

TO FORGIVE BUT NOT FORGET?

On the relationship between recognition and reconciliation in Indigenous-settler Australian relations

Ng Qian Qian

Abstract

What is the relationship between recognition and reconciliation? I argue that reconciliation undermines recognition's promise of eventual attainment of freedom for all, even as it is crucial to the project of recognition. As this crucial relationship has been undertheorized, this paper hopes to spark new conversations within recognition theory. I discuss the reconciliation between Indigenous Australian peoples and the settler-colonial state, focusing on the pivotal 2008 apology for the "Stolen Generations" and more recent proposal of Makarrata. Drawing on literature on anger, forgiveness and psychoanalysis by Agnes Callard, Jacques Derrida and Paul Muldoon, I propose four criteria for a proper apology for reconciliation. Applying these criteria to the 2008 Apology by then Prime Minister Kevin Rudd, I argue that the apology is inadequate, and further that an apology can never be an adequate mode of reconciliation. I end by considering prospects of alternative forms of reconciliation.

Keywords: Reconciliation, Recognition, Anger, Apology, Australia.

Though recognition and multiculturalism do not necessarily entail reconciliation, any project of recognition and multiculturalism that takes seriously historical injustices and restorative justice necessarily has to engage in reconciliation. A theory of reconciliation remains under-conceptualised, at least in the Australian context which I focus on.¹ I take the more common use of 'reconciliation', which refers to formal processes of acknowledging past misdeeds and engaging in restorative justice as the basis of repaired relations. Will Kymlicka's brand of liberal multiculturalism arguably attempts to embed reconciliation. Kymlicka's liberal multiculturalism is "a distinctively liberal approach to minority rights" with a luck egalitarian

1 A. Little, *The Politics of Makarrata: Understanding Indigenous–Settler Relations in Australia*, in "Political Theory", 48, 1, 2020, pp. 30-56.

tarian core that prescribes these rights on account of a person's history; specifically, their mode of entry into the territory.²

Recognition theory lags on this front: it requires but currently lacks an embedding of reconciliation. Here I focus on projects of recognition in the Hegelian tradition, such as Axel Honneth's and Nancy Fraser's, whose key features are to "[designate] an ideal reciprocal relation between subjects in which each sees the other as its equal and also as separate from it".³ Recognition, in the theoretical account based on Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*, begins when two self-consciousnesses simultaneously realise they are both equally objects to each other even as they think of themselves as a subject.⁴ Neo-Hegelian recognition theories take as their promised end goal the eventual attainment of freedom of all individuals via mutual recognition. Fraser's and Honneth's recognition theories also aim to provide guidance to practical matters of material redistribution and status recognition, though they work through the logic of redistribution differently. Although both account for the intricate entanglement between those two categories, Honneth subordinates all injustices, including material forms, to recognition, while Fraser treats the material and cultural as irreducible bases but risks reducing recognition to a status good to be redistributed.

Regardless of the ontological ordering of material and non-material, I argue that any theory of recognition, including and especially the liberal family which Honneth and Fraser are in, which takes as their fundamental assumption and goal some form of equality between peoples, – an equal right to full esteem for Honneth and an equal opportunity to be accorded esteem for Fraser – have to correct for the obvious inequalities arising from historical injustices. My point is simply that given an awareness of history, of all past wrongs that have led to an individual's current plight, a project of recognition that takes seriously the development of the flourishing self, embedded in history and society, must then redress these wrongs via reconciliation broadly defined.

2 W. Kymlicka, *Multicultural Citizenship*, Oxford University Press, New York 1995, p. 75.

3 N. Fraser, A. Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, Verso, London 2003, p. 10.

4 G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, engl. transl. by A. V. Miller, J. N. Findlay, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1979, §§ 178–184.

Thus, I argue that recognition theories need to embed some practice of restorative justice in order to be consistent with their egalitarian ideals. As mentioned earlier, Kymlicka's luck egalitarian multiculturalism already folds reconciliation into his theoretical structure: historical injustices become the first diagnosis and main ailment to treat via minority rights. Consequently, theories of recognition and multiculturalism that give due consideration to historical injustices necessitate the embedding of reconciliation (currently understood as a formal process enacted by the state), and resultant practices of restorative injustice may be taken as manifestations of recognition. The question then becomes: what structure of recognition theory do we have, given its old goals of freedom and autonomy for all, and newer consideration of accounting for reconciliation?

