

Transcriptions:

Maria Lucas, Black Metis Lawyer interviewed by Frances Maddalozzo:

Equipping educators with the tools towards truth and reconciliation with an intercultural and interreligious perspective

Frances Maddalozzo:

Weyktp! Hello in Secwepemctsin Welcome to an Indigenous podcast privileging oral traditions, past, present, and future.

Frances ra squest. I just said my name is Frances in Secwepemctsin. I am Frances Macapagal Maddalozzo I come as a learner with the unique perspective and nuances of my identity I am a second-generation Filipina Canadian, a Catholic, an Educator, a Graduate Researcher, wife, mother, and recent graduate of the Master of Education program here at Thompson Rivers University.

The reason for stating with all transparency the totality of my identity is to better understand how I can listen, learn, and grow through committed reliance with Indigenous leaders, scholars, and mentors. It was through being in an Indigenous research course taught by Dr. Mukwa Musayett, Shelley Johnson that I have come to understand why the Chief Commissioner of the Truth and Reconciliation Commissioner Honorable Murray Sinclair said, "reconciliation is the responsibility of every Canadian I am accepting this responsibility."

I am truly thankful for being able to study on the unceded and traditional lands of Tk'emlúps te secwépemc where TRU (Thompson Rivers University) is located. It is on this land that I have studied and learned my responsibility towards reconciliation. I am joining virtually from the traditional lands of the Katzie First Nation located in the lower Fraser Valley region of B.C. (British Columbia).

Today's episode will be equipping educators with tools towards truth and reconciliation with an intercultural and interreligious perspective our special guest today is Maria Lucas Maria Lucas is a Black Métis woman whose heritage inspired her to study indigenous crown relations in a historical and political context in her undergraduate degree which she completed at the University of Toronto in her studies.

She discovered the unique. Legal framework that informs indigenous people's relationship with the crown and she came to understand that the law is key in reconciling this relationship as a result she was prompted to pursue law school. She completed her Juris Doctor at the University of Ottawa

With a specialization in Aboriginal law and Indigenous legal traditions in 2019. She was recently called to the Ontario bar as a lawyer Maria is also a co-founder and secretary of the Indigenous Catholic Research Fellowship and she currently serves as the Indigenous government relations assistance at Indspire. The first time I heard Maria Lucas speak it was on a political podcast hosted by M P Garnett genius which featured Maria Lucas an honorable grade in Nicholas and the episode was on residential schools' reconciliation and indigenous catholic relations I was inspired by her authenticity.

We are honored you're here with us today, Maria. Our student led podcast team under the direction of Dr. (Shelley Johnson) Mukwa Musayett, Associate Professor at Thompson Rivers University and the Canada Research Chair of Indigenizing higher education are extremely grateful for your time. Our mantra is humble, we come as learners to listen and privilege indigenous oral traditions past present and future, without further adieu. It is time for me to listen to your opening remarks and we can go directly into our questions.

María Lucas:

Well thank you so much for having me here today Frances I really appreciate the opportunity to be able to speak with you today. So I'm joining you virtually, but I'm actually currently situated in Toronto, Ontario, which is actually the land, that's ah, a meeting place. It's a traditional territory of many nations including the Mississaugas of the Credit, the Anishnabeg, the Chippewa, the Haudenosaunee and the Wendat peoples and is now home to many diverse First Nations, Inuit and Metis peoples.

Toronto is also actually covered by Treaty 13 signed with the Mississaugas of the Credit. So that's where I'm coming from today. Um, and as you said I myself have a unique identity with a lot of intersectionality I'm Black Métis I was brought up in the Catholic tradition I studied Law at the University of Ottawa where I specialized in now Aboriginal Law and Indigenous Legal traditions. And now I'm a lawyer looking and seeking to work in reconciliation ah, in any way that I can be of service.

Frances Maddalozzo:

Thank you, Maria. It's such an honor to actually see you across the screen and hear your voice. So thank you for being here with us. Although this episode is intended for equipping educators, I'm sure our Faculty of Law here at TRU will also benefit from your insights and I'm sure your answers will reflect the legal lens through which you have been taught to understand these important topics and I'm just going to go directly to our first question.

