Standing with Sol: The Spirit and Intent of Action Anthropology

Joshua J. Smith   *Western University*

Abstract: This paper reflects on *Finding a Place to Stand* by Michael Asch (2001) in drawing out the political philosophy of Sol Tax's action anthropology with emphasis on Asch's "self-relational other," as a means to understand how Canadian anthropologists might eschew the distant position of neutrality and thus, "find a place to stand" within the ongoing struggle for self-determination between Indigenous peoples and Canada. I argue that Tax's action anthropology is a viable foundation for a relevant anthropology, if not an urgent one, in fostering just relations in Canadian anthropology today. This, in turn, acutely shows how action anthropology is philosophically, politically and historically divergent from other engaged methodologies, such as applied and collaborative anthropologies.

Keywords: action anthropology, Sol Tax, decolonization, methods, First Nations, Canada

Résumé : Cet article réfère à *Finding a Place to Stand* de Michael Asch (2001) et à la philosophie politique de l'anthropologie appliquée de Sol Tax, soulignant le concept de « l'autre auto-relationnel » de Asch, dans l'optique de comprendre comment les anthropologues canadiens pourraient éviter la position distante de neutralité et ainsi « trouver un endroit où se tenir debout » au sein de la lutte constante pour l'autodétermination entre Peuples autochtones et Canada. Je soutiens que l'anthropologie appliquée de Tax est une voie viable et pertinente, sinon urgente, pour promouvoir des relations justes dans l'anthropologie canadienne d'aujourd'hui. De même, il s'agira de démontrer comment l'anthropologie appliquée est philosophiquement, politiquement et historiquement différente d'autres méthodologies engagées, telle que l'anthropologie appliquée collaborative.

Mots-clés : anthropologie appliquée, Sol Tax, décolonisation, méthodes, Premières Nations, Canada

Introduction

> Between John Collier and the Indian move for self-determination, 1969, you look around and what do you find? You find Sol Tax liberating the whole discipline. Liberating them from the idea that they have to be objective scientists therefore can never be advocates. And you find the tremendous change, so that by the early 1960s, Indians, when they advocate, find that there's a good many scholars assisting them and so in a transitional motivation he changed anthropology and he changed Indians without any of us noticing it.
>
> Vine Deloria Jr., Eulogy at Sol Tax's Memorial Service, January 1989

The above quote is a poignant statement that captures the essence of Sol Tax and his legacy. His work and commitment to reshape anthropology and constantly re-examine relations between Indigenous peoples and settler peoples was an early reflexive approach that marked a clear shift from traditional ethnographic approaches, to an analysis and critique of state bureaucracy and settler relations with Indigenous peoples. In doing so, Tax found "a place to stand" and, with students, colleagues and friends, changed anthropology, as Vine says, without any of us noticing it.

Sol Tax passed away in 1995. Michael Asch's "Indigenous Self-Determination and Applied Anthropology in Canada: Finding a Place to Stand," appeared in 2001, in the pages of *Anthropologica*. That paper demonstrates the congruence of ideas between Asch and Tax in providing a dialogue that accomplishes three correlative tasks. Part one of this article approaches Tax's political thought to better understand what is referred to here as "the spirit and intent" of Tax's action anthropology in overcoming the fundamental challenge of settler and Indigenous relations. The impediment to mutual understandings, Tax found, lies with the problem of settler governance and the politics of history and storytelling, which is taken up here in part two. Tax worked in the context of the post–World War II United States. Yet, the shift to thinking through action anthropology today,

especially in keeping with Asch's notion of "finding a place to stand," is instructive for a new generation of anthropologists in Canada. Part three speaks to the relevance of action anthropology and its currency in accomplishing the challenging goal of decolonization in the contemporary political climate of settler–Indigenous relations vis-à-vis an action anthropology approach and Indigenous political and legal thought. There is a rich conversation and an opening for a contemporary action anthropology approach that is not new in any sense but that continues to be a salient method for working on problems of colonialism within Canada in this present moment: these include researching treaty relations, First Nations legislations, Canadian "Aboriginal policy" and the Canadian legal regime.

One: Between Applied and Collaborative Anthropologies

Action anthropology programs began earnestly in 1948 with the start of the Fox Project where Sol Tax and several of his graduate students worked with the Meskwaki People near Tama, Iowa. This, in turn, lead to several other action anthropology projects over the next 30 years.[1]

Many of Tax's political engagements and projects share two common principles in working toward the larger aim of decolonization: the principles of self-government and non-assimilation, which are outlined in my previous works (see Smith 2010; 2012). Altogether, this dynamic comprises what is the "spirit and intent" of action anthropology, which refers also to the relational ethic aptly articulated by Michael Asch as "the self and relational other" (Asch 2001).

