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Bringing Culture in: Community Responses to Apology, Reconciliation, and Reparations

BRUCE GRANVILLE MILLER

We live in an era of the proliferation of the use of apology and attempts at formal reconciliation by national governments and civil institutions, such as churches, to breach grievances with particular populations within the national borders. This is the case in Canada as well as the United States concerning indigenous peoples and other groups. Although these apologies are accompanied by various well-publicized ritualized events there is inadequate recognition by state officials of the preexisting and long-established cultural practices of apology in these indigenous communities. As a consequence, there can be a gulf between the practices of the state and local indigenous people's expectations regarding how apology and reconciliation should properly occur. These issues have received little direct scholarly attention.¹ My claim is that indigenous North Americans, and no doubt many others, already have ways of understanding how historical grievances should rightly be handled and that they have become less and less willing to put up with imposed, Western-derived models. In this text, I describe historic Coast Salish ritual practices and the concepts regarding wrongdoing and redemption that underlie them. I draw out the implications, particularly the associated dangers, derived from these existing rituals for ritual work conducted by outsiders engaging Coast Salish peoples. Finally, I consider the responses of Coast Salish peoples to recent apologies and reparations in Washington State and British Columbia.² Despite the difficulties and potential traps, there can be positive benefits to considering existing cultural practices and incorporating them with top-down state-driven apologies.³ Over the last few generations, Coast Salish leaders have developed their own ways of

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incorporating representatives of government and industry within local rituals of reconciliation. But, as I have noted, the state's use of rituals of apology to manage relations with constituent groups internationally creates the context for this development in North America, and so I briefly consider the insights and shortcomings of current scholarship on these issues.

CURRENT SCHOLARLY APPROACHES

To date, scholarly attention concerning apologies and reconciliation around the world has been largely directed to the politics of negotiation, international diplomacy, education and its role in reconciliation, the psychology of conflict, and national policies. These research initiatives are at the expense of the study of social justice from the ground up and from the vantage point of those who are not the newsmakers and largely without voice. Ehrenreich and Cole have noted that the Holocaust literature, for example, has given little visibility to the victim group, which has been treated as an amorphous mass.⁴ They note further that there is a lack of direct documentation on the general, nonperpetrator/nonvictim population in archives and oral histories. Torpey's seminal piece expressed concern for indigenous ideas of ownership of knowledge in the practice of reparations, but this falls short of considering directly indigenous ideas of the practice of ritual.⁵

To the extent that rituals of reconciliation carried out by indigenous and other nonmainstream peoples have been recognized, they have been largely treated from an implicit neoevolutionary perspective disguised as historical analysis. For example, Olick and Coughlin, although they concede that there are earlier precedents for reparation and apology, suggest that regret and apology are modern phenomena and not a characteristic of premodern societies that engaged in practices such as bribes, blood feuding, vengeance seeking, and compensation.⁶ However, other forms of political and ritual process have continued, although largely hidden from the view of a modernist dominant society convinced that its practices have supplanted earlier, less adaptive ones. Similarly, the rise of capitalism as the dominant contemporary economic system has not erased earlier forms of reciprocity and redistribution, forms that continue to coexist, although not as dominant forms of exchange.

However, there are others who share an interest in examining truth and reconciliation commissions, public state apologies, and state restitution efforts from the ground up and provide arguments outlining why this is important. Braithwaite observed that, when resolving what he called "micro forms of justice," top-down restorative justice works better when complemented by bottom-up restorative justice and that responses to global terrorism might be improved by pairing elite diplomacy with bottom-up justice in refugee camps.⁷ Likewise, Wilson argued that the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission did not well serve the needs of the local community and had little effect on popular ideas of justice as retribution.⁸ He does not, however, consider culturally relevant approaches to justice, such as Coast Salish long-house rituals, that already exist and inform the viewpoint of local people and,

in effect, provide the grounds on which a truth and reconciliation commission or any other state-sponsored initiative might be evaluated.

Avruch and Vejarano, in their review essay regarding truth and reconciliation commissions worldwide, pointed to the issue of culture in such commissions, noting that “[c]ulture did *not* arise in our rough ‘meta-analysis’ of themes in the literature in anything like the way that justice, truth, reconciliation, and democratization did. . . . [I]n fact the notion of culture hardly arises at all.”⁹ These scholars observed the attention given to the Christian-centeredness of the values driving the South African commission and concluded that “notions such as justice, truth, forgiveness, reconciliation . . . are always socially constructed and culturally constituted.” Further, an avenue for further research lies in examining the challenges that arise working *across* significant cultural borders.¹⁰ The existing literature, in brief, stops short of carefully considering local culture.

CANADIAN APOLOGIES

In the Canadian context, efforts at reconciliation have been made to various groups, including indigenous peoples and communities, by religious institutions and the state. These apologies are not limited to indigenous peoples, and in the spring of 2006 the Conservative government arranged apologies and reparations for the Chinese Canadians who were forced to pay a head tax in order to immigrate to Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Indo-Canadians, Ukrainian Canadians, Japanese Canadians, and others have made demands for apologies.