But we'll read an excerpt from the United Nations page, "the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples" also known as UNDRIP was adopted by the general assembly on September 13, in 2007 by a majority of one hundred and forty-four states in favor and 4 votes against and those countries were Australia, Canada, New Zealand, and the United States, and Eleven abstentions.

Years later the 4 countries that voted against have reversed their position and now supported the UN declaration. Today the declaration is the most comprehensive international instrument on the rights of Indigenous peoples.

It establishes a universal framework of minimum standards for the survival the dignity and well-being of the Indigenous people of the world and it elaborates on existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms as they apply to the specific situations of Indigenous people so on June 16th of 2021 after decades of advocacy by First Nations the parliament of Canada passed the United Nations declaration on the rights of Indigenous people.

Formally known as Bill C 15 the act received royal assent on June 21st, 2021, the act set out Canada's obligation to uphold human rights, including treaties and inherent rights of Indigenous peoples that were affirmed in 2007 for UNDRIP these include rights of self-determination and the rights to have treaties respected and enforced. So reflective educators with a growth mindset always ask what is being taught and how is it being taught? What and how should educators teach UNDRIP?

10:01 seconds

Maria Lucas:

Yeah, so in reflecting on this question sort of giving my given my context as a recent law student and a baby lawyer I had to think about. What do I how do I teach and how do I educate given my position not as a teacher by profession, but as a lawyer by profession and in lawyers we do um, sort of provide I guess you could say public legal education and in in certain contexts particularly if you work in the legal aid, ah, space. Which I which I do have a bit of a background in um, but I also have found myself particularly over this past year in conversations I am giving classes on sort of the history of Indigenous church and Indigenous crown relations and those two relationships are not necessarily um, mutually independent of each other. Um I think as we see with the with the history of residential schools in Canada.

Maria Lucas:

So um, when I think about UNDRIP and what UNDRIP is what it's meant to do and what it stands for, right it, UNDRIP is as you said it articulates the minimum standards the minimum standards. Okay, not the stars and the moon.

But the minimum standards for the survival dignity and well-being of Indigenous Peoples in the world and so I think for educators to teach UNDRIP effectively given that context and what it and what it articulates. I think that it's important that educators understand on drip as the framework for reconciliation in Canada and that's what the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission) calls for right.

It calls on all parties. Um, in different sectors of society education, law, child welfare, church, state. It requires all these parties to look to the to the Declaration as the framework for reconciliation as that roadmap. Um, in order to implement reconciliation going forward and it also defines what reconciliation is and I and I think that's important because a lot of people might look at reconciliation as sort of this very elusive concept. Um, but the TRC says that reconciliation is an ongoing process in establishing and maintaining respectful relationships and so when we look at UNDRIP right. Which is that framework for reconciliation and as I said before it establishes the minimum standards for the survival dignity and well-being of the Indigenous Peoples of the world.

Um, it also elaborates on the existing human rights standards, right. The existing human rights standards and fundamental freedoms that apply to the specific situation of Indigenous Peoples so UNDRIP it doesn't articulate. Special rights for Indigenous Peoples and I think this is something that um is a misconception that many hold due to perhaps miseducation and misinformation. Um, but they're not an UNDRIP not special rights at Indigenous People's hold they are the rights contained within UNDRIP articulates the human rights of Indigenous Peoples as applied to their specific context and history and

contemporary times even show us that the human rights of indigenous peoples have historically been violated and continue to be violated.

Maria Lucas:

Um, and we see this in the legacy of colonization here in Canada we see this in the overrepresentation of Indigenous children in the child welfare system, right? And we see this in recent, recent um court cases. Ah, such as the Canadian human rights tribunals ruling of finding the Federal Government had actually discriminated against Indigenous children living on reserve by underfunding child and family services to children on reserve. And this led often led to the unnecessary removal of many indigenous children from their homes and therefore removal from their families in very much the same way that residential school's um remove children from their families. Um.

