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Melissa Mollen Dupuis (MMD) - I have a very clear childhood memory of seeing a family of tourists and their children drive through our community. They were looking out of their car windows as if they were at a zoo, looking at “Indians,” as if they were wild animals. This sight remained engraved in my memory, and reinforced the idea at a very young age that there was an “us” and a “them.” Remember, this was the 1990s in Quebec, a time when Indigenous presence was, as Richard Desjardins so deftly described it, that of “invisible inhabitants” on the land they had been occupying for thousands of years. It therefore took the flashpoint of the Oka Crisis (in 1990) for Indigenous issues to reappear in the media and, more importantly, to highlight the division created between two nations who had been travelling on the same river without speaking to each other for such a long time.

Reconciliation is a relatively recent term in the Canadian context. Although it emerged with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, the concept itself is also new. The term has both weaknesses and strengths. A dictionary definition describes reconciliation as the act of re-establishing good relations between adversaries who were angry with each other, as well as the subsequent state of being reconciled.

Unfortunately, in the case of reconciliation in Canada, it is true to say that the two parties never disputed nor were ever angry with each other, let alone were adversaries. What we’re talking about is more a policy of assimilation put in place to wipe out the identity, culture and language of Indigenous peoples with whom Canada had signed treaties and agreements and then decided later that this contractual relationship would become one of legal and political domination. The general population, as we discovered during the Commission hearings, was totally ignorant of these policies but the ideology was commonly shared: Indians, only had a place in Canadian society if they assimilated into the dominant culture. In this context, racist and discriminatory policies seemed justified.

Many people argue that it would help to forget the past in order to move on. But this conception of reconciliation that sacrifices collective memory in order to exonerate the past and make the process more digestible still exists today and underpins all attempts to bring about a real change in relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples. That is why some deep soul-searching is required in Canada – perhaps the word “reconciliation” was chosen because it sounds more tolerable than “contrition.”

The process of reconciliation is nonetheless important for several reasons: there is a crying need to leave behind the burden and legacy of all assimilation policies covering areas such as the destruction of the matriarchal social system, the imposition of land trusteeship, the rupture in language transmission, the residential schools and the 60s’ “scoop” when Canada placed Indigenous children with “white families” as foster or adoptive parents, thereby perpetuating the residential-school process. The energy needed to move on forces us to dump the useless weight of this ballast. This energy cannot only come from those of us who live in the most impoverished, stigmatized and at-risk communities in Canada. It must also come from those who benefited from unceded territories. The process of not only protecting our youth, women, and the knowledge of our elders, but also protecting the

water, territory and resources we depend on, cannot happen if we stay in healing mode. There's not enough time to heal all these wounds and at the same time wage the struggles that are ours.

However, an act of reconciliation can take place with the support of our communities. During the Truth and Reconciliation Commission hearings, I was amazed at the number of people who approached us to say: "I didn't know that all this was being done in my Canada, but I promise to speak about it!" The power of these allies is tremendous: they have begun to demand respect for the rights of Indigenous communities across the country and to take steps that make us visible at last.

Canadians need to be educated about the First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples. The transmission and preservation of Indigenous knowledge are increasingly urgent tasks.

Manon Barbeau (MB) - They are indeed – and Wapikoni mobile, among others, has attempted to reinforce the pride of Indigenous youth in their identity by featuring their culture and ancestral languages in their artistic works. Some 20 years ago, when I visited Quebec's North Shore and was curious and dared to enter Pessamit, a coastal Indigenous community, I discovered another world, one that was unknown to rest of humanity – and I was profoundly destabilized. The first seeds of the "reconciliation through the media arts" project that subsequently became Wapikoni, were sown at that time.

Research on coming-of-age rituals initially took me to the heart of the Rockies in Arizona to participate in a traditional ceremony. During my trip, I noticed pawnshops along the road that were selling traditional Indigenous moccasins and clothing, the relics of a disappearing ancestral culture that were being sold for next-to-nothing. I was hosted by an Apache family lived at the end of the road. Their daughter Joycinda, barely 14 and wearing a magnificent white buffalo dress covered with golden pollen, was participating in the Changing Woman ceremony in which she was being tested by some Crowndancers, frightening-looking spirits in colourful costumes who had come down from the mountains. However, the family had to carry out this impressive ritual in secret because it is still considered sorcery by the dominant society. I was overcome by a deep feeling of sadness for this people who had been forcibly acculturated by a "white" society sure of its rightness and the superiority of its values. Back then I was not then familiar with the full extent of the historical drama of the First Peoples. I was not yet aware of, nor sensitized to, the traumatic residential school era, the alarming rate of suicide in Indigenous communities, and so on. The idea of Reconciliation was not yet common currency and I would not have believed Reconciliation to be possible in those days.