In 1998 Jane Stewart, then minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, formally apologized on behalf of Canada for the damage done to indigenous people by the practice of sending children away from their homes and families to attend either church- or state-run residential schools. This practice ended only in the 1970s.¹¹ In these schools, ties to kin were damaged or broken, and the schools actively worked to eliminate language retention and erode indigenous cultural practice. In addition, in many instances physical, sexual, and other forms of abuse were practiced in the schools. The Canadian government funded a \$350 million project to support what it termed community-based healing for individual victims of the residential schools. The intergenerational wounds from the residential school era are still fresh and are now widely discussed in indigenous communities.

The passive Canadian statement of reconciliation, however, is largely without “any real sense of responsibility or meaning” and leaves out questions of the control of land and resources in its stated emphasis on healing.¹² There is the suggestion that the statement is largely aimed at heading off lawsuits by residential school survivors.¹³ Meanwhile, since the release of the statement of reconciliation the underlying relationship between the state and indigenous people remains unchanged.¹⁴ A promised \$5 billion aid package for Aboriginal communities, known as the Kelowna Accord and negotiated by the Liberal federal government with indigenous leaders, was not included in the 2006 Conservative federal budget. Land rights negotiations remain

stalled, with few settlements; treaty negotiations under the present treaty commission process in British Columbia have yielded no treaties; and bitter disputes between indigenous peoples and communities and the Canadian state flare episodically, such as the struggle over a parcel of land in Caledonia, Ontario in 2006.

In addition to concern about residential schools, a federal responsibility, there is also growing debate about the removal of thousands of children from their families by provincial authorities in the name of child protection. In the province of British Columbia, for instance, public ceremonies have been proposed as part of a reconciliation process by the Ministry of Children and Families' Strategic Plan for Aboriginal Services.¹⁵ Val Napoleon argues that "Aboriginal communities will have to guard against substituting ceremony or ritual for substance," thereby overlooking underlying issues of power and reducing a ceremony to a "pretty band-aid on a gaping wound."¹⁶ But Napoleon further notes that one problem is that this is a one-way approach, and the ministry's efforts to learn about non-First Nations history and cultural values are not matched by an effort to expose ministry values, thereby perpetuating a myth of a cultureless ministry. Napoleon rightly concludes that it is through one's understanding of one's culture that other cultures are comprehended. She has, however, conflated the ministry's interest in connecting to elite indigenous political actors with genuine interest in community practice.

On the surface, many ordinary people respond positively to efforts at reconciliation and apology, although others emphatically reject this.¹⁷ Some like the idea of monetary compensation for residential school abuses, for example, and many indigenous people have the strong sense that they should be financially compensated for wrongs committed against their person, family, nation, or against indigenous peoples generally.¹⁸ And well they should, given the scale of problems and the fact that the contemporary generation of First Nations and American Indian people have grown up with a very clear sense that compensation, within Western law, is achieved by equating harm with cash. They see in insurance claims, for example, that the loss of a limb or conjugal rights is tied to a specific dollar amount. In addition, Coast Salish family law has historically included the idea of compensation for damages. However, cash has been rejected as an unacceptable form of compensation for the alienation of land or the loss of resources in many cases. Many reject the idea of cash compensation for personal grievances.

The ways people respond to apologies and reparations reflect individual perceptions of the nature of power and state-indigenous relations. Often responses reflect local, personal feelings of hurt and dishonor following generations of abuse, disdain, and outright theft of resources. Many view the state proximally through their experiences with nearby representatives, school officials, or health professionals, for example, as opposed to viewing the state as distant from their lives or as a referee between competing interests, as in liberal theory.¹⁹ They understand that the state relies on agents of normativity who regulate the body in a manner that reflects the values of communities other than their own. This understanding of the state as

composed of local power holders is manifested in tensions in public institutions, such as hospitals or schools, and in barriers to access. These members of indigenous communities often personalize the insult felt by the actions of the unresponsive state and point to particular, grounded cultural practices.²⁰ This personalization is important in understanding the negative responses of some local people to formal and impersonal state apologies.

EXISTING CULTURAL MODELS OF RECONCILIATION

Although these state-sponsored apologies are being carried out there remain significant existing models within indigenous communities concerning how conflict between constituent groups ought to be handled and that largely derive from prior practice—from current understandings of what was done in the “old days.” The degree to which these perceptions are altered by contact with nonindigenes is not my central concern. Although indigenous peoples and leaders commonly speak in oppositional terms regarding Western and indigenous concepts of justice, this reflects more distaste for the current circumstances of indigenous peoples in North American society than an effort to discern carefully the history of the “middle ground” of mutual influence, as the historian Richard White has put it.²¹

It is these cultural models that are my concern. These ideas or models persist in people’s minds; they suggest the right way to do things, even though people do not agree on the exact content of them. The practice of apologies, reconciliation, and the press for reparations have come at precisely the moment in which interest in indigenous ritual life is most heightened. This is not an accident, and these developments are related. They represent the increasing strength of the indigenous voice in Canada, liberation from restrictive rules and efforts at assimilation, and gradual realization that new practices within old frames of thought are possible. In recent years, a vigorous ethno-nationalist movement has arisen that has been built on the conscious rejection of Western governance even while Western-style administrative structures are widely adapted. These circumstances imply that attention to cultural models is all the more salient, more so today than ten or twenty years ago. One must also bear in mind that contemporary indigenous ritual life is increasingly associated with moral good, restoration of old ways, reestablishment of connections to an indigenous cosmology, the good path (as it is commonly termed in the Coast Salish community), community redemption, and repudiation of Western materialism.

