by the size and

epistemological expertise of their departments, as well as the “duty” to maintain the discipline’s current academic offerings, that is, to maintain the status quo of a western paradigm.

Upholding the status quo: Where is the leadership?

On furthering the dialogue of the role and incapacities of Geography departments to operationalize change, some participants were keen to rationalize their lack of action by suggesting that their academic backgrounds limited their abilities. For example, one participant stated: “I’d say a personal challenge is that I come from a physical and GIScience background ... sometimes I don’t feel that equipped to do this” (P-34). Another noted: “I’m not trained as a human geographer, I’m not a social scientist” (P-01). Still another said: “I’m a scientist... I’m not a human geographer” (P-24). Yet the discipline of Geography as a whole has contributed extensively to settler colonialism and the perpetuation of a western epistemology, so to deflect responsibility also reflects a lack of critical reflection and understanding of the TRC calls to action.

Some participants extended this line of dialogue by outlining the ways in which the shape or magnitude of addressing the calls to action should lie with the social scientists in their units. For example, one participant said: “When we talk about reconciliation and different ways of looking at space and land and connection to land and relationships to each other... that’s Human Geography in my mind” (P-47). Another participant stated: “I think Human Geography has a much more direct role to play” (P-25). Additionally, this participant outlined: “I think Critical Human Geography is really well positioned to contribute to ... I don’t know about correcting past wrongs but critiquing the modes of thought that have underpinned past wrongs” (P-26).

Considering the statements above, it is evident still that other participants (who do not identify as human geographers) perceive that the time spent on operationalizing the calls to action should primarily lie with the human geographers or social scientists in their units. In line with those speech acts that drew attention to the Human/Physical Geography dichotomy, they spoke of the ways that the TRC’s recommendations have not been

substantively engaged with in the Physical Geography domain. Participants perceive the reason for this as being due to Physical Geography’s focus on the terrestrial domain. For example, this participant said:

I know that individual professors have incorporated elements in their curriculums and in their deliveries. ... In some closed cases it hasn’t been done for a variety of reasons, some being that some of *our courses are more purely physical in nature and don’t lend themselves as easily to that ...* that sort of change. ... It’s something that my colleagues in the cultural courses are much more adept at doing than I am. (P-09; emphasis added)

While some participants focused on the ways in which the characteristic differences between Human and Physical Geography could pose challenges to implement the calls to action and change curricula, others voiced what they saw as potential threats to their academic freedom. This can be seen in the following participant’s statement:

Faculty members have academic freedom to teach within the curriculum what they want. We cannot stipulate specifics of what they must teach. So, the approach to that is that we need to make sure that we are educating our faculty members with Indigenous history and understanding so that they can choose to implement that into their courses. (P-02)

Another participant said: “Someone could say, ‘you should do this, and you will do this,’ but then the academic freedom thing kicks in if you don’t really want to” (P-10). Moreover, and while academic freedom is not explicitly named, one participant stated this in the context of changing existing courses: “It’s a bit harder to get people to change their courses, it is easier to work with people that are just coming in. It’s a certain inertia that’s hard to change” (P-40).

Participants thus identified that within their departments, academic freedom has or could be used as a tactic to circumvent responsibility, time, and space around operationalizing any sort of curricular change. As the department heads’ comments show, the power and privilege that comes with academic freedom can either uphold inequities and normative categories of geographical knowledge production or facilitate the development of Indigenous content and courses that

exceed the epistemological orthodoxies underpinning the disciplinary status quo.