However, if the project of recognition cannot take off without proper reconciliation, I argue that recognition theorists are caught in a bind. Though reconciliation is both a prerequisite and expression of recognition, my thesis is that the structure of reconciliation potentially forecloses the possibilities of recognition, rendering them incompatible on a serious level. As mentioned, reconciliation here refers to a family of processes that acknowledge and make up for past wrongs. I focus on reconciliation in the form of an apology, and in so doing, follow in the footsteps of scholars such as Sarah Maddison and David Mellor et al.: "Reconciliation requires both an apology and forgiveness," so as to allow "disrupted or severed relationships to begin anew".⁵

My essay proceeds in three sections. In order to argue that reconciliation in the form of an apology will structurally, always seek to sublimate, I first derive some conditions for a proper apology by drawing upon accounts by Agnes Callard, Jacques Derrida and Paul Muldoon. Second, I apply these conditions to Indigenous-settler relations in Australia by considering whether a state-level public apology by the Parliament of Australia to Indigenous Australians in 2008 for the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families can meet these criteria and consider some inadequacies of a state apology that beckons Indigenous peoples' forgiveness. Third, I attempt to think through some alternatives to the current (Abrahamic) model of apology and forgiveness, but remain pessimistic. I conclude with considerations that a fatalistic logic of reconciliation can inform and thus

5 D. Mellor, D. Bretherton, and L. Firth, *Aboriginal and Non-Aboriginal Australia: The Dilemma of Apologies, Forgiveness and Reconciliation*, in "Peace and Conflict", 13, 1, 2007, pp. 11-12, <https://doi.org/10.1037/h0094022>.

shapes the project of recognition, signaling the need for a radical rethinking for a project of recognition now too narrow for its stipulated ambitions.

A caveat before I proceed: My argument goes on to stress the significance of the Indigenous point of view in reconciliation, but I acknowledge that Indigenous Australians “recall oppression and opportunity in different ways”.⁶ As a theoretical exploration of the apology, my paper cannot and does not purport to provide a full representation of the Indigenous response(s) to the apology. From an empirical perspective, it is then fair to say that my paper is a speculation about Indigenous responses to any reconciliation initiative, – ranging from support to skepticism (specifically, a strong proposal for internal self-determination) – on the part of the non-Indigenous.

1. *Conditions of a proper apology*

I now lay out four conditions necessary for a proper apology that can be applied to the Australian state’s apology for the Stolen Generations. The first condition of a proper apology as reconciliation is actually a pre-condition: a historical awareness of a wrongdoing. In her piece “The Reason to Be Angry Forever,” Agnes Callard defines the eternal anger argument as follows:

P1: My betrayal of you at t1 is your reason for being angry with me at t2.

P2: If it is true at t2 that I betrayed you at t1, then it will also be true at t3, t4, t5, and so on that I betrayed you at t1.

Conclusion: If you have a reason to be angry with me, you will have a reason to be angry with me forever.⁷

Unless a new reason directly resolves the wrong at t1 by eliminating it, the wronged has reason to remain eternally angry. In other words, the anger must be “*about* something practicable—something that *can* be changed”.⁸ If the wrong pertains to an unchangeable state of affairs, say murder, it seems the wronged (e.g. those from the same family, group, or identify

6 T. Rowse, *Indigenous Heterogeneity*, in “Australian Historical Studies”, 45, 3, 2014, p. 310, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1031461X.2014.946523>.

7 A. Callard, *The Reason to Be Angry Forever*, in *The Moral Psychology of Anger*, ed. by M. Cherry & O. Flanagan, *The moral psychology of anger*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham 2018, pp. 123-137; here p. 123.

8 *Ibid.*, p. 128.

with the murdered) would have a reason to be angry forever, because we currently have no means to revive the dead. With such a strict sense of issue resolution, a lot of anger can rightfully remain eternal, provided the wrongdoing at t1 continues to be acknowledged.

Callard assumes that anger, along with other emotions that reflect care, necessarily follow from a wrongdoing⁹. To elaborate, anger “is uniquely poised to apprehend [...] the *wrongness* [...] of some action”.¹⁰ I will not question Callard’s assumption.¹¹ Of greater relevance to us is how anger is an emotion felt individually, but that its resolution cannot be solved alone; anger can only be jointly resolved with the violator of the relationship.¹² Anger cannot be resolved alone is, as seen above, because the state of affairs was wrought by another party and if irreversible, cannot be resolved practically by any party. If the wronged remain concerned but the wrongdoer does not, the wronged have a reason, but also have no choice except, to remain eternally angry. In other words, any reconciliatory effort, including an apology, can only be made provided the occurrence of the wrongdoing remains relevant, or of concern to both the wronged and the wrongdoer. I call this first condition Historical Awareness.

The second condition for a proper apology is that it ought to be a product of what Callard calls a renewed co-valuation. To Callard, “[anger] devolves from a special kind of valuing: shared valuing”.¹³ Crucially, Callard equates wrongs that anger is adept at identifying, with “disvaluational significance” of the wrongdoer’s action. In other words, we only feel certain emotions that indicate care, such as anger, towards the wrongdoing because we have a prior relationship with the wrongdoer, who has committed an action (wrongdoing) that disvalued the relationship.¹⁴ Thus, anger must be resolved jointly, because it emerges in response to the wrongdoer’s vi-

9 *Ibid.*, p. 127.