Finding expression of such a relationship in both indigenous political philosophy, such as, the treaty relationship and "Western" or European political philosophy, such as Martin Buber's notion of the I—Thou relationship, Asch provides a salient link that overcomes the impediments of imagining culture as a barrier to self-determination, dialogue and justice, to be able to find a place to stand:

> The fact that concepts of political relationship framed through I—it or I—Thou exists in both Indigenous and Western cultures convinces me that there is no cultural divide that inevitably separates our voices. We need not speak past each other. We can have a conversation. We can make decisions as to which path to take. And I can express my choice with my own voice. [Asch 2001:206]

Hence, this article is about the relational theory of action anthropology, which helps distinguish it from other forms of engaged anthropologies. While action anthropology was a response to the growing field of post–World War II applied anthropology, it was never intended to be a method of applied anthropology. Explicitly, action anthropology sought a break from applied anthropology as a response to the post-war modernization theory of development, which created a demand for applied work that was, in turn, spurned by evolutionary theories (see Hancock 2011; Pinkoski 2008; Steward 1955; Trencher 2002; White 1949). In the context of post-war era of U.S. Indian policy, applied anthropology placed Indigenous peoples as temporary, assimilating and vanishing.

The Society for Applied Anthropology was established in 1941, several years before action anthropology was conceptualized and implemented. In the introduction to the unpublished *Action Anthropology Reader* (STP 1957, hereafter AAR), Sol Tax noted his departure from applied anthropology in this way:

> I often think therefore that it is better for emphasis and clarity to make a clean break by using the term action anthropology to denominate not simply a kind of applied anthropology but to label a competing philosophy and method by which the anthropologist operates in community development programs. [AAR:15]

The distinction is largely to do with the locus of power, that is, acknowledging and divesting oneself of it, so as to not have power over others and to be better able to avoid denying or impeding peoples' or persons' abilities to determine their own destinies. Tax did not believe such a position or approach was achievable in applied anthropology for several reasons, all of which have to do with the political and relational dynamics of power. First, "it is not clear that, from the usual position of applied anthropologists, hired as expert advisors to administrators with power, it is possible to reject power over the community" because, when "the anthropologist works for an administrator, since his obligation ... is to satisfy not only the ends of the community but also the ends of an administration which characteristically has its own problems" (AAR:8). Second,

> it is difficult to avoid having undue influence over the people. In order to reject power we must actually work. We find it necessary actively to convince the people that we have no goals of our own other than a desire to help them clarify, compromise, and achieve their own goals. That is still more difficult, if not impossible, if the anthropologist is placed structurally in a position of power. [AAR:8]

These challenges, political and relational, led Tax to conclude that "there is an essential difference between action and a few applied projects on the one hand and most applied projects on the other" (AAR:3). This statement characterizes the relationship between action anthropology and collaborative research as well; sometimes collaborative anthropology is action anthropology but action anthropology is not usually collaborative anthropology. Moreover, Tax did not underestimate the difficulties in taking this path:

> Need I repeat that, even under ideal circumstances where the anthropologist operates unconnected with administration and its power, it is exceedingly difficult *not* to exercise undue influence ... [because the anthropologist] has power whether he wants it or not; to succeed in stripping himself of this power takes time, patience, luck and a genuine desire to do so ... Insofar as we have succeeded, a major reason is that we are a group; a lone man could not, very probably, hold himself in adequate check. [AAR:12]

Action anthropology, when understood in these terms, is neither a kind of applied nor collaborative anthropology. But Tax remained relational and open by noting that it may not be different from *all* projects of applied anthropology. He leaves room for the exceptional or subversive work of some applied or collaborative anthropologists who might be working in a politically relational way as he has described. Thus, the relationship between action and applied anthropology, as a problem for the history of anthropology, is parallel to the distinction I make between action anthropology and collaborative anthropology in that, their shared genealogies are to a great extent invisible—there is both continuity and revolution (Darnell 2001).

The historiographic methodology advocated here is one possible form of resistance, among other things, to a universalizing construction of history that occurs in step with the scientistic and positivistic approach to epistemology within the project of colonialism. Such a project is dubiously at odds with a reflexively self-conscious approach grounded in practices that begin with the understanding that anthropology, as an intellectual, institutional and economical enterprise, is embedded in relations of power. Moreover, the history of anthropology is fundamentally a political project sustained by widely accepted methodological and pedagogical disciplinary practices, which are themselves historical (re)constructions, as well as colonial devices (technologies) of settler states; precisely what, perhaps inadvertently, compelled Tax to shift anthropology accordingly.