A couple of years later, in September 2000, I attended a pow-wow in Wemotaci, a small Atikamekw village 115 kilometres north of La Tuque, at the invitation of Marcel Boivin, the Band Chief of the time. The long dirt road that led to Wemotaci crossed a dense, unspoiled forest, interspersed with large clear lakes. In blinding clouds of dust, we continually met logging trucks heavily loaded with wood cut from land that did not belong to the companies concerned, as well as ATVs and pickups in a hurry to reach their destinations. After the Saint-Maurice River bridge, which used to be the only access road into Wemotaci, the small community came into view along the river, starting with a small cemetery covered in

multicolored plastic flowers where too many youth were buried, brought down by dark thoughts that made them take their own lives.

That was where Wapikoni would come into being, its name taken from that of Wapikoni Awashish, a young 20-year-old girl, who was the leader of the group with whom I was going to write the *La fin du mépris* screenplay. Wapikoni Awashish had gathered together a group of around 10 youth of the same age. So, for the next two years, I took the train from Montreal to Sanmaur, the train stop without a station on the outskirts of Wemotaci. Without fail, a member of the group was waiting for me in a pickup to take me to the community. On each occasion, a bed was found for me as well as a room where we could work and write together. We developed a fictional script and the ideas poured in from all sides. Throughout the entire scriptwriting, I observed the strength of Indigenous culture, its spirituality and the rich imaginations of its young people. In my humble way and unconsciously, I had begun my own process of Reconciliation.

I loved that community. There I experienced the self-renewing effects of sweat lodges. There I hunted Canada geese and tanned skins. There I made close friends. At the same time, I also noticed that the young people were at a loss and I witnessed many suicides: I occasionally heard the roar of helicopters in the air coming to provide emergency assistance to some desperate soul; I also noticed how satellite phones were always on hand to receive any call for help. I observed an air of defeat among some of the young people – a malaise and lack of hope in the future, combined with the indifference of Quebec society towards the distress it had partly caused through the *Indian Act* and the residential schools.

The first draft of the *La fin du mépris* script was accepted by SODEC in 2002. Many of the scriptwriters were due to play a role in the future film, but an accident was to change the course of events and turn my life upside down: on May 2 of that year, a car heading towards La Tuque crashed into a badly parked logging truck along a road in the woods. Wapikoni Awashish was in that car – my young and loyal colleague who was almost like a daughter to me. I felt as if the log that smashed into her heart had struck mine as well.

After the white flowers were tossed on her grave, after the traditional funeral ritual was once again secretly performed, it was impossible for me to continue writing the script.

I created Wapikoni mobile instead and named it after her. Our traveling studios, which were co-founded with the Atikamekw Nation Council and the Youth Council of the First Nations of Quebec and Labrador, would subsequently travel to youth in Indigenous communities in order to provide them with the technological equipment for making films and recording music on themes they care about – to give them a voice, to let them be heard and to give them hope. And by the same token, counteract their fascination with death and help them understand that death is no longer a solution to suffering and that artistic creation and its inherent pleasure and worth can give them pride and joy – that what they create can connect them with the world and earn them respect and recognition – and that their films can thereby become works of Reconciliation.

This is because Wapikoni mobile is primarily a mediation project. It is designed to empower and give a voice, but also, most importantly, reveal these peoples who were invisible for far too long.

MMD - Exactly, providing audiovisual training to youth not only develops enduring technological capacity and leadership skills, but also provides opportunities to be heard outside the echo chamber that was too often ours by enabling non-Indigenous people to discover our culture and languages – not through closed car windows, but through the eyes of the young people themselves.

MB - The training teams that go out to Indigenous communities are a mixture of Indigenous and non-Indigenous members, which is another way of meeting and interacting with each other for mutual benefit. And the films the participants make become bridges towards the Other in a way that reduces isolation and the resulting distress. Developing networks is said to be the best protection against gloomy thoughts. The circulation of these films helps build networks. These emerging filmmakers often travel with their films, both within Canada and abroad. In the process, they become proud ambassadors of their culture and help combat racism and prejudice. At festivals or other public events around the world, they meet other filmmakers, both Indigenous and non-indigenous. They expand their horizons. They are no longer alone. With their films and first-person accounts, they help change how the Other looks at them and thereby contribute to reconciliation.

MMD - I feel that true reconciliation cannot occur if Canada and Canadians do not learn how to know and appreciate our cultures as a whole and not just through the few knickknacks that are available and on display in souvenir stores or exhibited at events like the Olympic Games. Being truly open to the Other and listening to them, that's a precious gift and the first step towards genuine reconciliation. For that to happen, we need to hurry up and record our elders, film our cultures, and formulate laws that protect our culture as a whole from disappearing.

MB - We need to recognize that the Reconciliation Commission played a major role in preserving memory by compiling moving testimony from residential school survivors from all parts of Canada. In Quebec, the young Wapikoni filmmakers use their cameras to record these testimonies. In fact, the Commission officially acknowledged our organization's contribution in its report. The abuse that Indigenous children suffered became increasingly better-known. Young people began to organize across the country. And Melissa Mollen Dupuis, a co-founder of Idle No More Quebec became Wapikoni President.