This decision, ah ultimately was judicially reviewed by the federal court. Um, the parties in the case went through negotiations last fall and came to an agreement in principle earlier this year um and I believe it was early January that the federal government announced at 40 Billion Dollar commitment \$40 000 000 000 commitment um to to rectify the harm done as a result of its discriminatory practices. So that's just an example of how the human rights of, of Indigenous Peoples even now literally right now continue to be um, continue to be violated and UNDRIP is necessary in rectifying it because it articulates the indigenous the human rights of Indigenous Peoples.

As but applied in their specific context. Um, and I think in Canada in particular, I think justice requires um that Indigenous rights be paid a particular attention especially when the lived reality, um, Indigenous Peoples is taken into consideration and again I think education is a medium through which, um, people can learn about what these live realities are right and it's the medium through which they can learn this history as a medium through which that they, they can. Um.

Sort of come to understand, right. It can foster that intercultural understanding, um, between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Canadians.

Frances Maddalozzo:

Thank you so much. So, I didn't know how UNDRIP played the role in relation to truth and reconciliation until I was in the Indigenous research course with Dr. Mukwa Musayett.

So, I was just learning it just last year. So, I'm more familiar but a lot of Canadians still don't know so thank you for sharing that with us and I'm going to go directly to our second question.

17:16 seconds

Um, and it's in regards to what you said the truth and reconciliation commission. So, for those who don't know and you're just tuning in and you're just understanding um about the truth. You're just learning about the truth and reconciliation commission of Canada it was held between 2009 to 2015 and it emerged through the bravery and resilience of residential school survivors.

And they share their personal testimonies over 80 000 experiences were documented with the hopes to begin healing. From the 7 generations of residential schools. So, the commissioners completed their final reports in 2015 on the histories and the stories of residential school survivors. As well as a document suggesting 94 calls to action to advance the process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous People just what Maria was mentioning so the question is,

“How do you think, the recent papal apology will inform the implementation of calls to action number 60 which calls upon church leaders and institutions in partnership with Indigenous communities to promote intercultural and interreligious understanding?”

Maria Lucas:

Yes! Um, well in reflecting on and reflecting on this question I was reflecting on the words of the pope or or the Holy Father. So, I actually went back to read um, what's been, what's been dubbed an apology and so first I think I just want to acknowledge that I think hearing the Holy Father say, “I am very sorry, I am very sorry,” was significant for many residential school survivors to hear even if it's been too long even if those words were meant to be heard sooner. Um I heard one residential school survivor. Um, express what his reaction was.

To add to the words of the Holy Father and he I think it provided an avenue for healing in a way said I'm I'm thankful to hear them but the same time it's that six-year-old boy inside of him who needed to hear it, right? And who was still carrying the scars of the trauma that he went through So I I do acknowledge that hearing the Holy Father say I'm very sorry was very significant. Um, but I also acknowledge that not all. Accept What the holy father said as an apology not all not at all accept will accept it as enough or have accepted it as enough. Um, some found it lacking because he failed to um, address the complicity of the church in residential schools as an institution.

Um, so that was a point of contention for some and quite notably there was no mention of the um doctrine of Discovery. And a definitive repudiation of this doctrine which is really the sort of foundation and justification for colonization and the taking over of Indigenous lands. Um, and these concepts. Concept of the doctrine of Discovery and Terra Nullius which means no man's land. Um, finally they find their origins and Papal bulls from the fourteen hundreds.

So there wasn't any engagement with that either. Um, however, the Pope is supposed to be coming to Canada in, in the summer and it's my hope that um this this is words on this topic are and are they're not definitive.

I think where I think we'll hear more from the Holy Father on this. Um, so. I'm aware of these critiques and I just wanted to raise them because I know that they are out there and justifiably so, um I know I can't address them at length in this in this podcast.

Maria Lucas:

Um, but in is talking about the recent people apology I, I felt like I couldn't talk about it without acknowledging. Um that part of the conversation. Um, but I also want to note two sentiments in particular and that really stood out to me. And the and the words that the Holy Father had expressed

and that I think will be helpful in promoting intercultural and interreligious understanding and, and ultimately call to action number #60.