In 1952, my attention turned to anthropology as it had developed in the rest of the world; since then problems of "world anthropology" became central to my interest. It was no coincidence that, beginning in 1948, I was also in a new approach to ways in which anthropologists could help in the process of decolonization. [Notes on Action Anthropology, STP n.d. 282/2]

Two: The Spirit and Intent of Action Anthropology

In the 1976 meeting of the American Anthropological Association, Sol Tax participated in the panel "American Indians and Anthropologists: of Ethics and Actions." On route to the meetings, Tax jotted down several thoughts on his airline boarding pass:

> Restoration of the status of all surviving Indians, nations, bands and tribes. Let us restore their power to make treaties with the Federal government. Treaties mean that two parties have something each to give the other. Undo the illegalities, a thousand wrongs don't make a right. Let Restoration be the policy as we enter a third 100 years. [STP 1976 179/9]

Tax's thoughts on treaties, on justice and the role of anthropology are representative of what I am referring to as the "spirit and intent" of action anthropology. These are the relational aspects of action anthropology, which remain unnoticed, undocumented and, in some cases, written out of the discipline's history. In many ways, Tax's coining of the phrase "action anthropology" is a misnomer, as it provides the impression that it is merely about pure activism without thought, theory or philosophical principles. This has led to misunderstandings about the anti-colonial politics of action anthropology vis-à-vis the totality of anthropological theories, methods and their histories. Action anthropology stands as both an explicit departure from applied anthropology (since the 1940s) and from the current trends in collaborative anthropologies. That is, it was not, nor is it, a sub-category but, rather, an altogether different path for anthropology, one that sustains a specific and uncompromising politic centred on a value of self-determination through "mutual obligation" (see Asch 2014:73–99), as opposed to partnerships premised on principles of "equality of standing" (37–38, 102). This also constitutes the spirit and intent of action anthropology.

This spirit and intent stems from Tax's interpersonal politics and pedagogy, informed and inspired by his relationship to the Indigenous peoples with whom he worked, especially the Meskwaki People near Tama,

Iowa. Indeed, Tax tells his story in his unpublished memoir, "Last on the Warpath: How an Anthropologist Learned from the American Indians" (1968). Yet, the relational politics of action anthropology also stem from Tax's intellectual genealogy and his work on social organization.

Supervised by Radcliffe-Brown, Tax's doctoral research on Meskwaki social organization inspired him to attempt to convey an egoless kinship system. Arguably, Tax's egoless kinship diagram stands as a symbolic reference point for the emergence of the theoretical and political foundation of action anthropology. The completion of his doctoral work in 1935 coincides with Radcliffe-Brown's 1935 article "Patrilineal and Matrilineal Succession." Within this article, first published in the *Iowa Law Review*, is "a strong—but obliquely stated—critique of the ideological and legal principles fundamental to Australia's justification of the legitimacy of its sovereignty" (Asch 2009:156). Taken together with other evidence, this text "is not only as a contribution to anthropological theory, but also as a political statement against colonial rule" (Asch 2009:157). Accordingly, I suggest Tax's endeavours to devise a way of conceptualizing Meskwaki social organization was intended to begin to think about social organization without relying on the atomic individual as a reference point to relations but to articulate the relations in keeping within Meskwaki's own relational ontology, as Tax tried to understand it. This work was interrupted and he spent over a decade working in Guatemala and Mexico until the end of World War II, before returning and, to put it in Vine Deloria Jr.'s terms, changed anthropology without any of us noticing it.

Yet, the lessons of relationality and political systems, as both Radcliffe-Brown and Meskwaki ontology challenged him, provided a substantially fertile ground for action anthropology. Kinship studies show the myriad possibilities of political organization, as well as the vital role kinship plays in understanding Indigenous law and political philosophies today, in terms of Indigenous relations, rights, jurisdictions and sovereignties (see Craft 2013; Hill 2013; Stark 2013). To a great extent, kinship is foundational to the possibility of the *idea* of action anthropology or, as Wharhaftig (1979) states, Tax set out to "understand how to comprehend the core of meanings that unites a people and determines [the people's] participation in larger political entities" (258).

There are numerous action anthropology projects a scholar might turn to, and I will mention some, but what this paper captures is best extracted from Tax's unpublished notes and memoirs beginning with the AAR.

Drafted sometime in the late 1950s, it provides an early perspective on the political conceptualization of action anthropology with its value of "self-determination" that, according to Tax:

> means simultaneously two things. It is a check on what we will do and what we will not do in the field. In that sense, its meaning is that we cause ourselves to be permissive in our dealings with the Indians. The logical extreme is the position that, where the group studied faces a choice point, *their decision is by definition the good decision.* [AAR:5–6, emphasis added]

Moreover, action anthropologists operated on the grounds that:

> self-determination by a human group is not a thing that is ever achieved ... It is not a goal that can be "reached" in some definite sense—not even by a tribe in isolation, leave alone a group in the modern one-world. Rather, it is a way of valuing one state affairs relative to another in two groups or in one group at different times. But even relatively, self-determination is difficult to see or measure ... [yet] If a human group is not self-determining in some large measure, *it is recognized by common sense and by solid science to be sick.* [AAR:6–7, emphasis added]

Maintaining the "value position" of self-determination thus, "requires the *absolute rejection of a position of power over* the people and the community" (AAR:8, emphasis added). This is the beginning of the theory of action anthropology, as the Reader attempts to clarify it, without the benefit of contemporary political philosophy and discourses on sovereignty, power and colonialism and, most relevantly, without Foucault's concept of governmentality, which is a corollary to Noble's notion of coloniality.[2] "Coloniality" is a crucial concept employed here to speak of the relations of power in the context of understanding how colonialism operates between the various relations as constructions and tools, interchangeable through the various and complex agencies of polities, and the liberal democratic practices of coloniality. This is particularly relevant to the co-operative understanding of the liberal-colonial logic that underscores contemporary trends toward "collaborative research" and the historical break from other engaged forms of anthropology, especially where anthropology and law intersect.