COAST SALISH RITUAL

My examples of ritual come from the Northwest Coast, particularly the Coast Salish peoples of Washington State and the province of British Columbia; my work concerning tribal justice practices; and conversations on the topic of apologies with Coast Salish people in several communities.²² In these communities people endlessly debate if political or cultural activities are being improperly conducted and, hence, if they are culturally correct. Bierwert

observed the Coast Salish decentering of authority and the consequences of disputes about culture.²³ To be wrong serves to invalidate the ritual “work” done and may convey the opposite message. In this case, the message received from the ritual practice of reconciliation could be the lack of a desire to reconcile. One of the analogues of reparations in indigenous life, the giving of gifts in repayment for wrongs, very specifically carries the cultural message that slight breaks of protocol can reverse the message.²⁴ It is hard to give gifts successfully, especially in those situations in which the problem between groups has been a wrongful, crude play of power. It is easy for the compensation to appear, yet again, as a manifestation of domination.

Shame Potlatching

A recent example of a ritual of reconciliation, and of the difficulty of gift giving, comes from a “shame potlatch” given by a tribal leader said to be powerful and domineering.²⁵ This man’s effort to restore his name and his relations with his subordinates, people working under him in a department of the tribal government, by distributing gifts was undone by a subtle tone of superiority. Although he spent an estimated \$10,000 to \$20,000 on the affair, at least some guests left thinking the leader was all the more greedy, pompous, and destructive.²⁶ Giving gifts, after all, continues to demonstrate the wealth and power of the giver. It is hard to give humbly. It takes a mastery of the local idiom of oratory, timing, and shrewdness in picking “speakers” to present one’s case, luck in that nothing else intervenes, and the goodwill of the guests—the witnesses to the affair who validate the outcome. If all goes well, there will be an implicit agreement to a new understanding of someone’s place in the world. If it does not go well there is also a new understanding, not the one the host wished for but someone else’s. These indigenous “reparation” feasts are political events; they are not pro forma. Someone may wish to disrupt the work on the spot and publicly present a more compelling or skillfully presented version of the truth than the host, a version to which the other guests might be willing to agree.²⁷ And the work is not concluded until long after the ritual event, when everyone has had a chance to criticize, find fault, and pick apart. Later, if the complainers are gradually silenced by an emerging agreement, then the tacit agreement achieved at the time of the potlatch is validated. It is difficult to change people’s understandings and successfully assert a new social persona for oneself.

People from leading families who are leaders within the larger community normally carry out shame potlatching and other big-time ceremonial work. Lesser people from other families are willing to find fault, and there is a social-class element to this in the hierarchical and status-conscious Coast Salish society. Everyone can speak, but, ordinarily, elite people have the floor and the privilege of communication in important settings. In return, lower-class people have the privilege of looking carefully to see if the elite stumble—even minor slips can cause trouble, and these slips can require formal repair to one’s reputation in the form of a potlatch. There is a history of using stories to lampoon the presumptuous elite who reveal themselves to be other than

they claim when they are unable to conduct themselves properly in public.²⁸ The conduct of the elite is a potent theme all through Coast Salish society. Winter ceremonial initiates who slip while engaged in “dancing” their power and sing incorrectly are endangered spiritually. Similarly, leaders who lose their temper and warriors who kill too much and lose respect are the cause of revulsion rather than the objects of esteem or respect.²⁹

The relevance of this for the idea of state reparations is that reparations cannot be concluded outside of a formal, ritual setting. People are alert to and sensitive to the possibility of a slipup by the presumptuous elite. And, because reparations require a form of cross-cultural communication, there is a great probability that the representatives of the state will botch the job and appear presumptuous, arrogant, or foolish. It is hard for insiders to carry off ritual work before the scrutinizing gaze of the community, and it is all the harder for outsiders, even those who are well coached. Gooder and Jacobs point out that apologies are delicate, precarious transactions.³⁰

One might object and argue that indigenous peoples, following a long, dark period of domination, would expect the idiom of the ritual to be Western. But this is not so, and a quick examination of ceremonial encounters even in the most Westernized settings incorporate indigenous symbolism. Indigenous people now expect the presence of their own symbols and protocols. To fail to include them would be to undermine the very point that reconciliation and, subsequently, reparation are meant to convey. Ritual action in the Western idiom would merely reinforce the differences in power that created the problems we face today.

Several years ago I carried out a ceremony to honor and thank a Coast Salish ritual man and elder who hosted a number of my graduate students who lived in his winter ceremonial house while conducting research with his nation.³¹ He shared his knowledge, humor, and insights with my students, and I remain grateful. When I approached his family to discuss the ceremony, eventually held at the Museum of Anthropology at the University of British Columbia, they presumed that it would be done Coast Salish style, with speaking chiefs, witnesses, feasting, and gifts. There was no meaningful, other way to approach this. The event was fitted into the existing repertoire of “work,” as ritual practice is called. There was some discussion about whether it was properly done in the format of a naming ceremony or an honor ceremony; eventually the latter choice won out. There was some oblique debate about whether regional up-river or down-river “saltwater” (located near the ocean) practices should be employed. The honored guest was from up-river, but the event was staged in a saltwater location, and there was one speaker from each. Rituals are negotiated all along, from conception to completion, which occurs some time after the event. Rituals are processes rather than single events.

