

Introduction

This article offers a new perspective on the relation between public historical knowledge and political apology. Rather than seeing state acknowledgements of wrongdoing as moments of finality that come once the record is complete, or that should themselves serve somehow to complete the record, we analyze political apologies *within* broader processes of civic reckoning with historical injustice. We focus on two apologies in Canada that occurred amidst ongoing struggle and inquiry. In these two cases, apologies that had already been given appeared later to be undermined by an expansion in public knowledge; new historical findings and interpretations emphasized dimensions of causal and political responsibility ignored in the earlier regretful admissions. However, rather than taking as problematic what might seem an unfortunate relation between public knowledge and apology, we instead suggest that our cases illuminate a key reality: political apologies interact dynamically with public historical knowledge—the contemporary practices, discourses, and struggles that shape our understandings of the past—in ways that can retrospectively highlight their own inadequacy and incompleteness. They are thus better understood as moments within iterative processes of social memory and civic learning than as their summative ends.

A growing literature analyzes apologies in varying contexts: interpersonal, collective, professional, corporate, and legal (e.g. Koehn 2013; Lazare 2005; Smith 2008 & 2014; Tavuchis 1991). Our two cases—the Canadian government’s 2008 apology for forcing Indigenous children into residential schooling and the 2013 apology by the City of Vancouver for its complicity with the uprooting and

internment of Japanese Canadians during the 1940s—exemplify the use of apology by official representatives to address histories of human and civil rights violations by states (Barkan and Karn 2006; Gibney et al. 2007; Mihai and Thaler 2014).

Although there is disagreement in the literature, a sincere, authentic, or categorical *political* apology (Bagdonas 2018; James 2007; Smith 2008) is seen generally as one that accepts causal responsibility for wrongdoing, that identifies that wrongdoing in detail, and that takes moral responsibility for it, typically with undertakings of non-repetition, reform, or reparation. Robust political apologies are also expected to perform this responsibility-taking with dignity and ceremony (Cels 2015).

Because political apologies are oriented towards addressing problems of relation, membership, and legitimacy in complex collectives (Cunningham 2014; Nobles 2008; Winter 2015), questions of fact and narrative as they pertain to these problems are particularly important (James 2018; Tavuchis 1991). We need to know: what were the wrongs? Who suffered them? Who or what entities committed them? What moral standards were transgressed? What are the applicable lessons for the future?

There is good reason to believe that political apologies face significant obstacles in answering these key questions. The difficulties extend beyond the reality that the motives for political apology “are inevitably mixed, including strategic as well as principled concerns” (MacLachlan 2014, 19). As philosopher Nick Smith (2014) explains, even good-faith actors stand in a fraught relationship with the basic knowledge necessary to robust political apology: “Harms caused by collectives such as nations can present particularly challenging factual

investigations” (33). The size and organizational complexity of states confound efforts to attribute clearly cause and intention and thus to name adequately the wrongs. Massive state archives are daunting in their extent, yet almost inevitably omit key information and perspectives, leaving deficits that may become intractable with the passage of time.

In addition to complex organization, vast records, and chronological distance, grappling with major injustice entails further difficulties of understanding and interpretation. A basic premise of the historical discipline, after all, is that the past is constantly reinterpreted in the light of new or previously ignored findings and perspectives; as Smith notes “History . . . can be temporary” (34). In cultural critic Michael Rothberg’s (2009) words, “memory is a contemporary phenomenon, something that, while concerned with the past, happens in the present” (3-4). As accounts of fact and endeavours of interpretation, political apologies thus seem almost uniquely bedevilled in their tasks (Mihai and Thaler 2014); analysts may despair at the “daunting range of issues” (Smith 2008, 157) involved.

The literature on transitional justice proposes one possible solution. Concerned with the measures and processes used to transform abusive regimes at junctures of significant change (Teitel 2000), transitional justice scholars tend to see formal processes of official inquiry as prerequisites of good apologetic practice. For example, a leading expert in the field, law scholar Ruti Teitel (2006), posits as the gold standard the so-called “transitional apology.” A transitional apology comes only after there has been an official governmental investigation, such as a truth commission, into the injustices. Standing upon and in a sense emanating from the

official knowledge created by the investigation, the transitional apology morally reorients the polity by stamping the results of prior, state-sanctioned inquiry with the seal of penitent executive approval. Political scientist and transitional justice expert Robert Rotberg (2006) agrees, arguing that the authoritative knowledge and investigative detail bequeathed by truth commissions provide “unimpeachable grounds” (39) for apologies that promote accountability and change.