We have (not) started to (slowly) make changes

While lack of time, department size and capacity, epistemological expertise, the nature of Human versus Physical Geography, and academic freedom were identified as factors creating challenges to implement desired changes, some participants noted that in their departments there have been commitments to alter existing curricula and courses. For example, one participant stated: “We have one or two courses where the instructors, particularly in third or fourth year, are starting to bring in concepts around Indigenous Peoples and the TRC as well” (P-27). Another participant outlined: “We have talked within our department about how to improve the Indigenization of our curriculum in areas where we should talk about and incorporate Indigenous histories, issues of reconciliation, issues of colonization and decolonization. We’ve identified a number of courses where we can start to incorporate that into the curriculum” (P-02). In the context of Physical Geography, the participant also remarked:

Historically in Geography, our field methods and field studies has often focused solely on the physical environment ... going out and measuring water, measuring soil, those types of scientific measurements. There is a big, strong connection between land-based learning and Indigenous knowledges. We want to incorporate that into our field methods and field course programs. (P-02)

Commitments have been made to change existing curricula and practice in some departments. However, the degree of uncertainty and the slow pace at which course and curriculum change is occurring within Geography departments is common across the interview transcripts. This can be seen in the following participant’s statement:

There’s been a commitment to weave material on Indigenous knowledges and Indigenous ways of knowing throughout a number of courses. So, I think our curriculum is changing, well, I hope. It’s a slow process, but I think there’s a commitment to weave Indigenous theory and issues throughout a number of our courses, our core courses. (P-40)

It is evident that there have been some efforts to make practical and epistemological changes that

implement the calls to action. But while some participants speak of efforts to change curricula, there is great ambiguity as to when, the extent of time committed, whether such changes have been enacted, or had any positive effect in geographical theories, pedagogies, and human dimensions within departments.

In contributing to the dialogue on curriculum change, some participants highlighted efforts within their departments to adjust or develop new courses to meet an institutional mandate. For example, one participant stated:

The course requirement has been the fire under everyone’s butt to have to create something that goes through senate and is now part of your degree and part of advising students on why they should have to take it, and what they should take. And then that naturally seems to breed pedagogical discussions around how to do it properly. For example, I teach a course about Indigenous Knowledge, science, and the environment, which is our “Indigenous course requirement”. I’m a non-Indigenous person and so by teaching this course alone, there’s obviously critiques and discussion of whether it’s appropriate if a non-Indigenous person should be teaching this. And that breeds this great spirit of discussion. So, it’s very informal, very bottoms up because I think we have a passion to show that [our institution] can do this. (P-47)

Another participant said: “We have courses within our program that are certified as Indigenous credits, meaning the course has substantive enough content on First Peoples of Canada that it satisfies a learning requirement” (P-48). In some cases, there have been curricula changes within Geography departments that respond to the calls to action. Where such change has occurred, it is often (but by no means always) the result of higher-level institutional direction through a specific mandate. It is encouraging to see the role of some institutions in contributing to implementing change at the department level. However, some participants highlighted the insufficient guidance and clarity surrounding their institution’s response. For example, this participant stated:

We’ve been charged with Indigenizing the curriculum but if I ask what that means no one can tell me ... It’s difficult because the process as outlined is vague and permissive, but you know, campus’ reaction to those

things is difficult because there's no explicit directives. So as a department chair, I have found it difficult to engage with the marching orders I was given by my dean which was to do something. And if you say, "what is that thing?"... they don't really know. So that means it is underthought about at the senior administrative level. (P-10)

In the findings above, some participants explain that a challenge of engaging with truth and reconciliation and Indigenization at the department level is inadequate direction and guidance at the institutional level. Interestingly, a review of each institution's formal response(s) to the TRC (available online for approximately 75% of the 44 institutions included in this study), show general or specific recommendations. Although some institutions have not devised precise plans to address truth and reconciliation and the calls to action, most of the participants stated that, as departmental leaders, they have a duty to respond. It is promising to see change occurring in some of these Geography departments, but overall we heard multiple participants express ways of deflecting responsibility. In the section below, we provide a discussion of our findings, including the varying implications of what Geography heads and their respective departments have and have not done in response to the calls to action.