Ritual work requires recognition of the permanence of the other party. There is no point in reconciliation or reparation with a fleeing adversary. These you merely dispatch, if you can, because adversaries do not occupy space in the moral universe. Reconciliation requires that one admit the possibility of the humanness of the other (in Coast Salish reckoning the other might actually be a nonhuman but be a powerful, sentient being nonethe-

less). Ritual work marks out the continuation of a relationship, one that has a past and a future. This, in turn, requires that the parties conduct further work to continue to cement the relationship; there is no unilateral ritual work.³²

One cannot impose reparations. Ordinarily, giving and receiving reparations assumes that one is willing to engage the other in a broad spectrum of activities that encompass the full humanity of the other. Simply, you exchange the most valuable commodities in one's possession and marry into the other's family. You participate in common defense from outsiders, contribute to mutual honor, and share the resources under one another's control. Although the other party will continue to control access to the riches of the environment, a party engaged in a moral relationship cannot be excluded (wealthy owners might, however, allocate a turn to use the fish weir in the middle of the night). There is an assumption of common contribution, even though parties will continue to engage in contests over one's place in the social hierarchy.

I believe this leads to an interesting contradiction. In traditional ritual life, the assumption is that parties to a dispute might reach a settlement, sometimes involving reparations in the form of gifts or labor, and *restore* the social breach and reestablish good relations. This isn't about reversing the social standing of the parties involved; traditional ritual life reflects a close reading of human motivations and possibilities. In the case of the Canadian state and First Nations, good relations cannot be restored, but they might be established. As of yet, there is only a little evidence that the apologies and pools of money for residential school victims reflect a notion that the state seriously wishes to change its relations with indigenes, and I think most indigenous people see it that way. There is considerable cynicism bred of lifelong experience. Although some people think of the state as a piggy bank waiting to be opened, perhaps others are aware that the state is limited. In effect, reconciliation rituals and reparations promise a future that the state neither understands nor is able to deliver. It is done in an idiom that neither reflects indigenous sensibilities nor conveys an appropriate message.

Family Feasting

Let's look more closely at the mechanics of a feast hosted by an extended family whose guests are members of an aggrieved family.³³ Someone may have been killed in a hunting accident, for example, causing a breach of relations between the families of the hunters. There is no misunderstanding of whose honor is at stake; it is the family whose member or members have committed the offense. The offense might be accidental or otherwise, but it doesn't matter. The issue at hand is the restoration of good, working relations between groups. There has been some behind-the-scenes work done to establish the terms of reference, if possible. You can't proceed beforehand, because to meet together otherwise would simply escalate the problem. The offending parties must willingly acknowledge their offense. There is an element of shaming here; it will not continue past the feast if done properly. Those who give offense are judged by the grace with which they respond to criticism. Speakers for both parties cautiously state their views of how things

should be handled. They indicate what precedents there are and why precedents are slightly different than the situation the hypothetical speakers are dealing with. The feast is an exchange of food and thoughts. Exchange, as I have already noted, perpetuates a relationship rather than ends it. Details of the arrangement are given, and parties may arrange to compensate the other with labor and gifts. The entire offending family contributes to the effort, not merely those who committed the offense. The guests will agree that the issue is resolved properly, and, in theory, the issue will not be raised directly again.

The feast is not merely a public airing of grievances. Families attempt to reconcile differences in the tightest circles possible. The whole community is not invited to the feast unless outside help is needed. Once resolved, grievances are, in theory, not spoken of again publicly. There is no notion of justice performed by merely speaking or performing one's grievance and letting the culprits off the hook as in the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission. In this case, the prosecution of lawbreakers for their confessions and meaningful compensation to those wronged were traded for the possibility of Christian redemption and public affirmation of the horror of crimes against oneself.

Longhouse Gatherings

There is another, related Coast Salish model of reconciliation besides shame potlatching and family feasting.³⁴ Here, an offender or "wrongdoer" agrees to meet in a longhouse to face a gathering of community elders and other community members. This is voluntary, but families exert pressure on members to protect their collective reputations and restore working relations with other families. The offender is "given strong words" by those whose opinions carry weight. This is often in the form of stories that contain implicit negative comparisons to those who exhibit good qualities and behavior. In this case, too, the offenders are judged by the grace with which they carry themselves. In theory, those who manage this well are judged favorably; they are redeemed and may even be celebrated for the achievement. If all goes well, terms of settlement are arranged, and the issue is regarded as completed.