Chapter two of the Reader is broken into several sub-sections, in the first, titled "Pre-emption by Government and the 'Indian Burden,'" Tax begins to formulate the problem in terms of what is also captured by coloniality:

the historical fact that government pre-empts the administration of services vital to the Indian community; that pre-emption has caused serious political disorganization and from the visible effects of those disorganizations the physical presence of white administrators, it appears to whites that the Indians are a burden. [AAR:40]

Significantly, the implication here is also to assert that settlers are *not* culturally predisposed to "see" Indigenous peoples as vanishing but this notion is reinforced via coloniality and underscored in the second section of chapter two titled "The 'Temporary Indians'":

> The general political climate—in respect to economy of government, the welfare state, individual initiative, together with Indian policies per se—exerts much effect on the way white Tama county citizens perceive the "fact" of Indian impermanence and how they act on that fact. [AAR:41]

While the state sees and reinforces Tama citizens' perceptions of the Meskwaki People as temporary and vanishing, the Meskwaki "resent and resist" such perceptions "as they feel tangibly the objective fact that they are a historic political community which has persisted without interruption from some remote beginning, often thought of as Creation" (AAR:22). The third section, "Mesquakie Values and Resistance to Change," emphasizes the resistance to termination, because

> the present arrangement implies to them an earlier mutual agreement, recognition by the U.S. that the Meskwaki are a sovereign historic community and because the implication to them of the U.S. breaking the agreement unilaterally is that, in the eyes of government officials, the tribe is no longer a community. On the other hand, other kinds of social change constantly occur and, indeed, is sought by the Indians. [AAR:43]

In short, despite the overwhelming dissemination in the 1950s of scientistic theories lending themselves to evolutionary paradigms that put peoples and their cultures on a hierarchical teleos of evolutionary progress, action anthropology begins with the fact that, in their example, the Meskwaki are agents of their own cultural, political and social destinies even as they are forced to contend with the coloniality (see Noble, this issue) and governmentality of the state. The problem then, is not how will anthropology contribute to the study of culture change or assist in navigating inevitable change. The question is how anthropology might situate itself, given the value of self-determination and the relational dynamics of In-

digenous peoples and settlers trying to co-exist together within the culture of the state.

It is at this point that the Reader makes a significant point about history and how, "against this backdrop ... both the Meskwaki and their settler neighbors in Tama view current affairs against the backdrop, largely implicit, of their sense of history; they see the same history differently" (AAR:43–44). The significant point here is that it is, in fact, the *same* history but there appears to be two views of that shared history that are held apart, largely due to the problem of coloniality and the state.

The settler version, the Reader explains, views "the Meskwaki as another example of the general history of the Indians, with their uniqueness being only in that they are nearby" (AAR:41). In contrast, the Meskwaki understand their history as stemming from the meeting of "two groups of people, the Meskwaki and the Americans, both political equals and both responsible to the same supernatural power" (AAR:44). The Reader provides, first, a brief version of the oral history version:

> One Indian tells us: "The old men say that, long ago, when the white men came here, and they agreed, with the Indians, to be allowed to use this continent, they made themselves sort of a blood brotherhood and they say that when the Indians ask for their rights and what's coming to them and live up to their promises, something would happen to them ... These white men would die." [AAR:45]

The interpretation of this history, which has to do with the "fact that there were promises, and that they are not being kept, holds deep significance. According to this statement, if the white men do not keep their promises, supernatural repercussions will follow. Each party must hold to his share of the supernaturally sanctioned agreement" (AAR:45). But, the Reader points out, "white men" find this explanation "vague" (AAR:45).

The extent to which each of the two versions differ, is overcome by looking at what the Reader refers to as "the documentary record of Meskwaki history" and how it "fills in certain details not revealed by the first two versions" (ARR:46). Noting major historical interactions between settlers and Meskwaki and other Indigenous nations, such as the Treaty of 1804, the War of 1812 and the Black Hawk War of 1832, the Reader summarizes some of the documentary history and concludes that, "by studying the documentary record we are able to see *the meaningful distortions* in the first two accounts" (AAR:46–47; emphasis added). On the one hand, settlers' interpretations of Meskwaki history marginalize the "present power position of the tribe" and

deem "Indians as temporary, regardless of the long history of contact with whites" (ARR:47). On the other hand, Meskwaki "feel they have access to power that, from a secular point of view, they do not have" (ARR:47). In contrast to the settlers, the Meskwaki "see no real end to their existence as a tribe, although most have some vague fears about the future of Meskwaki culture. Amoral vs. Sacred power; they respectively guarantee tribal disappearance and permanence" (AAR:47). In other words, there are two very different perceptions of the same history of relations between two peoples but they are not as incommensurable as they seem.