Discussion

This study draws attention to how many Geography department heads invoke settler-colonial market time to obstruct and decelerate the implementation of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing in their departments. They acknowledged that they have a responsibility to operationalize the calls to action, but it became apparent that time functions as a key barrier impeding processes to implement the calls at the department level. Our FDA discloses how settler-colonial market time influences and enables participant evasions against operationalizing the calls to action at the department level by promoting geographies of ignorance (Godlewska et al. 2010). While some participants faulted time as an impediment or constraint to not having done "much" or "more," the FDA reveals an underlying alibi

consistent with wilful settler ignorance and upholding the status quo.

We could see how settler-colonial market time played out in perpetuating evasion and innocence in participants' responses by their tendency to deflect responsibility and "blaming" individual research background and (in)capacity, department size and (in)capacity, the dispositions and dichotomization of Human and Physical Geography, and academic freedom. Certain participant comments about both individual and department capacity were of an epistemological nature; that is, they highlighted challenges to operationalize the calls to action because of their own research training and expertise or that of other faculty members within their departments (e.g., "physical geographer," "scientist," etc.). Moreover, some participants fended off implementing course and curriculum changes that engage Indigenous knowledges and perspectives by invoking the need to protect academic freedom, the "ostensible nature" of Physical Geography, and the "duty" to cover the curricular extent of what the discipline currently offers: aka, the status quo. The barriers and incapacities articulated by many participants demonstrate a degree of departmental "indifference" to truth and reconciliation (Granzow 2020). In doing so, our analysis reveals how settler-colonial market time perpetuates geographies of ignorance as it situates non-Indigenous, Euro-western knowledge production at the top of the discipline's epistemological hierarchy. This exemplifies how settler colonialism and settler structures of feeling function within the discipline, and more generally, the academy.

Considering the extent of epistemological incapacity to institute change at the departmental scale, Geography heads may wish to inquire into online training workshops and stay up to date with campus workshops and programs developed through Indigenous-led initiatives. Further, and given the perceived issues surrounding academic freedom and faculty member pushback against operationalizing change, department heads might consider mandating such training. The notion that training cannot be a requirement of faculty members is a misnomer; most universities' health and safety orientations nowadays also require equity, diversity, and inclusion training as well as research ethics training. For example, up until 2020, Queen's University did not require faculty

members to have the TCPS2 CORE (Course on Research Ethics) certificate, even if their research involved human participants, but the certificate is now mandatory for any faculty member doing such research. We can change with the times; we must, and our faculty associations can support/lead the implementation of these changes too.

Although time and incapacity were used to obfuscate action and responsibility, some participants outlined successes of operationalizing change within their departments. Participants spoke of how there have been some curriculum changes that engage Indigenous perspectives and knowledges, Indigenous histories, Land-based learning, as well as content on settler colonialism, decolonization, and truth and reconciliation. It is encouraging to see these efforts, however, “weaving” some Indigenous content into a few courses, whether in response to an institutional mandate or not (e.g., an Indigenous course requirement), is insufficient for addressing Geography’s complicity in white settler colonialism. Geography heads and their respective departments may wish to consider the ways that they can implement Indigenous content throughout “a range of courses in a critical and constructive manner, whereby introductory topics are built upon in upper-level courses” (Daigle 2019, 713). Developing a range of Geography courses that draw from, or centre, Indigenous histories, knowledges, and perspectives, can contribute to dismantling the forms of geographic ignorance undergirding settler-colonial market time and the ongoing dispossession of Indigenous Peoples from their Lands.