10 *Ibid.*, p. 135.

11 I note that Callard’s use of anger is similar to, and indeed she cites, Amia Srinivasan’s (*Would Politics Be Better Off Without Anger?*, in “The Nation”, 30. November 2016) notion of righteous anger as indicative of a moral transgression (as opposed to disappointment that might indicate the unfulfillment of a supererogatory task) (A. Srinivasan, *The Aptness of Anger*, in “The Journal of Political Philosophy”, 26, 2, 2018, p. 123-144).

12 A. Callard, *The Reason to Be Angry Forever*, cit., pp. 134-35.

13 *Ibid.*, p. 130.

14 *Ibid.*, p. 131.

olation of a shared project of valuation that is the relationship. Call this second condition Renewed Co-valuation.

One way to resolve anger is to have it no longer be of concern. Renewed co-valuation need not lead to an apology, it can lead to an agreement to cease the relationship: we come to a shared feeling that the wrongdoing no longer matters.¹⁵ Extending this logic, one way to resolve anger is for both the wrongdoer and wronged's to forget about its occurrence.¹⁶ An apology as a type of relevant reparatory step, is first an acknowledgement of the wrong and thus the wronged's right to be angry with the wrongdoer. It is also a mode of renewed co-valuation, of joint problem resolution without eliminating the wrong at t1.

The third condition is that a proper (sincere) apology has to stem from contrition of the wrongdoer. The apology correlates the wronged's anger with the wrongdoer's contrition (the third condition), and anger and contrition are transformed into reconciliation.¹⁷ Here Callard's conception of a proper apology converges with Derrida's understanding of forgiveness: Comparing anger to a genuine question, and efforts to jointly re-value a relationship to a satisfactory answer, an apology is an answer that we as genuine askers cannot expect.¹⁸ To have an apology premeditated by the wronged person, and have it executed by the wrongdoer, would merely be satisfying and redressing a punishable wrong, i.e. a non-eternal anger; forgiveness becomes an economic enterprise where the apology can be calculated and made commensurate with the wrong.¹⁹ A structural offshoot of this requirement is that an apology cannot be anticipated and thus, neces-

15 *Ibid.*, p. 134.

16 I concede that there seems to be something unsatisfactory about resolving anger by forgetting about the wrongdoing. I see two compromises here: either we tolerate the notion of an unsatisfactory but proper form of resolution via forgetting / historical amnesia, which is the route I am picking, or we distinguish between the wrong committed and the anger felt by the wronged. The latter seems plausible, but it quickly runs into limits; recall anger, especially righteous anger, is supposed to be an appropriate tool to indicate a wrong (moral transgression, on Amia Srinivasan's terms). The interlocuter thus cannot simultaneously hold that anger is apt in identifying wrongs, while accommodating cases of apt anger without a relevant wrong.

17 A. Callard, *The Reason to Be Angry Forever*, cit., p. 134.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 132-133.

19 J. Derrida, *On Forgiveness*, in Id., *On Cosmopolitanism and Forgiveness*, Routledge, London and New York 2005, pp. 34-35; A. Callard, *The Reason to Be Angry Forever*, cit., pp. 132-133.

sarily puts the wronged in a position of dependence and neediness towards the wrongdoer.²⁰ Because the wronged cannot anticipate when the apology (for Derrida) or the contrite effort to re-covaluate the relationship (for Callard) will occur, it becomes an experience of aporia. I call this third condition: Contrition.

The fourth and final condition is that the apology should come from the wrongdoer, but forgiveness cannot come from the same entity. Call this fourth condition Apology-dichotomy. Across thinkers like Callard, Arendt and Derrida, the assumed model of apology-forgiveness is that the wrongdoer apologises and the wronged forgives.²¹ After all, anger arises from a wrong that could only be inflicted by another party with whom we are already in a relation of joint valuation with. Though it is possible to inflict a wrong and thus disvalue one's relation with oneself, I am particularly interested in the paradigmatic form of apologies, which do not involve self-apologies and thus, self-forgiveness. Thus, we, along with the aforementioned thinkers, assume the default model of one entity offering the apology, and another entity accepting the apology as a sign of forgiveness.

20 A. Callard, *The Reason to Be Angry Forever*, cit., p. 133.

21 I take apology and forgiveness to be two sides of the same coin. I acknowledge that there may be instances where apologies are made without the intention to receive forgiveness, and of forgiveness doled out without a prior apology. I am more concerned with the former than latter. Some Holocaust survivors who forgive the general figure of Nazi doctors long past are examples of the latter. Arendt defines forgiveness as "the undoing of what was done" and thus limits forgiveness to what can be punished (*The Human Condition*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1958, p. 241). Strictly speaking then, Arendt might dismiss the possibility of forgiveness even in those cases; if the Nazi doctors are out at large or dead, unable to be trialed, then perhaps the forgiveness of some survivors will fail to qualify as valid under Arendt's conditions. On the contrary, Derrida applies forgiveness to precisely that which Arendt deems unforgivable (*On Forgiveness*, cit., pp. 32-37). Thus, despite their intractable disagreement on what forgiveness is, they share a common definition of what is unforgivable. I believe, for my purposes within the scope of this essay, that I do not need to position myself between Arendt and Derrida or to provide a technical definition of forgiveness. I take forgiveness in a general way, as that status granted by the wronged following a wrongdoer's apology. But in my analysis of the apology, I will draw on the notion of the unforgivable, that which Arendt's forgiveness does not apply to, and what Derrida's pure forgiveness forgives.