The state apparatus, through policy and entities such as the Bureau of Indian Affairs, mediates relations in such a way that, "the circular system of causation has been rejoined. The [Meskwaki's] variety or resistance to change reinforces the anxious perception of Tama County white men of the intolerable "fact" of lazy persons being cared for by the government" (AAR:51–52). The problem or, rather, the solution, is within understanding the mediating culture of the state, that is, the project of colonialism, and how we (i.e., settlers and anthropologists) are situated within the same historical relations and what we might do about it. Tax said as much on his boarding pass in 1977, when he called for undoing the illegalities and returning to the treaty relationship or "Restoration" as he put it.

The central thesis of action anthropology as theory focuses on the relationship between the Meskwaki community and the Tama community and their perceptions of each other. Finding two seemingly different perceptions of a shared history, the Reader concludes that these two stories are different, not because they represent two different cultural worlds or two different histories but, rather, that they are unable to relate to each other as two political and self-determining peoples (or polities) due to the role of the state, especially the Bureau of Indian Affairs and individuals (labelled "dickerers"), who reinforce the view that Indigenous peoples will, inevitably, assimilate. Alternatively, Tax directed action anthropology toward relationships and the politics of storytelling by re-situating himself and settler descendants within U.S. history by retelling it in terms of ongoing obligations and the move toward rectifying the situation:

> Had they [Indigenous peoples] followed the "inevitable" path to disappearance (which Europeans convinced themselves was prescribed by history and justified their occupation of the continent), this story would still have been worth the poignant reading. But we must read it not only because the Indians are still here and growing in numbers and in identification

with their tribal forebears, but also because it is we—200 million non-Indian Americans in the 1970s—who are behaving still as our forebears did, still taking from them the driblets of land they have left and living by the same rationalizations. But what may have seemed, then, to be a necessary evil is now a series of unmitigated unnecessary evils which rise in part from the continued avarice of a few and, in larger part, from the psychological need to hide now the enormity of our earlier sin. By no stretch of the imagination is it now economically or politically necessary to deny to Indians what they need and ask for. [Tax 1972:xxii]

Action Anthropology and Self-Determination in Canada Today

The stories anthropologists write (e.g., textbooks) and tell (e.g., in courtrooms) have power and agency; in turn, these both enact upon the world we live in. The history of anthropology outlined and advocated for in terms of providing a "cultural analytic" (S. K. Asch 2009) that emphasizes our relations together with an analysis of imperialism and colonialism, sustains the potential for decolonization as follows. This analytic first begins with the realities of colonialism and imperialism as formations of power relations, which continue to structure our current relations. Second, this approach, challenges us to know our traditions and where we come from, and to eschew the illusion of scientistic objectivity. That is, to locate ourselves within our own history and research, ontologically, existentially, epistemologically, methodologically, and to "find a place to stand" (Asch 2001).

How this fits the context of First Nations in Canada is a compelling example of the utility of a history of anthropology to the process of decolonization by overcoming the limitations anthropologists have imposed invariably on ourselves and the polities we reach through our engagements. Overcoming this requires understanding where anthropology is often situated as a technology of coloniality vis-à-vis other technologies, such as the "law"; therein lies a primary utility of a history of anthropology as it pertains to the "the settler problem" and the "settler question in Canada" (Smith 2011).

Approaching the answer to the questions of utility and the role of non-Indigenous peoples requires a shift in perspectives in understanding ourselves as "storied communities" vis-à-vis the many interrelated subjects of Indigenous rights, self-government, sovereignty and Chief Justice Antonio Lamer's assertion that, "let us face it, we are all here to stay" (*Delgamuukw v. British Columbia*, [1997] 3 S.C.R. 1010 at para. 186).

Johnny Mack asks, "How would taking stories seriously transform what goes on in treaty negotiations?" He provides two responses. The first is "settler pack up," whereby settlers give back what they have taken: "If settlers took their story seriously, it seems that they would be required to confront the inherent injustice in their claim of any rights or authority over Indigenous people and to their unconquered and unceded territory" (Mack 2011:287). His other response, labelled "let us face it," stems from Justice Lamer's statement and Mack's response that, "presuming the constraints of our existing political context—a context in which the settler party is unwilling or unable to meaningfully confront the thievery inherent in its story—what would we as Nuu-chah-nulth do differently if we took our stories seriously?" (Mack 2011:289).

