



Spiritual Reflections

How Do We Repair the Irreparable?

By Mathieu Lavigne

For now, let us work on ourselves, individually and collectively, so that we are ready to accept the hand when it is extended. It is up to Indigenous peoples to dictate the walk. Let us walk with them, at the desired distance, at the desired rhythm of these nations. Let us be present, gratuitously.

The more I seek to inform myself, the more I dive into the heart of the questions and issues affecting Indigenous communities, the more I realize the extent of my ignorance. The more I read, the more I listen, the more I feel the pain of understanding that my rootedness was only made possible by the uprooting of many peoples.

This belonging that nourishes me, this relationship to the territory that has partly built me, all this must be reviewed, corrected, transformed. Is it easy? No. Is it pleasant? Far from it.

It means completely re-reading a collective history with which I have identified myself, and a family history on which my foundations and those I had begun to build for my sons rests. So, what to transmit? What story to pass on? Can I still be emotional when I return to the family land?

Can I still tremble with rage at certain injustices, certain government decisions that have upset my corner of the country, Mirabel, where hundreds of families were expropriated from their land, their farms, and their homes to build a gigantic airport, now completely empty. The pain of this loss is still very much alive and is an embarrassment to me today. Is this land that we think is ours really ours? How can we mourn the loss of something that, in the end, should never have belonged to us?

I wish to place this personal reflection as part of a desire for reconciliation. But I will not allow myself to

define in advance the content of this reconciliation. Perhaps we should first allow, as the Innu poet and actress Natasha Kanapé-Fontaine points out, Indigenous peoples to heal internally, to take a step on this path of healing, to give them time to reconcile with themselves.¹

Will it take a long time? It's not for us to say. We like to be in control so much... but we don't have control over the reconciliation process.

For now, let's work on ourselves, individually and collectively, so that we are ready to accept the hand when it is extended. It is up to Indigenous peoples to dictate the course. Let us walk with them, at the desired distance, at the desired rhythm of these nations. Let us be present, free of any expectations.

A question crosses my mind: how to repair the irreparable? From the outset, we must accept the idea that the situation cannot continue. We must accept, individually and collectively, that our wealth, our comfort, was built on the negation of the dignity of peoples, cultures, nations.

There can be no reparation without a looking with, without taking responsibility for one's actions, without a commitment not to perpetuate the imbalance in the relationship. Not without redistribution of wealth.

¹ Natasha Kanapé-Fontaine, in Deni Ellis Bécard and Natasha Kanapé-Fontaine, *Kuei, je te salue. Conversation sur le racisme*, Montréal, Écosociété, 2016, p. 128.

Beyond Apologies



I repeat my question: how to repair the irreparable? This question must be asked to the people who are living this rupture, this break, who bear the "Personal Wound of Colonization" (Natasha Kanapé-Fontaine). It is a matter of *listening and listening without justifying ourselves*. Allowing the other person to tell us what might contribute to their healing. Accepting their anger; accepting that this anger be expressed.

As Ali Nnaemeka, a young Oblate father who has been walking alongside the Innu people for the past few years, points out, by denying the dignity of the other, we deny our own humanity. By placing ourselves in a posture of reparation, it is a path of mutual humanization that we take.

What about forgiveness? Forgiveness can be experienced as a pressure from a person who has been the victim of a crime or an injustice. Is there not a risk that the offender, by asking for forgiveness, puts the victim in a position where he or she must respond to the needs of the offender? The forgiveness that a victim can grant can only be the fruit of an inner process, and above all, rooted in freedom. At the very least, when forgiveness is sought, it is necessary to accept the fact that it may not be granted. That there is also a time for anger. That only once it is expressed and validated, the weaving of a new bond becomes possible. And let us insist on this point: forgiveness is not forgetfulness.

The truth hurts, but it makes one live. My conscience is opening up. I want to tell my sons a more complex story. A story with multiple views, multiple voices. I want them to be aware of their privileges, and that they quickly become mobilized in order to give back, to "walk with", to become allies.

That they question their relationship to the world, to history, even their family history. That they have a broad view, embracing all the complexity of reality. That their roots be deep, but flexible, and that they may communicate with the roots of others. Isn't it said

that trees communicate with each other underground, and even share their resources?

I want my sons' relationship with the land to be rooted in sharing, in the common good, and I want their "we" to be vast. I want them to be aware that their footsteps will tread on soil that other walkers know better. That their roots are young and running on the surface, compared to the roots of those who have cared for the land for so long. I want my sons to be light-footed, out of respect for a land where they walk, basically, as guests.²

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Questions for Reflection

1. *What struck you most?*
2. *How do you feel when you hear: "It's about listening without justifying ourselves. Allowing the other person to tell us what might contribute to their healing. It's about accepting his or her anger; accepting that this anger be expressed."*
3. *Share a quote or idea that is important to you.*

² Thanks to Marilyne Roy for sending me this image of the guest.