To effectively institute curricula reform, Jazeel (2017, 336) notes that faculty members need to examine how they can “de-link the production of geographical knowledge from the hegemony... [of the] disciplinary infrastructure.” Daigle (2019, 713) also asserts that they need to assess “whether they are reproducing colonial imaginaries, a colonial citational politics, and colonial power dynamics in their courses.” Department heads, faculty, and staff members could institute departmental retreats on an annual basis to discuss, debate, and reflect on ways to challenge and unsettle the dominant and unjust colonial structures that sustain epistemological inequities in the discipline, and then strategically implement the actions arising from these retreats. Creating time and space for peer-to-peer mentorship and the sharing

of stories, experiences, challenges, and successes might offer strategic pathways for department members to engage the calls to action and Indigenous knowledges and perspectives in their teaching and research. White settler racial causing to examine motivations for disrupting Indigenous specific racism is one such example of peer-to-peer mentorship. This approach involves white peers *taking the time* to learn about colonization, colonial policies, inequities, racism, whiteness, bias, stereotypes, power, privilege, and systemic racism (from those with appropriate training), which then creates space to engage in self-reflection, reflexivity, and understanding whiteness without burdening Indigenous Peoples with narratives of “where do I start, what should I do?”

In cases where there is uncertainty regarding the implementation of Indigenous knowledges and content in geographical curricula, departments may consider reaching out to available support systems within their institution for direction. For example, many institutional ‘Teaching and Learning’ centres now have Indigenous curriculum developers and/or equity, diversity, and inclusion experts to support curriculum reviews, renewals, and reforms that engage with broader than existing epistemological (i.e., western) content. Individual faculty can centre the knowledges of Indigenous, Black, racialized, LGBTQ2S+, and critical disability scholars in their courses to trouble the colonial knowledges, narratives, and mentalities that reify regimes of settler-colonial power, heteronormativity, ableism, and white supremacy.

To contribute to overturning the ignorant geographical knowledges that perpetuate settler-colonial market time, Geography departments may wish to consider developing content and courses that critically disentangle the complexities of settler colonialism and white supremacy (see “Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, interview by Mariah Walsh 2017). Daigle (2019, 712-713) states that such “courses should compel [non-Indigenous] students to think about how they benefit from the structures of settler colonialism and white supremacy,” wherein “Indigenous content should perhaps be reframed as content on colonialism that centers Indigenous activism and scholarship, to activate responsibilities to Indigenous places and peoples.” Investing time and resources in field trips, field courses, and/or field schools with Indigenous

Peoples (if they so desire and see mutual benefit) may activate such responsibilities, while also generating opportunities for non-Indigenous geographers to spend time on the Land with Indigenous Peoples. Doing so can result in learning how they can support and protect the health of Indigenous Lands from the extractive and dispossessive forms of white settler colonialism (e.g., mining, oil, forestry, and other resource revenues connected to Land and place) (Harris 2004). It is worth noting that democratic decision making, departmental strategic plans, and departmental constitutions could be mechanisms for mandating the use of a department's discretionary funds for Land-based learning and faculty training initiatives. While we know these funds exist (despite the neoliberalizing of institutional budget models), we also know there is a lot of obfuscation about how much is available and how such funding is spent.

Operationalizing the calls to action, decolonizing the discipline, and reconciling Geography's relationship to Indigenous Peoples and the Land requires action and doings that transcend the confines of settler-colonial space-time geographies, to engage deep and meaningful efforts to understand, respect, and defend Indigenous knowledges and ways of being (de Leeuw and Hunt 2018). Geography departments must take time away from their status quo agendas to critically discuss, debate, reflect, and systematically implement the calls to action in (un)familiar, (un)anticipated, and (un)imagined ways that buttress the beauty and diversity of Indigenous Peoples' perspectives and knowledges. This process is ongoing, non-linear, far from straightforward, and demands administrative commitments to value and appreciate the "shifting relationality," "circularity," and "complexity" of Indigenous knowledge systems (Hunt 2014, 31); disrupting the settler-colonial market time mentality that permeates our discipline is essential.