Asch and Tax, each in his own way, tied story to a relational politics as a foundation of their anthropologies. Responding to the question, "If this is your land, where are your stories?" (Chamberlain 2010), Asch answers by noting that Canada's position is that jurisdiction belongs to settlers, which is not in keeping with, say, the Gitxsan point of view that settlers are chapter 15 of *their* story (Chamberlain 2010). The story Asch tells is encapsulated within one brief excerpt from the ruling in the judgment referred to as *Sparrow* authored by Chief Justice Lamer and Justice La Forest. He relies on this sole judgement "because, after five First Ministers Conferences and two referendums, Canada left that story untold and the Supreme Court finally stepped in to tell it" (Asch 2011:30):

> It is worth recalling that while British policy towards the native population was based on respect for their right to occupy their traditional lands, a proposition to which the Royal Proclamation of 1763 bears witness, there was from the outset never any doubt that sovereignty and legislative power, and indeed the underlying title, to such lands vested in the Crown. [Asch 2011:30–31; legal citation is *R v. Sparrow* [1990] 1 S.C.R. 1075 at 1103]

It begins with who lived here before settlers. It then tells us that, despite this fact, sovereignty, legislative power and underlying title to these lands are vested in the Crown. Thus, Indigenous peoples did not occupy these lands. Therefore, chapter one can begin with our arrival! It is a "bizarre" story as "it evokes an imaginary world occupied before our arrival by mythological creatures ... who were not yet sufficiently advanced to have constituted political society" (Asch 2001:32). Yet, sticking to it "is perhaps the cruelest cut of all" (Asch 2011:32).

Why do we tell such a racist and ethnocentric story? The answer is in understanding how Eurocentric thought locates Indigenous peoples in a universal history and the evolution of this kind of thinking. Asch suggests we can learn these stories so we can become part of this land by accepting "that we are like younger siblings and that therefore we can learn our place only by listening to our Elders. To do this necessitates opening chapter 15 and taking responsibility for the consequences of what happened with our arrival" (Asch 2011:37).

Leanne Simpson (2011) explains that "storytelling then becomes a lens through which we can envision our way out of cognitive imperialism, where we can create models and mirrors where none existed and where we can experience the spaces of freedom and justice" (33). After all, politics are often the stories we tell about ourselves that determine the consequences of how we live well (or not) with each other. As Patricia Tuitt (2011) has observed, "No sovereign entity exists without an accompanying set of narratives surrounding its emergence. It's through stories of settlement, conquest, exploration and discovery that distinctive nations, peoples and communities are constructed" (229). Somewhere, between the idea of sovereignty needing narratives and the assertion that legal sovereignty, connected to an original tale cannot be subjugated or controlled, lies a potential answer to the colonial impasse and settler responsibility.

Just as Alfred (1999) challenges Indigenous peoples to know their traditions, Asch and Tax, through a relational anthropology, challenge settlers to know ourselves by knowing our stories as a means to decolonize and live with the peoples on whose lands we find ourselves today. In this way, a more enriching understanding of each other and our shared, mutual politics of how to co-exist is within reach. Moreover, this would challenge colonial mentalities and the justifications for paternalistic attitudes toward Indigenous polities; the key point in Sol Tax's seminal position piece on colonialism, "The Freedom to Make Mistakes":

> This paper addressed a problem that arises when one person or group is in authority over another and has the power to decide what the other one should do *for his own good.* The main concern is with communities who are under some authority, like colonies under the rule of benevolent powers, which remain in power to help the colonials prepare themselves for independence. I think especially of American Indian communities who are under the Indian Service, which behaves in a notoriously paternalistic way. [Tax 1956:173]

"The Freedom to Make Mistakes" points to the paternalistic logic of U.S. Indian administration, that is, the same logic rooted in the ludicrous mythology of assimilation. Tax elaborates on the colonial logic, which he exposes as a perfectly illogical and ineffective way to foster relationships with peoples adept at governing their selves (for an example of bureaucratic paternalism in the context of Canadian Indian policy; see Weaver 1980). In this piece, Tax exposes the Indian administration's absurd tautology that, left to their own powers of decision-making, Indigenous peoples will make mistakes because they will not assimilate. In other words, the political agency of Indigenous peoples does not fit with Indian policy; thus, whatever they decide will, from the state's point of view, be a "mistake." Tax ends his exposition with a dire warning to the colonial machinations of the state bureaucracy: "And we are now in an era when, in many parts of the world, colonies which are not given the freedom to make their own mistakes, will take that freedom" (Tax 1956:177; see Smith 2012).