2. The inadequacies of the state apology

In this section, I analyse the nature of a state-issued apology based on the Parliament of Australia's 2008 public apology to the Indigenous Australians, and in particular, the Stolen Generations. I acknowledge here that two apologies were given to the Indigenous Australians, one by Labor Prime Minister Kevin Rudd on behalf of the Parliament of Australia, and another by Liberal Leader of Opposition Dr Brendan Nelson. I focus on the first of two apologies, primarily because it is debatable whether the content of Dr Nelson's apology even qualifies as an apology for the forced removal of Indigenous children from their families. There was significant controversy regarding Dr Nelson's apology, and a plausible interpretation is that the Leader of Opposition was apologizing for insufficient policing of Aboriginal children and families. My paper adheres to the general consensus that past government policies that culminated in the forced removal of Indigenous children from families between approximately 1905 and 1967 have led to economic and existential harm across multiple generations of Indigenous Australians. Secondly, my goal here is to study what appears to be a better trajectory towards proper recognition as attainment of freedom for all, premised on an acknowledgement of wrongs, to reveal how reconciliation-as-apology can still undercut recognition. Dr Nelson's apology arguably undercuts recognition in ways more blatant than hitherto undertheorized internal contradictions of a state apology, making it a less fruitful case study for the scope of my study.

My aim in this section is twofold; to discern on one hand, problems pertaining to the state in fulfilling the proper conditions for an apology, and on the other, potential inadequacies of the model of an apology itself in achieving reconciliation. My argument is that a sense of narcissistic shame that underpins (at least the Australian nation-state) makes it difficult for a state to fulfill all four criteria, constituting a low chance for proper reconciliation via an apology. And if it is unlikely that a state can ever provide a proper apology as a form of reconciliation, it seems highly problematic for the project of recognition that currently, similarly, depends on the nation-state to dole out recognition.

Analysing the reconciliation process in Australia whose major turning point was the Federal Parliamentary Apology to the 'Stolen Generations' in 2008, Paul Muldoon noted how:

by characterizing it as the moment in which Australia ‘began anew’, cleansed of the stain upon its soul, Rudd effectively bypassed the moment of reception altogether. Rhetorically, if not really, the performance of the Apology became a transcendent moment, turning Australia instantaneously, as it were, into a ‘fully united and fully reconciled people’ (Rudd, 2008).²²

The apology seems to have accomplished, in one fell swoop, three things. First, past injustices are deemed to have been addressed (even if their effects have not). Second, a new chapter in Australian Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations has been claimed. Third, implied is a sense of morality, even moral superiority, of the government’s ability to diagnose a wrong they committed and (begin to) recompense for it. These three effects were accomplished at the expense of foreclosing “the possibility of its own deferral or rejection” by the aboriginal people.²³ The combined effect of these three upshots seems to be to reinstate power asymmetry between the state and the minority Indigenous peoples.

Pertaining to Contrition, the case of Australia has drawn out the fine line between narcissism and contrition *en route* to true atonement; specifically, that proper reconciliation might be inclined to tip in favor of the narcissism. Povinelli has suggested that there is possibility for an apology to be made out of contrition, for Australians “are truly sorry when history once again reveals that liberalism’s goodwill has been perverted”.²⁴ Yet, this trace of contrition is intermingled with what Muldoon might label narcissistic wounds: “[Australians] do not feel good when they feel responsible for critical social conflict, pain, or trauma”.²⁵ Muldoon’s wariness of narcissism refers to the suspicion that the motivation behind the apology is to alleviate the colonizer’s shame, to overcome the gaping wound between their ego and ego-ideal, and pursue narcissistic fantasies of wholeness and innocence.²⁶

A key upshot of Muldoon’s explicit condemnation of the apology as motivated by narcissism, is that it turns out to be regressive against the goal of correcting for historical injustices. The apology, in its claiming of moral superiority, then seems not to be meant for the Indigenous Austral-

22 P. Muldoon, *A Reconciliation Most Desirable: Shame, Narcissism, Justice and Apology*, in “International Political Science Review”, 38, 2, 2017, pp. 213-26.

23 *Ibid.*

24 E. A. Povinelli, J. Frow, and M. Morris, *The Cunning of Recognition: A Reply to John Frow and Meaghan Morris*, in “Critical Inquiry”, 25, 3, 2007, p. 637.