THEORIES OF WRONGDOING AND REDEMPTION

These three forms of reconciliation are built on local theories of the nature of wrongdoing and the role of redemption. Ritual life aims at treating particular kinds of dilemmas, and resolution depends on what causes people to do wrong. One Coast Salish theory is that low-class people do things wrong simply because they are not properly trained to conduct themselves in society.³⁵ It's worth noting, because of the implications for state apologies, that white people have historically looked like low-ranked people or even wrongdoers to the Coast Salish. They lose their temper in public, exercise authority openly and crassly, have few children (initially, early white traders and explorers didn't seem to have any wives at all—an obvious sign of inferior status), and point with their fingers.³⁶ This latter practice is dangerous and

rude because fingers can “shoot” harmful power. In short, people do wrong because they don’t know otherwise and have not learned the public restraint that characterizes the elite; have been harmed by someone who wishes them ill (a form of intrusive magic); and are greedy and violate the cardinal rules of reciprocity. In prior periods, the material conditions of life were not so much different for upper- and lower-class people. For the most part, the difference lay in how people conducted themselves and the reputations they bore. Greedy people are thought to earn their own punishment by spiritual means; they will likely suffer infirmities or tragedies.

The relevant question now is: Why do white people (embodying the state) do wrong? The common answer is that whites are greedy—for land, salmon, anything. A Halkomelem (a Coast Salish language) term for whites is glossed as “hungry people,” in reference to this greed.³⁷ They do wrong because they don’t know any better. They don’t reciprocate. They are overbearing and crude and are without the features of high-class people. What can you expect from them? The answer is more of the same. The hosting of a ritual for reparations or apology can’t generate a result because it doesn’t change the nature of the wrongdoer. In Coast Salish logic, it is not so much the gift that counts as what it represents, namely, a knowing repudiation of actions that have eroded the ability of groups to work together. The state appears shameless, however. Representatives have come to the ritual but seem to have a bad heart.

Coast Salish practices of reparation require that there be a reason for the wrongdoers to come forward. They may do so because they wish to redeem their family name or restore their place in the community or because their bad thoughts have caused harm to community members.³⁸ It is less clear what the motivations for the state are in participating in ritual life. At least one commentator, however, has connected the rise of state reparations with the growing inability of the state to carry out its core functions and the consequent need to get minority group support.³⁹ Some indigenous people make this very connection and regard it as evidence that the state remains untrustworthy. Others note that the very conditions that promote apology rituals deny the possibility of transformation.⁴⁰

Coast Salish culture emphasizes redemption and the capacity of individuals to transform in a way that contemporary mainstream culture does not. People can purify themselves and seek out spirit powers that can guide and empower. Individuals who have achieved this are new people and are conceptually not the same being. Individuals can take ancestral names that link them to others of the past and can make them new. People can be redeemed by the action of healers. Coast Salish stories speak of low-class people who surreptitiously overhear lessons given to upper-class young family members, act on these, and become great as a result. There are stories of people encountering immortal beings and attaining new capacities. People can work hard and gain the respect of community members through their ritual work. A common life course for contemporary middle-aged men is to transform themselves from lives of drinking and merrymaking into public figures acting for their family and community. Given the opportunities for redemption, and the emphasis on it, ritual practice without real change is all the more inappropriate.

Annalise Acorn, in her provocative book *Compulsory Compassion*, observes that ritualized apologies in restorative justice settings can act to reinforce and maintain the existing inequality or state of disrepair. She notes that “it is therefore perplexing that conventional wisdom regards apology and forgiveness, in contrast to revenge and reprisal, as precisely what is need[ed] to heal the wounds of wrongdoing and to break out of a cycle of violence.”⁴¹ Further, she notes that apology and forgiveness saps the victim’s energy for moving toward a more radical transformation in the relationship. Although Acorn primarily is concerned with restorative justice practices that concern one-on-one, private issues of wrongdoing and in which the victim may willingly comply and be fooled into believing in the sincerity of the wrongdoer’s participation in the process, she also considers the implications for cross-cultural practice. She observes that it has become customary to begin with indigenous ceremonies such as prayers by elders in legal gatherings involving Aboriginal issues in Canada (for example, land claims proceedings). Nonindigenous participants, she says, look on with reverence. Although these shifts in ritual practice indicate some progress for indigenous peoples in Canada, nevertheless, “clearly, the currency here is not one of authentic respect. At stake is the ability to demand that others knuckle under and pretend to pay homage to your traditions—however much they may consider them at best quaint, possibly silly, or even downright offensive.”⁴² Such rituals, she concludes, are demonstrations of power relations but not just by indigenous peoples. These rituals remain tokens and “costless-to-whites” perks that are easier to grant than tangible and useful rights. Acorn has captured something of the truth in this, but has left out the average, nonelite community members who have their own interests in mind and do not sit on the stage during the proceedings, but watch the proceedings from below to note carefully the failures of the elite. In the case of state apologies, the careless elite are both the members of the indigenous community and the representatives of the state.

Gooder and Jacobs envision apologies as entangled with the postcolonial national agenda and primarily as vehicles for the white settler population to reconstitute the national imaginary by wiping out the actions of their shameful ancestors, thereby including themselves.⁴³ Therefore, apologies are linked to social identity and the creation of a shared moral order and await the response of the other. For this reason, apologies require that the ways in which the other sees the world, in this case indigenous ideas of knowledge and of social relations, be taken into account.