Conclusion

Operationalizing the TRC calls to action in Geography departments at Canadian universities requires systematic and structured efforts. In this paper, we revealed the ways in which settler-colonial space-time geographies influence and enable Department heads' evasions against implementing the

calls to action at the department level. Our analysis showed that this status quo approach to time functions as a key barrier obstructing processes to enact the calls and decolonize the discipline, as settler-colonial market time perpetuates geographies of ignorance. If Geography departments do not take the time required to implement the calls to action and do the work of truth and reconciliation, they are (re)producing the structures of white settler-colonial market time that inhibit respectful, equitable, and reconciliatory Indigenous-settler futures. This paper then, in and of itself, is a *call to action*. We are calling on Geography heads across Canada, and their respective departments, to do better and take the time to engage in the ongoing work of decolonizing and reconciling the discipline's relationship to Indigenous Peoples and the Land. Let us not forget that the work of reconciliation is settler work: we must "restore what must be restored, repair what must be repaired, and return what must be returned... For that to happen, there has to be *awareness* of the past, an *acknowledgment* of the harm that has been inflicted, *atonement* for the causes, and *action* to change behavior" (TRC 2015, 6–7; emphasis added).

Acknowledgments

We are deeply grateful to those who participated in this exploratory project, without whom we could not have carried out the research. We are also grateful the constructive criticism we received from the peer reviewers, from our colleague, Dr Paul Sylvestre, and the students of both courses who supported the data collection process.

References

- Al-Saji, A. 2013. Too late: Racialized time and the closure of the past. *Insights* 6(5): 2–13.
- Awâsis, S. 2020. "Anishinaabe time": Temporalities and impact assessment in pipeline reviews. *Journal of Political Ecology* 27(1): 830–852.
- Castree, N. 2009. The spatio-temporality of capitalism. *Time and Society* 18(1): 26–61.
- Cook, A. 2018. Recognizing settler ignorance in the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation Commission. *Feminist Philosophy Quarterly* 4(4): 1–25.
- Coulthard, G. 2014. *Red skin, white masks: Beyond the colonial politics of recognition*. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press.
- Daigle, M. 2016. Awawanenitakik: The spatial politics of recognition and relational geographies of Indigenous self-determination. *The Canadian Geographer* 60(2): 259–269.