25 *Ibid.*

26 Cf. P. Muldoon, *A Reconciliation Most Desirable*, cit.

ians but more for the healing of ‘other’ Australians’ narcissistic wounds. The regression steps in because the (re)establishment of the wrongdoer’s moral superiority sabotages efforts towards a genuine atonement that truly grasps the magnitude of the injustices against the Stolen Generations.²⁷ In short, the effect of the apology then seems to be directed to the healing of the settler-colonial state’s self-understanding rather than genuine, productive atonement for the misdeed that wounded the state’s narcissism, where the genuine atonement entails earnest dialogue in the form of the second condition of joint re-valuation, as elaborated later.

This fine line between narcissism and Contrition makes it hard for states, including Australia, to even fulfil the precondition for an apology: the acknowledgement of a wrongdoing that accounts for a form of eternal anger (usually of the minority groups), and the commitment to correct a nation’s history.²⁸ Representation of now widely accepted though still contentious events of the doctrine of terra nullius, massacres along the frontier and forcible removing of ‘half-caste’ children in the 60s, was widely debated in the history wars from the 70s to 90s. There was a worry that Australia’s history was being re-written to a point where “Australians should apologise for most of it”.²⁹ Nevertheless, with the benefit of hindsight, we know history has now revealed a wrongdoing at tl of live concern to the wronged, an unpunishable wrong (for the actual wrongdoers are no longer present) and so an eternal anger, “the unforgivable [...] that *calls* for forgiveness”.³⁰

The underlying narcissism of the state, now wounded upon being forced aware of their past wrongdoings, also complicates the fulfillment of the second criterion of a joint effort to arrive at a renewed co-valuation, supposedly undertaken between the state and the wronged. Interestingly, Australia has a decades-long and still-live debate on matters of reconciliation and leading up to the apology. Where the apology started as the pre-requisite to recognition, –“without shame there could be no justice” – the apology came to be overdetermined after much pushback from conservative politicians.³¹ It stood for making up of the wrongdoing, a new foundation for Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations, and an establishment of the state’s moral superi-

27 *Ibid.*

28 P. Muldoon, *Forget Recognition?*, in “Arena”, 2018, p. 26.

29 *Id.*, *A Reconciliation Most Desirable*, cit., p. 215.

30 A. Callard, *The Reason to Be Angry Forever*, cit., pp. 123-137; Derrida, *On Forgiveness*, cit., p. 32; P. Muldoon, *A Reconciliation Most Desirable*, cit.

31 P. Muldoon, *A Reconciliation Most Desirable*, cit., p. 216

ority: “no longer guilty through and through, but already another, and better than the guilty one”.³² It reduced righteously eternal anger to an economy of commensurable forgiveness and misgivings, where an apology was implied to be sufficient in redressing the wrong. Hence, Muldoon also suggested that an apology, even if delivered sincerely, might not suffice: “‘Sorry We Killed You’, encapsulates this problem with perfect economy”.³³ Indeed, it has been argued that the Apology has been inept at “addressing the broader structural inequalities experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in contemporary Australia and their grounding in a historical experience of conflict,” and criticised for its too-narrow scope that focused only on the “Stolen Generations” out of the totality of wrongdoings.³⁴

Perhaps the biggest gap between a state and a proper apology is the fourth criterion of Apology-dichotomy, that the state ought to have the wronged (Indigenous peoples for Australia) accept the apology as a show of forgiveness. To do so would require, as hinted by Callard’s insights that anger indicates an existing relationship and co-valuation is premised on some level of equality between the two parties, the raising in status, at least symbolically as a “people,” to a level that could withhold forgiveness from the settler state. Assuming the aforementioned heterogeneity of Indigenous voices that casts doubt on the validity of organised representation, arguably no such entity currently exists in Australia. The Australian federal government recently rejected a proposal to form a “Makarrata committee” to oversee matters of reconciliation.³⁵ The problem, as Muldoon foregrounded, is “the risk of embedding a ‘First Nations Voice’ in the Constitution [such] that ‘the Parliament may have no recourse to abolish or replace it’”.³⁶ In the policed absence of an entity with the constitutional clout to grant or withhold forgiveness, it seems only pragmatic that the settler state do away with reciprocal recognition in the form of reconciliation.

Given the existence of reconciliation committees at various points in history, such as in South Africa, I want to consider such a hypothetical in an attempt to discern the structural efficacy of an apology as reconciliation. I want to consider what happens if all four conditions are fulfilled: if there is acknowledgement of the settler state’s wrong, if Contrition rather than

32 J. Derrida, *On Forgiveness*, cit., p. 35.

33 P. Muldoon, *A Reconciliation Most Desirable*, cit., p. 224

34 A. Little, *The Politics of Makarrata*, cit., p. 33.

35 Cf. *Ibid.*, p. 34-48.

36 P. Muldoon, *Forget Recognition?*, cit., p. 27.

narcissism motivates an apology, if the apology is reached as a project of joint re-valuation, and if Indigenous Australians are in a position to refuse the apology. Ultimately, I want to consider if reconciliation and recognition are structurally compatible projects.