Similarly, Sally Weaver's (1976, 1980, 1985, 1986a, 1986b, 1993) approach to Canadian Indian policy is in keeping with Tax (Hancock 2013). Much in the spirit of action anthropology, Weaver approaches the difficult questions of Indian government by seeing "the definition and development of Indian government as a job to be done by Indian people" for two reasons: first, "the federal government would put their own construction on the concept of Indian government" and, second, "it is imperative that Indian leadership explicitly address the differences they perceive between what they are promoting as Indian government and Quebec's demands for 'sovereignty-association'" (Weaver 1984:65–66). Moreover, Weaver's analysis of anthropology and government is the exemplary example of the importance of a history of anthropology to Indigenous governance in the colonial era. She links the need for anthropologists to "study the political and bureaucratic cultures of governments by discovering how the work of anthropologists has been used by governments in the past, a long-neglected aspect of applied anthropology" (Weaver 1993:75). Her methodological recommendations, crudely paraphrased, are ignored at our peril: there is no "homogenous governmental perspective of anthropologist's work"; we need to prepare/anticipate rapid changes in government to remain relevant; we need to understand how one policy change is affected by other changes elsewhere; we need to seriously strive to predict implications of our involvements; and, we "must rationalize our approach against the dominant ideology and policy thinking of the day" (Weaver 1993:90–92).

In this sense, action anthropology is premised on a notion Asch has framed as "finding a place to stand" with regard to power and justice (Asch 2001), as well as the parallel process of decolonization. The key is epistemology as the primary focus of action anthropology (Polgar 1979:414). Especially in gaining an intimate knowledge of *how* we come to live on these lands, as well as *what* our relationship is to the peoples on whose lands we now live, including the stories we invent to console ourselves of our past or to deny our contemporary roles in colonial domination (Asch 2002 2011; Chamberlin 20010). This relational anthropology requires more of us than the current hegemonic positions/policies of "recognition," "reconciliation" and, too often, their methodological corollary, "collaboration."

Kiera Ladner analyzes Indigenous governance and comes to the increasingly urgent conclusion that, Indian Act governments are not "true" governments and that it is possible for Indigenous peoples to reconcile their chosen governments with the Canadian Constitution. Ladner provides several examples of Indigenous governments and their constitutions (e.g., The Blackfoot Confederacy or the Haudenosaunee Great Law of Peace). Ladner's argument has a great deal of traction with John Borrow's (2002, 2010) work. There is a strong current of Indigenous law taking place with the goal of reconciling Indigenous law with the Canadian Constitution. This is mainly possible due to the now widely accepted notion (at least within this school of thought) that,

> the spirit and intent as well of the texts of the treaties are testament to this and to the corresponding promises made by colonial nations to this effect, history tells a *story* of broken promises. In situations where no treaties were negotiated, Indigenous constitutions were quite often recognized, affirmed and protected by the terms of the original relationship between Indigenous nations and the newcomers. [Ladner 2006:5 emphasis added; also Ladner 2009]

On the subject of Indigenous law and governance, Henderson provides a thorough and succinct overview in *First Nations Jurisprudence and Aboriginal Rights* (2006). In "displacing the context of colonialism," he astutely reminds us that, "by negating First Nations' rights protected by imperial law and the common law, colonial governments negated the rule of law itself for their self-interest" (8). He traces and dissects how this was accomplished through British positivism, as a "'scientific' expository jurisprudence of the existing legal customs":

Essentially, positivist jurisprudence sought to combine anthropological Eurocentric insight with taxonomic precision: each society was to be studied, its degree of civilization ascertained, and its legal status accordingly allocated. [Henderson 2006:12]

As with Henderson, many legal scholars have outlined the ongoing issues with attempts by settler courts (often racist and bigoted) to assess and utilize Indigenous law to determine Indigenous rights, usually where land and resources are concerned (e.g., see Asch 1992, 2002; McNeil 2010; Russell 2005). Yet, problems persist, mainly because Canadian governments, educational institutions and the courts continue to function with an assimilative agenda: "The Court is maintaining a steady colonial course from which the Court does not show any signs of deviating, and to which the Court is unquestionably committed in a principled manner" (Christie 2005:19). This is true of the current assimilation paradigm commonly referred to as "recognition."

Charles Taylor (1994) asserts "the struggle for recognition can only find one satisfactory solution, and that is a regime of reciprocal recognition among equals" (50). Thus, recognition is a reformulation of assimilation whereby differences are not erased but re-tooled to fit with the notions of "rights" in a liberal society. Hence, the result that "the recognition paradigm has tended to reproduce the effects of colonial dispossession" (Coulthard 2010:34). I contend that collaborative research, like post–WWII applied research, is too often a means to carry on the business of empire but now it does so within the coloniality of the "recognition" paradigm. In response to such coloniality, which the "recognition paradigm" fits into as a cultural product of imperial governance, Leanne Simpson has formulated a compelling response. Noting the lack of evidence of any political will by the Canadian state to "shift these relationships," she calls for "regeneration" instead of reconciliation by "building diverse, nation-culture-based resurgences and significantly re-investing in our own ways of being" (Simpson 2011:18); an approach that is congruent with Tax's 1977 call for "Restoration."

In keeping with Simpson, Coulthard (2010) argues that "the contemporary politics of recognition promises to reproduce the very configurations of colonial power that Indigenous demands for recognition have historically sought to transcend" (5).