The transitional justice literature has been preoccupied with the problem of peace-building in the fragile aftermath of authoritarianism (e.g. Hayner 2010; but cf. Winter 2014). Indeed, some transitional justice experts see apologies as potentially useful mechanisms for helping to “close the books” (Elster 2004) on explosive pasts: as tools, that is, with which “to mark a before and after ... a symbolic turning point” (Carranza et al. 2015, 4). Yet when democratic probing is unlikely to fuel violence, the timing and sequencing of political apologies may be less constrained; in established democracies, “a good political apology is likely to be only part of a larger remedial process containing multiple opportunities for restorative engagement” (Winter 2015, 18). In these more stable contexts, the lengthy delays caused by official inquiries may in fact make the transitional justice sequencing normatively undesirable. The requirement of full and official knowledge of wrongdoing prior to an apology can deny aging survivors the long overdue sense of public acknowledgment and respect that they deserve (Murphy 2011).

Moving to broader arguments about democratic politics, we can glean from the literature on what is known as “agonistic” democracy further difficulties with the transitional justice sequencing of official inquiry-then-apology. Emphasizing

“contingency ... plurality,” (Bell 2008, 153), and the positivity of difference, agonistic democratic theorists seek maximal opportunities for questioning, dissent, and ongoing negotiation (see esp. Tully 2008). When it comes specifically to the politics of historical justice, they demand “reconciliation processes [that] open up ... space[s] of contestation and disagreement” (Muldoon and Schaap 2012, 184), not prescribed processes and timelines that tend toward closure. Some agonistic democrats even worry that the very idea of political apology is embedded in “a vision of reconciliation as communitarian social harmony” that aims to silence “the writhing conflict of the past” (Hirsch 2012, 1-2).

We have seen thus far that political apologies raise tough problems of interpretation and knowledge; misleading or inadequately informed apologies may contribute negatively to the processes of inter-group understanding and negotiation they are meant to help (Nobles 2008; Cunningham 2014). But we have also seen that the transitional justice solution—sequencing political apologies so that they follow conclusive processes of official inquiry—runs into difficulties, too; it can deny the healing needs of survivors while running counter to values of democratic openness. This article addresses these concerns by proposing a more realistic understanding of what we call the impermanence of political apologies. This understanding emerges from a close analysis of two political apologies whose adequacy was called starkly into question by subsequent changes in public historical knowledge. Exploring key problems of fact, interpretation, and timing in our two cases, we show that even informationally or interpretively problematic political apologies can still support deeper and longer-run processes of civic

reckoning. They can do so, we argue, by contributing to dynamics of democratic probing that put the apology's supposedly authoritative account under pressure. Paradoxically, then, apologies may do some of their most vital work when they help to undermine themselves.

Before developing this analysis in more detail, we summarize our two cases and our conclusions about them. In 2008, Prime Minister Stephen Harper apologized for Canada's past policy of forcing Native children to attend residential schools. The policy was premised on the supposed inferiority of Indigenous peoples, whom the schools were designed coercively to assimilate. The 2008 apology took place when Canada's Indian Residential Schools Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2008-15) had just begun its inquiries. Seven years later, when the commission reported, it drew upon thousands of statements from residential school survivors, archival research, scholarly literatures, and its own prior engagement with Indigenous communities to situate Canada's residential schools policy as part of a larger colonial project of cultural genocide. But the 2008 apology had said nothing about genocide, had made no reference to colonialism, and had instead presented the residential schools as products of religious prejudice and cultural disrespect.

In 2013, the City of Vancouver apologized for its complicity and inaction in the 1940s, when Canadians of Japanese descent, including many in the city, were uprooted and interned, dispossessed, and deported, measures which, although undertaken in the name of national security, made no one safer. Coming after predecessor apologies, first from the Canadian federal government in 1988, and

later from the province of British Columbia in 2012, the Vancouver statement was not a watershed political moment. But Vancouver had been a significant actor in the dispossession of Japanese Canadians; subsequent to the apology, a community-engaged research project revealed that city leaders, staff, and resources had played a driving role in the forced sale of Japanese-Canadian-owned property—a role about which the Vancouver apology had been utterly silent. In each of our two cases therefore, the robustness of apology appeared to diminish in the fresh light of continued inquiry.