One reason why reconciliation-via-apology and recognition may be incompatible lies in how the party that apologises necessarily claims higher moral ground. The difficulty of the third condition of Contrition then, is that it is hard to distinguish from narcissism; both Contrition and narcissism lead to the settler state's ability to claim moral superiority. This higher ground can be read as an unfair advantage where it was motivated by narcissism, or a proper outcome if motivated by Contrition. Either way, I will argue the settler state's ability to claim higher moral ground disadvantages the Indigenous Australians, for they are left with no choice but to eventually accept the apology. The disadvantage can be seen in purely rhetorical terms; when forgiveness is withheld by Indigenous Australians, the situation reverses: "[the] one who confessed sees himself repulsed and sees the other as in the wrong".³⁷ But I argue that the disadvantage is not just on a rhetorical level, but a deeply structural one, for Indigenous Australians find themselves locked into the initiation of the process of the apology, i.e. Renewed Co-valuation.

The tragic irony about the relationship between reconciliation and recognition is that when both projects are properly conducted, i.e. some basic level of equality between Indigenous and other Australians so that Renewed Co-valuation takes place and Apology-dichotomy is granted, the two parties must tend towards sublation.³⁸ In other words, after fulfilling the second condition of Renewed Co-valuation via an apology, the Apology-dichotomy becomes foreclosing: there is only one way to end the story between the one who apologises and the forgiver, and that is reconciliation via acceptance of the apology by the forgiver. If the wrongdoer extends and maintains an apology, it is a sign that the wrongdoer values "the goods of our relationship"; if the wronged re-

37 G.W.F. Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, cit., § 667.

38 I acknowledge that my argument at this point of the paper becomes very similar to the argument Glen Coulthard puts forward in *Red Skin, White Masks* (University of Minnesota Press, Minnesota 2014), notably that the previously colonized peoples will always be disadvantaged in the project of recognition, when recognition is doled out by the settler colonial state.

jects the apology, then the terms of the apology are not jointly agreed.³⁹ One way to explain the necessary sublation is that the Indigenous peoples and other Australians find themselves irreversibly locked into a relation of mutual dependence. Callard's insight is that anger is only possible on the precondition that there exists a prior relationship with its own norms. On Callard's terms, the Indigenous peoples are angry because of a moral violation the *Other Australians* committed against them; the Indigenous peoples apprehended the other Australians' misvaluation of their shared goods or relation. Anger manifests as the other Australians' and the settler state's defection from this relation, where the shared valuation or project between Indigenous and other Australians can be thought of as joint negotiation of the terms and possibility of co-habitation on the same land. Renewed Co-valuation as resolution of wrongdoing is thus predicated on an equality of consciousness or selfsameness: "the two consciousnesses recognize the authority of the other to act, to judge, and to forgive".⁴⁰

Of course, as I argued above, on Callard's terms, mere Renewed Co-valuation does not have to deterministically lead to a reconciled relation or sublated entity; both parties can jointly agree to dissolve the relation. What I am arguing here is the particular quirk of the apology (and its presupposed confession) that has a foreclosing structure. In its requirement of a forgiver, and in the wronged party's dependence on the wrongdoer to jointly resolve the anger, Indigenous Australians find themselves already in the midst of a process of sublation set in motions not just by reconciliation-via-apology, but arguably since colonization first occurred and relations between the two groups first began. Here then, we see a dovetail between Callard's and Muldoon's logics of reconciliation. Muldoon posits that shame, the driving emotion behind the settler-colonial state's narcissistic apology, is "likely [...] to stimulate efforts to heal the self," to reconcile the ego and ego-ideal, and which predicts that reconciliation via apology will reach closer towards unity or sublation—echoing Hegel's prediction of recognition as absolute

39 A. Callard, *The Reason to Be Angry Forever*, cit., p. 134.

40 M. Farneth, *Hegel's Sacramental Politics: Confession, Forgiveness, and Absolute Spirit*, in "Journal of Religion", 95, 2, 2015, § 195.

spirit—than any other outcome.⁴¹ The conclusion for reconciliation via an apology is thus a predetermined, if not then limited, one.⁴²

To conclude this section briefly, I am pessimistic that state-apologies will be able to simultaneously fulfil all four criteria for a proper apology appropriate for the project of reconciliation. Whether it is an understandable (but perhaps unjustifiable) narcissism and shame that plagues the well-intentioned state, or the conservative considerations for bureaucratic (im)balance of power, the chances of a proper apology, arrived at through fair deliberation and just interventions from the Indigenous peoples, does not seem likely. On the contrary, the state, driven by the aforementioned motivations, will act in ways that regulate existing imbalanced power dynamics; reconciliation as apology seems to inevitably play out in favour of the state, where sublation of Indigenous peoples becomes morally justified. If historical injustices require non-sublation, it is unclear how the state and the projects of reconciliation and recognition can ever suffice. Yet, the project of recognition and point of reconciliation is to correct for existing injustices. The next section thus considers the prospects of other forms of reconciliation besides the apology.