THE PRESENT AND THE FUTURE

The worldwide era of apologies is not yet ended and apologies remain politically significant. On 29 February 2006 the Washington State legislature, for example, issued a resolution passed by the Senate and House of Representatives to “acknowledge the injustices of the 1884 lynching of Louie Sam.”⁴⁴ Louie Sam was a Stó:lō boy from British Columbia who was killed by a mob of Americans who were convinced that Sam had murdered a shopkeeper in nearby Nooksack, Washington. This story has remained with some elders

for the last 122 years and research by historian Keith Carlson led to the making of a movie on this issue in 2004. The grand chief of the Stó:lō Tribal Council, the lieutenant governor of British Columbia, and the lieutenant governor of Washington all participated in a healing ceremony in Olympia, Washington, the state capital. A news release from the British Columbia Intergovernmental Secretariat of 1 March 2006 claims,

John van Dongen, Minister of State for Intergovernmental Relations, is attending a ceremony in Olympia, Washington today. . . . “In order to promote healing, it is important to come to terms and acknowledge historical wrong, as in the case of Louie Sam,” said van Dongen. “Although these events may have taken place long ago, it’s our moral duty to recognize these injustices so that Aboriginal people can fully participate in the great future we all have in British Columbia.”

The release cites a “new relationship with First Nations based on mutual respect.”⁴⁵

This event has a significant role in the education of the general public, but it is unclear what members of the community make of the ritual and the purported closing of the file by the high-and-mighty faraway, regardless of the ways in which community elite may use this event for political gain. If a mutually acceptable story regarding Louie Sam has been crafted and its acceptance signaled ritually, to whom is the story acceptable? Who has been given the chance to indicate acceptance or to contest the emergent story?

Some evidence regarding these questions comes from a discussion of state apology I conducted with a group of some twenty members of the Musqueam First Nation, located in Vancouver, British Columbia.⁴⁶ One person in attendance observed that the Canadian residential school apology described earlier didn’t hold meaning for her because “they didn’t consult the right people,” meaning the school survivors. Another suggested that “too much damage has been done” for an apology to address the grievance. A third observed that the apology had to be understood within the larger historical context of loss of language and the destructive effects on parenting, and the apology, for this reason, was insufficient. The relationship, in effect, is bigger than issues of residential schools, and schools can’t be separated out. Another noted that the apology is “in the wrong language,” meaning it should be in their own indigenous language because there is a history of the Crown “using tricky language,” referencing legalistic English. Perhaps the most intriguing comment regarding apology and residential schools came from someone making comparative reference to both her own traditions and the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, noting that “the Nuns should come and speak the truth.” The ritual, in her view, would have meaning if the parties actually involved (nuns and priests in the case of the Catholic residential school at Kuper Island where her family members were sent) participated and followed the longhouse practice of direct participation. Regarding the Louie Sam event, one indicated that the event “wasn’t held in the right location” because it was away from the place and the people where the lynching

occurred. However, one man found the Louie Sam apology to be “ok” with him and suggested that “the family benefited.”

There are reasons for cautious optimism about the possibility of the use of apology and ritual in reconciliation beyond that given by the lone man at Musqueam. In February 2006, I spoke to the Vancouver staff of the federal agency Indian Residential School Resolution Canada about the issues presented in this article.⁴⁷ These federal employees, mandated to carry out alternative dispute resolution, promote reconciliation, and create agreements with churches whose school staff abused students, among other tasks, revealed through their questions, and in conversation after my talk, that some are largely uninformed about indigenous forms of knowledge and practice yet are willing to think about such topics. Others have already sought and found ways to make space for indigenous practice on its own terms in the conduct of government affairs. Still others, however, point out that government practices and protocols will continue to pose obstacles to conducting business in a way that connects to community practice. But at least they know this. A manager of this group hoped to go beyond academic talks such as mine and find ways to learn more directly, although he has not yet determined how this might be carried out. These responses give some hope that the government will become more open to the idea of thinking carefully about how it carries out its responsibilities to indigenous peoples. Further, the responses show an awareness that there are cultural differences between members of the mainstream and indigenous societies in their understandings of how social relations are best handled and even the insight that the current emphasis on apology as a political device derives from a particular historical moment.

In addition, there is a long history of Coast Salish Band and tribal leaders hosting events that they conduct in a traditional idiom in order to begin reordering political and economic relations with the mainstream society. It works this way: leaders invite important outsiders to their community to attend ritual events, sometimes held in winter longhouses. They cover the floor with blankets, thereby creating sacred space, place blankets over the shoulders of the visitors, and pin money on the blankets.⁴⁸ The visitors stand on the blankets. Speakers, hired for the occasion, call witnesses to the work and inform the visitors what they want for their community, employing techniques of ritualized oratory. The process creates liminal space, a transformed field, in which the visitors are receptive to the message in a way that they may not be otherwise. These ceremonies, however, are localized and ordinarily involve outside political and economic leaders from the immediate area. They typically don't involve national issues or leadership. They are time consuming and entail a measure of familiarity. They do, however, point to a model of ritual relationship that stands somewhere between those used by families in conducting relations with other families and those carried out in the halls of power, such as the Washington State acknowledgment of wrongdoing. Most significantly, as my examples suggest, many members of Coast Salish communities today believe that outsiders ought to negotiate with them in ways that are acceptable within their own communities. And rank-and-file members of communities continue to find ways to hold their own leaders responsible for doing so.