- . 2019. The spectacle of reconciliation: On (the) unsettling responsibilities to Indigenous Peoples in the academy. *EPD: Society and Space* 37(4): 703–721.
- Davis, L., C. Hiller, C. James, K. Lloyd, T. Nasca, and S. Taylor. 2017. Complicated pathways: Settler Canadians learning to re/frame themselves and their relationships with Indigenous Peoples. *Settler Colonial Studies* 7(4): 398–414.
- de Leeuw, S., and S. Hunt. 2018. Unsettling decolonizing geographies. *Geography Compass* 12(7): 1–14.
- Deloria, V. J. 2001. Power and place equal personality. In *Power and place: Indian education in America*. ed. V. J. Deloria, and D. Wildcat. Golden, CO: Fulcrum Publishing, 21–28.
- Denis, J. S. 2020. *Canada at a crossroads: Boundaries, bridges, and laissez-faire racism in Indigenous-settler relations*. Toronto, ON: University of Toronto Press.
- Edmonds, P. 2016. *Settler colonialism and (re)conciliation: Frontier violence, affective performances, and imaginative refundings*. London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Foucault, M. 1980. Two lectures. In *Power/knowledge: Selected interviews & other writings, 1972–1977*. ed. C. Gordon. New York, NY: Vintage Books, 78–108.
- Godlewska, A., J. Moore, and D. C. Bednasek. 2010. Cultivating ignorance of Aboriginal realities. *The Canadian Geographer* 54(4): 417–440.
- Godlewska, A., L. M. Schaeffli, and P. J. A. Chaput. 2013. First Nations assimilation through neoliberal educational reform. *The Canadian Geographer* 57(3): 271–279.
- Granzow, K. 2020. *Invested indifference: How violence persists in settler colonial society*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Harris, C. 2004. How did colonialism dispossess? Comments from an edge of empire. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 94(1): 165–182.
- Hickey, A. 2019. Rupturing settler time: Visual culture and geographies of Indigenous futurity. *World Art* 9(2): 163–180.
- Hunt, S. 2014. Ontologies of Indigeneity: The politics of embodying a concept. *Cultural Geographies* 21(1): 27–32.
- Jazeel, T. 2017. Mainstreaming geography's decolonial imperative. *Transactions* 42(3): 334–337.
- Kidman, J., L. MacDonald, H. Funaki, A. Ormond, P. Southon, and H. Tomlins-Jahnkne. 2021. 'Native time' in the white city: Indigenous youth temporalities in settler-colonial space. *Children's Geographies* 19(1): 24–36.
- Kobayashi, A., and L. Peake. 2000. Racism out of place: Thoughts on whiteness and an antiracist geography in the new millennium. *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 90(2): 392–403.
- Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, interview by Mariah Walsh, 2017. <https://ualberta.ca/wordpress.com/interview-with-drl-leanne-betasamosake-simpson/>
- Macias, T. 2015. 'On the footsteps of Foucault': Doing Foucauldian discourse analysis in social justice research. In *Research as resistance: Revisiting critical, Indigenous, and anti-oppressive approaches*. ed. S. Strega and L. Brown. Toronto, ON: Canadian Scholars' Press Inc, 221–242.
- Mackey, E. 2014. Unsettling expectations: (Un)certainly, settler states of feeling, law, and decolonization. *Canadian Journal of Law and Society/Revue Canadienne Droit et Société* 29(2): 235–252.
- Mahadeo, R. 2019. Why is the time always right for white and wrong for us? How racialized youth make sense of whiteness and temporal inequality. *Sociology of Race and Ethnicity* 5(2): 186–199.
- Mbembe, A. J. 2016. Decolonizing the university: New directions. *Arts & Humanities in Higher Education* 15(1): 29–45.
- Mills, C. W. 2007. White ignorance. In *Race and epistemologies of ignorance*. ed. S. Sullivan and N. Tuana. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 13–38.
- Pasternak, S. 2015. How capitalism will save colonialism: The privatization of reserve lands in Canada. *Antipode* 47(1): 179–196.
- Regan, P. 2010. *Unsettling the settler within: Indian residential schools, truth telling and reconciliation in Canada*. Vancouver, BC: UBC Press.
- Rifkin, M. 2011. Settler states of feeling: National belonging and the erasure of native American presence. In *A companion to American literary studies*, ed. C. F. Levander, and R. S. Levine. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 342–355.
- . 2017. *Beyond settler time: Temporal sovereignty and Indigenous self-determination*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
- Schaeffli, L. M., and A. Godlewska. 2014. Ignorance and historical geographies of Aboriginal exclusion: Evidence from the 2007 Bouchard-Taylor Commission on Reasonable Accommodation. *The Canadian Geographer* 58(1): 110–122.
- Simpson, L. B. ed., 2008 *Lighting the eighth fire: The liberation, resurgence, and protection of Indigenous nations*. Winnipeg, MB: Arbeiter Ring.
- Tadiar, N. X. M. 2012. Life-times in fate playing. *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 111(4): 783–802.
- Tuck, E., and W. Yang. 2012. Decolonization is not a metaphor. *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* 1(1): 1–40.
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. 2015. Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the final report of the truth and reconciliation commission of Canada. https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Executive_Summary_English_Web.pdf
- Waitt, G. 2016. Doing Foucauldian discourse analysis—Revealing social realities. In *Qualitative research methodologies in human geography*, ed. I. Hay, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 288–312.
- Wintersleep. 2019. "Beneficiary." Track 2 on In the Land Of. Dine Alone Records. Vinyl and https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4QVUIFOQe&ab_channel=Wintersleep
- Wolfe, P. 1999. *Settler colonialism*. London, UK: Bloomsbury Academic.
- . 2006. Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native. *Journal of Genocide Research* 8(4): 387–409.