3. Alternatives to an apology?

As mentioned in sections one and two, reconciliation need not take the form of an apology. In this section, I provide hypotheticals that admitted-

41 P. Muldoon, *A Reconciliation Most Desirable: Shame, Narcissism, Justice and Apology*, cit., p. 220.

42 Hegel makes a similar argument in chapter 6 of the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, explicating a situation of two antagonists, the judging consciousness and wicked consciousness that finally reconcile through a public confession after many rounds of conflicts. The wicked consciousness confesses his mis-action, acted upon his own partial interest and that the judging consciousness pointed out, and can accord himself the status of “beautiful soul.” The judging consciousness that chooses not to accept the confession, does so at the cost of “the highest indignation of the spirit” from the perspective of the other (*Phenomenology*, §667). Crucially for us, Hegel’s judgement dovetails with that of Muldoon, arguing that the two consciousnesses will ultimately reconcile, with the judging consciousness sublated into the wicked consciousness, the latter having already confessed and is able to present itself as “universal” (§ 670). An upshot we can take away from Hegel is that the recipient of the apology or confession can only accept it, because it has already “intuit[ed] itself in others” and will only reach full knowledge of itself as absolute spirit, as a sublated other (§ 667).

ly do not qualify as substantial alternatives, and seek only to give a brief overview of potential obstacles to and problems of adopting alternatives to an apology in seeking reconciliation. I first discuss the possible obstacle of the limits of cultural tolerance, especially in the cross-cultural platform that reconciliation seeks/has to be, against the context of an increasingly Christian world. I then discuss the prospects of less radical variations of current models of apology, highlighting the main worry of slipping into superficial and awkward rituals.

Forgiveness is necessarily culturally specific, yet there may be an increasing trend towards a broad homogenization that might cause resistance towards radically different forms of forgiveness.⁴³ Derrida observes how “[in] all the scenes of repentance, confession, forgiveness, or apology which have multiplied on the geopolitical scene since the last war, [...] they, NQ] do this in an Abrahamic language,” even in contexts that were not traditionally so.⁴⁴ To Derrida, the transformation of the model or language of forgiveness towards a convergence in the Christian/Judaist/Islamic tradition is but one manifestation of what he calls “*globalatinisation*,” globalisation but with the emphasis on “the effect of Roman Christianity which today overdetermines all language of law, of politics, and even the interpretation of what is called the ‘return of the religious’”.⁴⁵

If Derrida is right, then this increasingly Abrahamic backdrop might find the Makarrata strange, incommensurable, and intolerable. The Makarrata has been nominated by a convention of Indigenous representatives as the terms on which reconciliation should take place. A Yolngu word that translates in English to treaty, non-Indigenous understandings of Makarrata perceive it “as a merely benign dimension of processes of reconciliation or recognition”.⁴⁶ Yet, in Indigenous understandings, there is a connotation of physical hurt in this process of reconciliation: “Makarrata literally means a spear penetrating, usually the thigh, of a person that has done wrong [...] to maim them, to settle them down, to calm them”.⁴⁷ Though many Indigenous representatives and Indigenous studies scholars maintain that “the concept of Makarrata

43 J. Derrida, *On Forgiveness*, cit., p. 28.

44 *Ibid.*

45 *Ibid.*, pp. 28, 32.

46 A. Little, *The Politics of Makarrata: Understanding Indigenous–Settler Relations in Australia*, cit., p. 42.

47 *Ibid.*

was one that could do important work for different groups for a variety of reasons,” there remains much ambiguity and confusion even amongst the Senate about what the word means.⁴⁸ This problem of whether a form of reconciliation that involves physical hurt, as opposed to the benign Abrahamic model, will be tolerated and even passed again, can only remain open in this paper.