The collaborative model in research also reproduces the very configurations of the liberal state's colonial power that Indigenous demands have sought to transcend. Following Robert Young's post-colonial commentary, which suggests that critical self-assertion is the key and enabling factor in developing alternatives to

the colonial project, Coulthard (2010) also notes how Fanon "argued that the colonized must struggle to critically reclaim and revaluate the worth of their own histories, traditions and cultures against the subjectifying gaze and assimilative lure of colonial recognition" (67). Coulthard responds by asking "if the dispersal and effects of colonial and state power are now so diffuse, how is one to transform or resist them?" (71). Inspired by Fanon's call to resisting the "subjectifying gaze and assimilative lure of colonial recognition," Coulthard argues that Indigenous collective self-recognition ought to occur with "the understanding that our cultures have much to teach the Western world about the establishment of relationships" and these are "non-imperialist." Moreover, he points out how the liberal discourse of recognition has been "constrained by the state, the courts, corporate interests and policy makers so as to help preserve the colonial status quo" (71).

In keeping with the anthropological approaches of Asch, Tax and Weaver, Simpson asserts that, "the perception of most Canadians is that post-reconciliation, Indigenous peoples no longer have a legitimate source of contention" (Simpson 2011:22). Ultimately, collaboration (and its corollaries of research methods) is operating with the same "post-reconciliation" and "post-colonial" assumptions because it does not necessarily engage with or theorize the state's history and coloniality as a starting point. Working back to the immanent need for a relational politics tied to story to address what she refers to as "cognitive imperialism," Simpson ties this insight back to the power of stories: "For me, this discussion begins with our creation stories, because these stories set the theoretical framework ... [and] the ontological context from within which we can interpret other stories, teachings and experiences" (Simpson 2011:31–32).

Action anthropology continues to compel us to consider other ways of being together with the ways we are choosing to live our lives. This is where contemporary action anthropology, necessarily a relational anthropology, succeeds in being relevant to matters of First Nations governance and decolonization in Canada. What binds these challenges together (as articulated by the various scholars cited) is the ongoing policies and narratives of assimilation, that is, "the long term goal of internal-colonialism" (Little Bear et al. 1982:71; Thomas 1969) and the ways in which we could relationally rise to the challenges of decolonization today.

This representation and interpretation of action anthropology as it was conceptualized and implemented by Tax and as it might be understood and implemented today in positioning ourselves (here I am speaking as

a settler-anthropologist) to begin to work relationally accomplishes, in conclusion, two major points: The first is that we have rich traditions of honourable engagements with Indigenous peoples that have immense potential for decolonizing ourselves, our discipline and our communities. Action anthropology is one such tradition with many possibilities. The second is the ways in which, knowing our traditions, through storied practice and shared histories beyond the control and logic of the state, helps us to know ourselves intimately and to relate to those who seek to restore a relational balance by for starters, knowing our treaty obligations and living them.

Epilogue

Now the wonderful thing is, and I think if we reflect on a lot of stuff Sol did, there was action—there wasn't necessarily a product—but there was always a whole series of unpredictable results that made things better for people. [Vine Deloria Jr., eulogy for Sol Tax, January 1995]

Joshua J. Smith, Department of Anthropology, Room 3208 Social Science Centre, Western University, London, Ontario Canada N6A 5C2. E-mail: actionanth@gmail.com.

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Notes

1 These projects included the Fort Berthold Action Anthropology Project with the three affiliated tribes (Arikara, Hidatsa and Mandan) (Daubenmier 2008; Parker 2011; Rietz 1953); the North American Indians: 1950 Distribution of Descendants of the Aboriginal Population of Alaska, Canada and the United States (Levine and Lurie 1968; Stanley and Thomas 1978); a successful 20 year involvement, beginning in 1958, with the Chicago Indian Centre; the Cross-Cultural Education Project with the Cherokee in Tahlequah, OK (Cobb 2007; Tax and Thomas 1969); The Workshop on American Indian Affairs: a six week summer program for indigenous college students (Cobb 2008); and, the 1961American Indian Chicago Conference (Hauptman and Campisi 1988; Lurie 1968, 1969).

2 See Noble in this issue for a substantive discussion on governmentality and coloniality. The term "coloniality" is used here to give a contemporary inflection on what action anthropologists did in the 1940s to 1970s without describing or theorizing it to any substantive extent. Brian Noble (2009) defines coloniality as an:

embracing term wherein we can speak variously of settler colonialism, geopolitical colonialism, administrative colonialism, cultural colonialism, colonial property, scientific colonialism, colonial law, the colonization of consciousness ... Premised on the modern opposition of the relation between a self and an other ... [Coloniality] can be thought of as the tendency of a "self" in an encounter to impose boundary coordinates—such as those of territory, knowledges, categories, normative practices—on the domains of land, knowledge, of ways of life of an other who previously occupied or had dominant relations with those lands etc.

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