MMD - I discovered Wapikoni mobile when I was a young job-seeker and was told that it was an Indigenous organization. I was happy to work in my culture and especially in a culturally-safe environment. The discovery of Wapikoni changed my life. I found a network of artists, filmmakers and musicians from every background who came to lend a hand to youth in both urban and remote communities – to give young people an opportunity to express themselves about the things they care about through a medium that was a natural successor to our oral modes of transmission: video.

I not only made films on topics that are dear to me, I also reached an audience that I would never have reached otherwise. Helping people understand both the significance and the vulnerability of our cultures had never been so attainable.

MB - And the work goes on. Filmmakers like Kevin Papatie, Marie-Pier Ottawa, Elisa Moar, Réal Junior Leblanc, Emilo Wawatie, Ray Caplin, Heather Condo and Stephen Jerome have crisscrossed the world, proudly expressing their culture. Wapikoni participants have

studied at the Gobelins school of visual communication and arts in Paris, the University of Quebec and Concordia University. Jani Bellefleur became the first Indigenous graduate of the extremely selective INIS (*Institut national de l'image et du son*). Indigenous filmmakers from Bolivia, Peru, Panama and Chile have also made their mark and embarked on careers thanks to the workshops they received from Wapikoni in collaboration with various national and international partners.

In 2014, Wapikoni initiated the International Network for Aboriginal Audio-Visual Creation (INAAC), the world's first international network of Indigenous audiovisual artists, which now consists of 50 members from 16 countries. This unique network enables First Nations creators to express themselves on common issues and make their voices heard throughout the world. A first feature-film coproduction with these members of "Le Cercle des nations" was subsequently made and then screened at the close of the Montreal First Peoples Festival in 2015. A second film is in production.

Apart from their role as art and as means of free expression, video and music are more and more becoming powerful tools for the social transformation of First Nations – an essential tool for expression so that justice is done and Reconciliation does not simply become wishful thinking. A young generation that shares this hope and is ready to strive for self-determination and the recognition of First Peoples' rights is now emerging. This generation works inclusively, alongside all Indigenous nations combined, to create a fairer society TOGETHER, a society in which environmental and human values are to the fore. Wapikoni hopes that it has humbly contributed towards Reconciliation in Action: Reconcili-ACTION.

MMD - Some people will wonder why they should extend their hands towards reconciliation when everything would seem to justify that we continue to be incredibly angry against the nation that did its best to make us disappear? The reason is that our lives have been woven together, despite the wounds. We now need to patch up the social fabric because it can no longer continue to be ripped apart by assimilation policies if Canada truly and sincerely believes in its ideals of democracy and respect for human rights.

Now we will no longer be seen as little creatures in a zoo. Our values and our culture can circulate and be welcomed and celebrated with all the respect they deserve.

MB - The road towards true reconciliation might not be so long now. Genuine, deep and lasting alliances around common issues will be created between our peoples in a spirit of trust, equality and harmony. I dare to hope that Wapikoni will make its contribution.

MMD - A particularly important aspect that has emerged in the recent years of community mobilization is the urgent need to educate the general public; this is a process that should also include representatives of government and public services. The gulf that persists between our two populations still prevents Indigenous communities from enjoying the quality of life that Canadians in general enjoy without having to reject their identity as independent and distinct Indigenous peoples.

If we want to bridge this gulf, it is essential for Canadians to have access to Indigenous culture and for Indigenous communities to preserve their languages and cultures.

MB - In 2016, Wapikoni offered its methodology and workshops to other vulnerable populations – in refugee camps, for example. Films were made that revealed the soul of other peoples and highlighted other rich, yet similarly endangered cultures. In 2017, Wapikoni was officially recognized as an “NGO, official UNESCO partner.” This recognition will enable us to expand and develop our connections around the world. The work of the past 15 years has been carried out in a spirit of “connecting with the Other” – a theme that connects human to human in order to protect the most vulnerable among us, and foster resilience by giving them a voice and enabling them to be heard – in short, by making them “visible.”

Wapikoni itself needs a support network to ensure its viability and thereby the future of those it serves. The organization needs partners to provide it with funding that has so far never been long-term, as well as partners for creation, dissemination, mediation and offering thoughtful ideas.

2019 will be the International Year of Indigenous Languages. For Wapikoni, it will be an opportunity to compile Indigenous works and filmmakers from many different settings in order to mesh dreams and realities into a magnificent Common Action for the respect, dignity, and empowerment of Canada’s First Peoples – for reconciliation and peace between all peoples and every human being as the citizens of a common planet.

All help and collaboration in this regard are totally welcome.

MMD - I hope that this dream of reconciliation between our peoples – of valuing and including the cultural contributions of First Peoples – will be achieved. It is essential that this wish for genuine knowledge of the Other be realized so that we can talk about the future. In fact, how can reconciliation occur when there is total ignorance about the Other?