Rather than seeing these as examples of either bad timing or of the fundamental flaws of political apology, we propose a different reading. Taken together, the cases illustrate two different ways in which knowledge considerations can become retrospectively operative in political apology. In the residential schools case, the official apologetic account came under pressure from the increased prominence and authority of a broader reinterpretation of the meaning and significance of residential schooling. In the Vancouver case, new research unearthed details that drew into question the factual adequacy of the original apology. We argue that these developments point to the realities and complex potentials of political apology, rather than to a problem to be solved. Political apologies are subject to the ongoing pressure of new facts and new interpretive perspectives, pressures which entangle them in complex historico-political processes and that inhibit their ability to effect closure. Indeed, we argue that political apologies have considerable potential to contribute to these pressures and hence to undermine their own finality. We develop this argument by situating our two cases in their

respective contexts of knowledge production before exploring the implications of our approach for conceptualizing more broadly the place of political apologies in processes of historical justice.

Residential Schools, Canada's 2008 Apology, and the 2008-15 Truth and Reconciliation Commission

Over the course of the twentieth century, Canada's residential schools policy (the last school closed in 1996) separated, often forcibly and for years at a time, over 150,000 children from their families (TRC 2015; Miller 1996; Milloy 1999).¹ The schools instructed students that their communities and life-ways were inferior, prevented them from speaking their languages and practicing their spiritualities and cultures, and exposed them to disease-ridden environments with rampant levels of physical and sexual abuse. Although the residential schools were run by Canada's major Christian denominations, they were mandated, funded, and regulated by the federal government. Long before the 2008 establishment of the TRC, expert reports and survivor narratives (Assembly of First Nations 1994; Claes and Clifton 1998) had indicated that the schools were responsible for a range of intergenerational problems, including family dysfunction, community conflict, poor health, and over-incarceration.

The federal government first addressed residential schooling in response to the 1996 report of the Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples (RCAP). RCAP was convened to address mounting Indigenous frustration with Canada's failure to respect Aboriginal rights, treaties, and lands, a frustration symbolized in the

¹ This and the following two paragraphs draw on James (2018).

summer of 1990 by the armed standoff between the Canadian military and Kanien'kéha:ka (Mohawk) warriors at Oka, Quebec, which had been prompted by that town's decision to build a golf course on an unceded burial ground (Coulthard 2014; Simpson and Ladner 2010). RCAP's core recommendation (Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples 1996) was for Canada to commit to a transformative program of nation-to-nation relations, land restitution, and sovereignty-sharing. It also provided a significant research report (chapter 10 in *ibid*) on residential schools and called in its recommendations for an official residential schools inquiry and apology. Although Ottawa ignored RCAP's core recommendations on sovereignty and land, it elected to address the matter of residential schooling, which the activism of former students had begun to make a topic of heightened public and media attention.

Canada's response to RCAP was a document called *Gathering Strength* (Canada 2000); its centrepiece was a "Statement of Reconciliation" issued by then Aboriginal Affairs minister, Jane Stewart. The Statement apologized directly for the "tragedy of physical and sexual abuse" at the schools and admitted more broadly that Canada was "burdened by past actions that resulted in weakening the identity of Aboriginal peoples." But it did not state directly that Ottawa was responsible for these actions, explain how or why they might have happened, acknowledge their continued negative effects, or indeed in any way "say sorry" for them.

For these reasons, the Statement of Reconciliation was at best a quasi-apology (Corntassel and Holder 2008; James 2007), as many Indigenous activists and leaders protested at the time (Barnsley 1998). They insisted that the injustices

of residential schooling went beyond physical and sexual abuse, pointing out that the schools had been conceived deliberately as instruments of cultural destruction. They insisted that residential schooling was not just an injustice inflicted on the former students, but that entire communities continued to suffer intergenerationally from a policy that aimed to destroy the fundamentals of Indigenous community, identity, and belonging. They insisted also that the Statement of Reconciliation, which was made in the absence of the prime minister in an obscure government meeting room, had severe symbolic limitations.