And I think within that context right in promoting that intercultural and interreligious understanding. That's where you can address issues in topics like the Doctrine of Discovery and Terra Nullius so one thing that the Holy Father had said was quote,

“clearly the content of the faith. Cannot be transmitted in a way contrary to the faith itself,” right? Clearly the content of the faith cannot be transmitted in a way that is contrary to the faith itself. Um, so that really resonated with me because how is, you know you talk about interreligious dialogue or interreligious understanding from a Catholic perspective and standpoint and position.

How do we mission right? How do we evangelize and Love is that medium through which we are to do that. We're called to share our faith with Love. We are always called to propose what we believe to be true and never impose it ever. Um, and that actually serves to foster dialogue in conversation because in that process you are.

22:42.80

Loving the other person you are respecting their freedom. Um and you are genuinely invested in wanting to know what their position, position is, um so these precepts of love, freedom, respect, they form the content of our faith and I think must inform obviously the implementation of call to action number 60. And so to keeping very much in mind what the Holy Father had said that the content of the faith cannot be transmitted in a way contrary to the faith itself.

Ah the Holy Father also said that the spirit of the Lord is revealed in humility. The humiliation of the Church is fruitfulness. And sort of how he concluded his um his address, and ah that really resonated with me because I think humility must inform our approach to intercultural and interreligious dialogue and understanding.

In my view, humility is what permits, um, it's what permits openness to perspectives that may differ from yours. But it's also what may permit you to see intersectionality as well. And um. So, if one yeah, I do believe if one lacks humility and therefore openness, you're going to lack an ability to be able to understand. Um, so for me how I try to put this into practice I guess you could say in my own personal life and journey. Um, is is through sort of my navigation of reconciliation both professionally but also um, personally and spiritually and in an on an interior level as well. Um, sort of looking at my various. Identities and seeing those points of intersectionality seeing those points of um harmony and unification. Um, and I'm not going to say that it's been a journey that's been all like roses and it's been super easy and it's always harmonious. No. It's it's often I'm often trying to find um to learn to live in the tension of it all. Um, and I think it's led to as one of my friends put it.

26:14 Seconds

Maria Lucas:

Led to the shaping of my mind um like a diamond. That's what she said she says, "your mind's like a diamond you see things through many different prisms." And I think it's because I hold um a lot of different ah identities that I've that's for in order for me to be able to. Survive and thrive as a healthy human being. Um I've had to ah attempt to see things through many different prisms and I've had to do so with a lot of humility because I always approach this journey as a learner, as a student, and it helps to enrich my my own being, myself, my, my life and so I think these principles humility, love, respect freedom, all of that needs to inform any conversation we have with each other around interreligious and intercultural dialogue and understanding.

Frances Maddalozzo:

I love that, I love how you said, um the diamond and through the lens, um, that is going to be forever in my mind as I approach reconciliation in in my ways as an educator, as a student, as a mother, as a researcher, as a Catholic, um that will be forever with me because it's true that you can't... It's one's totality of how you were raised but then to with humility to look.

And just examine like what, what part was broken and what can be fixed and what can be so so thank you, through being more humble and just understand like there. There's some things that need to be fine tuned in how so thank you for that analogy I Love that I will take that with me, um, and share that quoting you of course I will take your friends.

Maria Lucas:

Well, you have to thank my friend credit to my friend who who it was It was quite the compliment I could I when I received it I said, "whoa Wow A Diamond that's. That's very precious." So it's something that I I always carry with me in whole Dear.

Frances Maddalozzo:

Thank you, Maria, for that. Um, if it's okay, if we can go to the to the last question. Ok.

For Faculty members in education and social work and the Faculty of Law here at the University listening, "What advice can you give them in helping their diverse student population like better understand their role in truth and reconciliation?"

29:00 seconds

Maria Lucas:

Yeah, so the only advice that I can give is, is forwarding the advice that's been given to me and that's been. That's really resonated with me. Um. With and who in this is advice that comes from people who have been walking the, the path of reconciliation much, much, longer than, than I have um.