CONCLUSION

There may well be value in employing bottom-up restorative justice practices together with top-down efforts. For example, bottom-up justice in refugee camps might help dampen global terrorism. Local, bottom-up efforts at reconciliation, through apology or reparations and that take culture seriously, may better serve local needs and convey a more satisfying message than those derived from top-down rituals alone. In the Coast Salish case, attention to the specifics of local ritual practices and concepts and culturally specific theories of wrongdoing and redemption could build on local notions of the importance and possibilities of redemption and convey a message of inclusion of indigenous peoples within the contemporary society. There will be obstacles in carrying this out, including the difficulties associated with conveying the wrong message in ritual practice, but Coast Salish communities have already demonstrated, through incorporating outsiders into their own longhouse rituals, that representatives of the state and the community can engage each other in ways that can be satisfying and useful to community members.

NOTES

1. Two quite different events focused my attention on the issue of how indigenous peoples respond to the current state-sponsored attempts at restorative justice, apology, and reparation. One event was an international conference held in November 2001 at the Peter Wall Institute, University of British Columbia, regarding reconciliation and reparations. In good measure, guests responded to a seminal piece, "Making Whole What Has Been Smashed": Reflections on Reparations," *Journal of Modern History* 73, no. 2 (2001): 333–58. See John Torpey, ed., *Politics and the Past: On Repairing Historical Injustices* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003). In this book Torpey reviewed the sources and types of reparation politics and argued, following Habermas, for the creation of a shared history, a mutually acceptable story as the result of reparations. My focus, however, was ethnographic and focused on local reactions to large-scale politics. I raised the question of precisely how the mutually acceptable story is generated and what would be the forum in which this story is told. My paper "Indigenous Culture, Historical Grievances and Reparations and Apologies" was delivered at the Peter Wall Institute for Advanced Studies Exploratory Workshop: Reparations for Historical Injustices, 2–4 November 2001. A second event concerned local responses to long-term injustice and historical grievances held just outside the old city walls in Jerusalem, Israel. This conference was the Adam Institute International Conference: Attitudes Towards the Past in Conflict Resolution, held the week of 29 November 2001. My paper for the conference was "Indigenous Responses to Historical Grievances," and scholars speaking of historic injustices in Northern Ireland, Bosnia, Palestine, and elsewhere joined me.

2. How community and national indigenous leaders treat this topic is much better understood than how nonelite community members view such events. For example, lawyer Susan Alter has written a paper commissioned by the Canadian government entitled "Apologizing for Serious Wrongdoing: Social, Psychological, and Legal Considerations" (Law Commission of Canada, <http://epe.lac-bac.ca/100/200/300/>)

icc-cdc/apology, 1999; accessed 20 March 2006), which considers in detail the legal and social implications of apology in providing direction to public officials. She also points out that there are different kinds of apologies (personal and official) and suggests the need for cultural sensitivity in making apologies but fails to consider existing approaches to apology in First Nations communities.

3. My concern is not to argue for a relativistic way of understanding culture or to contemplate universalism in light of the particularism of local culture. See Thomas H. Eriksen, "Between Universalism and Relativism: A Critique of the UNESCO Concept of Culture," in eds. Jane K. Cowan, Marie-Benedicte Dembour, Richard A. Wilson, *Culture and Rights: Anthropological Perspectives* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 127–48. Nor am I arguing that the world is merely composed of small, discrete cultures. And I am not arguing that cultures are monolithic. Instead, culture is best understood as historically situated, contested, and a process. I am arguing for the significance of culture as a variable in reconciliation processes, which are very often or perhaps usually, cross-cultural affairs. Finally, I do not claim that contemporary rituals of reconciliation are flawed because they are Western-influenced or stem from Eurocentric social thought.

4. Robert M. Ehrenreich and Tim Cole, "The Perpetuator-Bystander-Victim Constellation: Rethinking Genocidal Relationships," *Human Organization* 64, no. 3 (2005): 213–24.

5. Torpey, "Making Whole What Has Been Smashed."

6. Jeffrey K. Olick and Brenda Coughlin, "The Politics of Regret: Analytical Frames," in ed. John Torpey, *Politics and the Past: On Repairing Historical Injustices* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 37–62.

7. John C. Braithewaite, "Thinking Critically about the War Model and the Criminal Justice Model for Combating Terrorism," paper presented at the Law and Society Association Meetings, Vancouver, BC, June 2002.

8. Richard A. Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa: Legitimizing the Post-Apartheid State* (Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press, 2001).

9. Kevin Avruch and Beatriz Vejarano, "Truth and Reconciliation Commissions: A Review Essay and Annotated Bibliography," *Social Justice: Anthropology, Peace and Human Rights* 2, no. 1–2 (2001): 47–108. Also see John Borneman, *Subversions of International Order: Studies in the Political Anthropology of Culture* (Albany: State University Of New York Press, 1998) for a consideration of the analysis of culture in political change.

10. *Ibid.*, emphasis in original.

11. George Erasmus, "The Talking Stick," *Kahtou* 10, no. 2 (2001): 19.

12. Val Napoleon, "Who Gets to Say What Happened?" in eds. Catherine Bell and David Kahane, *Reconciliation Issues for the Gitsan. Intercultural Dispute Resolution in Aboriginal Contexts* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), 176–95, esp. 184–85.

13. Michael Valpy, "Native Lawsuits Fuel Costly Bureaucracy," *The Globe and Mail* (5 March 2002), sec. A, 1–2. This is not to suggest that underlying issues of relative power can be resolved by any ritual practice. Ritual generally papers over such differences but can be paired with substantive action.