If we extend the vein of conducting reconciliation on the terms of those who have been wronged, at least in the case of Australia and the popular proposal for the Makarrata, the anthropological question of how alternative forms (rituals) of reconciliation might be carried out arises. Numerous frictions abound, but I will focus on three main types: the worry of tokenism from non-Indigenous peoples, internal disagreements within Indigenous peoples, and perhaps most relevant here is the awkwardness of fit across the two groups. Regarding rituals of acknowledgement of country and welcome, sensitive, anti-racist members of non-Indigenous society find themselves caught between the desire to make “genuine contribution to change in attitudes and conduct” and risk of being “seen as token and hypocritical – a salve of conscience”.⁴⁹ Even within Indigenous communities, there are numerous internal divisions, from the distinction between “Aboriginal “high culture” of Dreaming and territoriality as opposed to cultural conduct of everyday life,” to qualms over authenticity and legitimacy that are usually only made between Indigenous peoples.⁵⁰ And thirdly is the issue of awkwardness of force-fitting, or belatedly re-introducing, “traditional” rituals onto events “from non-Indigenous concerns and forms of organization”.⁵¹ To continue the example of welcome rituals, the awkwardness arises when the non-Indigenous persons turn out to be the ones ‘at home’ in the space of the university or conference room while the Indigenous person ‘welcoming’ the ‘guests’ are specially invited to perform within an allotted slot. Transposing these considerations of traditional but discontinuous, modern but repentant relations onto the issue of reconciliation will probably amass their own specific set of problems on top of the ones already laid out here.

48 *Ibid.*, p. 43.

49 F. Merlan, *Recent Rituals of Indigenous Recognition in Australia: Welcome to Country*, in “American Anthropologist”, 116, 2, 2014, p. 305.

50 *Ibid.*

51 *Ibid.*

Conclusion

The premise of my inquiry is that the project of recognition cannot take off without proper reconciliation. Yet, I have argued rather pessimistically that reconciliation in the form of an apology from the state to the wronged is improper and will be unlikely to assume a proper form, and listed some difficulties that make the prospect of successful, alternative forms of reconciliation slimmer still. Furthermore, if recognition requires that the possibilities of prescriptions remain open, then my diagnoses of reconciliation as it currently stands (in Australia) that goes in the direction of further entrenchment of asymmetrical power and status between the settler-colonial state and Indigenous peoples make the two projects seem incompatible. Nevertheless, a live debate represents a constant working through, even if the process is not a happy one, and an apology is but a first step.

However, if we are right that the nature of reconciliatory efforts inevitably leads to a sublation of the minority in the majority state group, then contrary to what I have argued, reconciliation and recognition are actually highly compatible. The pivot lies in our understanding of the structure of recognition, specifically, whether it is inherently sublatory too. Beneath the alleged differences concerning notions of justice between Fraser's and Honneth's models of recognition – Fraser's self-alleged procedural justice and Honneth's self-avowed substantive justice – is how even the thinnest notion of justice calls for two sides – the recognized and the recogniser; here, the colonised and their colonizer(s) – to enter a relationship of negotiation or consent.⁵²

52 Fraser understands her project to be undergirded by a procedural form of justice she terms participatory parity. Because claims to redistribution-and-recognition are adjudicated through “democratic processes of public debate,” participatory parity regulates democratic discussion of “the good” via “social arrangements that permit all (adult) members of society to interact with one another as peers” (N. Fraser and A. Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition?*, cit., pp. 36, 43). Fraser understands her proposal's adherence to procedural justice to stand apart from Honneth's self-avowedly thicker, substantive justice that undergirds his project of recognition. Both agree that substantive liberals prescribe a notion of the good life and remain in the realm of the ethical. But here I side with Honneth: Fraser's notion of participatory parity is closer to Honneth's substantive justice than she argues, because even procedural liberalism, including participatory parity, necessarily harbours some notion of the ethical; it cannot “be filled out without the help of ethical considerations” (A. Honneth, *Recognition and Justice: Outline of a Plural Theory of Justice*, in “Acta Sociologica”, 47, 4, 2004, pp. 351-364, here p. 357).

This observation that recognition entails an ushering into an ethical relationship is not new.⁵³

What I hope to have shown in my essay is that the structure of reconciliation—its tendency towards unity or sublation—accompanied by its being both precondition and manifestation of recognition, implies that recognition is much narrower than liberal theorists might have thought. Indeed, even Muldoon, citing postcolonial theorist Glen Coulthard, remarked in 2018 about the possibility of Australian Indigenous peoples “opting out of the late-colonial system of rule through recognition”.⁵⁴ Unfortunately, if reconciliation tends towards sublation, there seems to be a fundamental impasse between the inherent unificatory logic of an apology/forgiveness and the extreme possibility of secession. In short, I hope to have demonstrated the necessity of a rethinking of recognition.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Joel Chow Ken Q for his mentorship and inimitable guidance throughout this project. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my two anonymous reviewers, Tim Rowse, Fiona Jenkins, and Sabina Bremner for their suggestions and perceptive comments that have shaped this paper. All remaining shortcomings within this study are my responsibility.

53 J. Maclure, *The Politics of Recognition at an Impasse ? Identity Politics and Democratic Citizenship*, in “Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue Canadienne de Science Politique”, 36, 1, 2003, pp. 3-21; E. Renault, *What Is the Use of the Notion of the Struggle of Recognition?*, in “Revista de Ciencia Política”, 27, 2, 2007, pp. 195-206.

54 P. Muldoon, *Forget Recognition?*, cit., p. 27.