But one thing that I had had learned ah from someone on this journey is that. He said it's hard to be reconciled if you don't know with whom or what needs reconciling? How do you, how can you be reconciled if you don't know with whom you need to be reconciled with and how can you be reconciled if you don't know what needs to be reconciled.

And I said yeah and again this goes back to the point of education, right? You need to you need to be informed of the history. You need to be informed of the context and that's I think a very significant part of the puzzle, right? and I think even um, senator

Former Senator Murray Sinclair had said, "you know education is what got us into this mess and it's what's going to get us out." Right and so and it doesn't necessarily mean um, formal education in terms of taking a class although that can be very helpful because it provides, I think a community of learning. Um.

But you can also do your own research in your own self-study and I always encourage people to to do their own self-study. Um, and there's so many different mediums that you can that you can access um in order to inform yourself on this history and the legacy and, and what continues to happen in this country when it comes to um, ah the protection and promotion of of Indigenous rights or lack thereof in many circumstances. Um.

So I'm thinking in terms of resources. Ah, you know we have the TRC multi volume report right on. Ah which is quite comprehensive on the history and legacy of residential schools and even what came before.

We have the ah RCAP the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples I think some people may think that reconciliation started with the trc but we have a lot of documentation over the years um through a series of studies and reports that have been done. That have pointed to the need for reconciliation in this country. Um, I of course I also encourage listening to the testimonies of residential school survivors. Um because they really it's one thing to read facts in a book.

Um, but it's another thing to hear those facts humanized and articulated by somebody who lived it and that's what will stay with you more I think more so than any. Um, any fact that you could read. Um I also would also suggest go back when it's safe to go back to in-person gatherings to attend a Pow Wow Ah, that's open to the public or go to a National Indigenous People's Day event in June um, and just learn about Indigenous culture and ways of being listen to Indigenous music traditional and contemporary or a compilation of both traditional and contemporary.

There's Indigenous artists who will do a mixture of the two and it's very, it makes for a really great listening, um like do take a bit take advantage of the opportunities that are out there to learn about Indigenous People to learn about our culture to learn about a history. Yes. But also, to learn about who we are today like Indigenous culture and ways of being or not these sort of frozen in time ah sort of notions we we live today.

Maria Lucas:

We are continuing to thrive. Yes, we've faced a lot of injustice, but I've never met an Indigenous person who defines themselves individually or collectively as that we're not defined by the injustice that's been inflicted upon us, in my view. Our story is one of resilience and strength and self-determination. Yes, yeah, and it's...

34:01 seconds

It's a survivor story in many ways. Um and for me very much a source of um of pride in that respect that despite, despite the very targeted efforts to eradicate we still stand strong.

So it's my hope. Um that in our current context all of those who have come to Canada or will come to Canada from various diverse backgrounds can come to know our powerful story. And the beauty that we hold in our cultures and the way of being and in doing that. It's my hope that they can come to know with whom and with what needs reconciling.

And perhaps also discover their role too in it too in in truth and reconciliation.

Frances Maddalozzo:

Wow, thank you so much Maria.

I, I think that's where the perspective that I've been experiencing this past year is where do I fit in all of this?

And I had the privilege to come to understand where do I fit, in finding a melody towards reconciliation as a graduate student, as a as a mother, as a wife, as a Catholic, and as an educator. Where do I fit in all of this and and this was how this podcast transpired is we want to just come as learners and to just listen fine tune and listen to how we can better take part in reconciliation efforts.

Um, so this wraps up our podcast. But. We are so grateful and I genuinely thank you on behalf of our student led podcast team Dr. Mukwa Musayett and Thomson Rivers University, kukwtsetsemc which means thank you in Secepemctsin and Miigwech. And into Tagalog, in Filipino we say Maraming salamat, Mabuhay which means long live. So, thank you very much Maria and I wish you all the very best in your endeavors.

Maria Lucas:

Thank you Frances! Miigwech.

Indian Residential School Survivors or descendants 1-800-721-0066

Counselling Appointment for Students at TRU 250-828-5023