14. Napoleon, "Who Gets to Say What Happened?" 185. See Erasmus, "The Talking Stick."

15. Ibid., 19.

16. Ibid.

17. Swinomish Tribal Mental Health Project, *A Gathering of Wisdoms* (La Conner, WA: Swinomish Tribal Community, 1991), 33. But see Rhonda Claes and Deborah Clifton, "International Child Abuse: Needs and Expectations for Redress of Victims of Abuse at Native Residential Schools" (Law Commission of Canada, [www.lcc.gc.ca/research/project/98/child abuse-en.aip](http://www.lcc.gc.ca/research/project/98/child%20abuse-en.aip), 1998; accessed 20 March 2006), who quote a residential school survivor who stated emphatically that he wants money in compensation but had no interest in an apology.

18. Keith Thor Carlson, ed., *You Are Asked to Witness: The Stó:lō in Canada's Pacific Coast History* (Chilliwack, BC: Stó:lō Historic Trust, 1997), 107.

19. Swinomish, *A Gathering of Wisdoms*, 29 and 68–69. See Paul Nadasdy, *Hunters and Bureaucrats: Power, Knowledge, and Aboriginal-State Relations in the Southwest Yukon* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2003) for a discussion of Aboriginal perceptions of the state.

20. Bruce G. Miller, *Invisible Indigenes: The Politics of Nonrecognition* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003).

21. Richard White, *The Middle Ground: Indians, Empires, and Republics in the Great Lakes Region, 1650–1815* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

22. This information comes from my own field notes concerning law. I consider specific community responses in more detail in the following text.

23. Crisca Bierwert, *Brushed by Cedar, Living by the River: Coast Salish Figures of Power* (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 1999).

24. Swinomish, *A Gathering of Wisdoms*, 177–79. See Jay Miller, *Lushootseed Culture and the Shamanic Odyssey: An Anchored Radiance* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999), 104, for examples of consequences of improper ritual.

25. Ibid., 101, for historic examples.

26. Personal communications, I wish to keep the sources anonymous. I don't want to provide identifying details regarding this instance of a shame potlatch, nor generally reveal the locations or identities of those commenting on the political actions of their own leadership. Ethnographic details come from my field notes covering 1976 to the present.

27. Swinomish, *A Gathering of Wisdoms*, 179.

28. See Crisca Bierwert, ed., *Lushootseed Texts: An Introduction to Puget Salish Narrative Aesthetics* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996), e.g., regarding the story of Crow, a social climber open to ridicule.

29. Swinomish, *A Gathering of Wisdoms*, 11 and Miller, *Lushootseed Culture*, 94.

30. Haydie Gooder and Jane M. Jacobs, "On the Border of the Unsayable: The Apology in Postcolonizing Australia," *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 2, no. 2 (2000): 229–47.

31. Bruce G. Miller, "Ceremonial Ties That Bind," paper presented to the American Anthropological Association Annual Meetings, Philadelphia, 2 December 1998.

32. Bruce G. Miller, *The Problem of Justice: Tradition and Law in the Coast Salish World* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2001).

33. Miller, *Invisible Indigenes*, see 148 for more details.

34. Miller, *The Problem of Justice*, 133.

35. Ibid., 140.
36. Alexandra Harmon, *Indians in the Making: Ethnic Relations and Indian Identities around Puget Sound* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998).
37. Carlson, *You Are Asked to Witness*, 65 and 82.
38. Miller, *The Problem of Justice*, 139–40.
39. Roy L. Brooks, “Reflections on Reparation,” in ed. John Torpey, *Politics and the Past: On Repairing Historical Injustices* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003), 103–16.
40. Michel-Rolph Trouillot, “Abortive Rituals: Historical Apologies in the Global Era,” *Interventions: International Journal of Postcolonial Studies* 2, no. 2 (2000): 171–86
41. Annalise Acorn, *Compulsory Compassion: A Critique of Restorative Justice* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2004), 74.
42. Ibid., 58.
43. Gooder and Jacobs, “On the Border of the Unsayable.”
44. *Vancouver Sun* (28 February 2000), 1.
45. New Release, Intergovernmental Relations Secretariat, “B.C. to Attend Washington State Ceremony” (1 March 2006).
46. I gave a two-hour talk and discussion with members of the Musqueam Nation, located in Vancouver, BC, 15 March 2006, on “Apologies.” The meeting was a session of “Musqueam 101,” a weekly seminar held in the band center.
47. Talk given to Indian Residential School Resolution Canada entitled “Ceremony and Protocol,” 15 February 2006; the Vancouver office serves British Columbia, Alberta, and the Canadian North. This federal agency was established 7 June 2001. It is mandated to work with former students, families, and communities in support of projects that promote healing and reconciliation; use dispute resolution methods that are faster and less painful for the individuals; resolve claims and liaise with governments and churches in implementing the federal government’s wider objectives of healing and reconciliation; educate the general public; and work with church organizations to reach an agreement concerning their shared liability to compensate victims of sexual and physical abuse
48. See Bruce G. Miller, “The Great Race: A Coast Salish Media Coup,” *Pacific Northwest Quarterly* 89, no. 3 (1998): 127–35.