By 2005, a range of Indigenous organizations, including the Assembly of First Nations (AFN), BC Union of Indian Chiefs, and National Indian Residential School Survivors' Society, was demanding a more narratively comprehensive and ceremonially robust residential schools apology (Assembly of First Nations 2005; "Native leaders" 2004). One notable contributor to the effort was Phil Fontaine, an Anishnabe leader who served two terms as AFN Chief (1997-2000 and 2006-09), and whose revelations in 1990 of his own residential school abuse sparked others to come forward. Another was Chief Robert Joseph of the Gwawaenuk First Nation, a residential school survivor who played key roles in the British Columbia (BC) and National Residential School Survivors' Societies and served as Special Advisor to the TRC.

Although Ottawa at first resisted these calls for a more comprehensive response to the residential schools policy, its resolve weakened amidst the growing political and pecuniary pressure stemming from a series of court actions launched by former residential school students (Nagy 2014; Regan 2010; Thielen-Wilson

2014). Starting in the late 1980s, individual survivors of abuse had begun, with varying degrees of success, to demand that their former abusers be criminally charged and convicted. By the late 1990s, thousands of former students had coalesced around class action suits alleging liability on the part of Ottawa and the churches for, in particular, losses of culture, language, and family connection. By certifying these actions, which were unprecedented in Canadian civil litigation at the time, the courts clarified that the claimed wrongs were in principle actionable torts. Fearing what observers predicted could be the largest civil damages awards in Canadian history, Ottawa and the churches concluded a court-mandated settlement with the plaintiffs in 2005. Finalized in 2006, the Indian Residential Schools Settlement Agreement provided lump-sum compensation to all former students, an out-of-court Independent Assessment Process for students seeking compensation for specific abuses, and a TRC that would inquire into all aspects of residential schooling and hold a cross-country series of major public events.²

Although the Settlement Agreement did not mandate an apology, it was a key milestone in bringing the federal government and churches closer to accepting the main residential schools narrative stressed collectively by survivors and Indigenous leaders and organizations. This narrative emerged in part from the attack on Canada's 1998 Statement of Reconciliation; critics urged in particular that, by apologizing only for direct instances of physical and sexual interference with students, the Statement minimized Canadian wrongdoing by presenting as incidental sites of abuse what were in fact manifestations of a state-mandated policy

² The Settlement Agreement and supporting materials are available at http://www.residentialschoolsettlement.ca/english_index.html.

of cultural destruction that was abusive in its very conception. For example, stressing that “people were victimized by a government policy that had an impact on entire communities,” Matthew Coon-Come (in Mofina 2001), AFN Chief from 2000-03 and a noted Cree leader, complained that Ottawa had evaded the “whole question of loss of language, loss of culture.” Similarly, Garnet Angeconeb (2008), an Anishnabe survivor and one of the first former students to make public his experiences of abuse, said that, although he approved initially of the 1998 Statement of Reconciliation, he came later to realize that it “did not look at the broader implications of the policy and how it fit into the government’s assimilationist agenda.” Calling for a more comprehensive apology, he urged that “now is the time for us to be honest with each other” (309-310).

The subsequent class action suits furthered these efforts to transform Canadian understandings of residential schooling in part because they claimed damages for abuses that Ottawa had failed consistently to admit were intentional outcomes of the residential schools policy: language loss, cultural disconnection, and family separation.³ The 2006 Settlement Agreement addressed these claims with a court-mandated program of blanket compensation for all living former students. Although it was certainly not an admission of guilt, the Agreement clarified that Ottawa and the churches would no longer contest the insistence of the mobilized survivors that the residential schools policy was a deliberate scheme to deprive them of their families, languages, and cultures and that the defendant entities had been causally and morally responsible for that deprivation.

³ This and the following paragraph draw on James (2018).

The apology of 11 June 2008 announced and formalized Canada's acceptance of this understanding.⁴ Broadcast live on national television, the 2008 apology was delivered in the House of Commons, was supplemented by separate apologies from the other federal party leaders, and was followed by responses on the House of Commons floor from the leaders of Canada's main Indigenous organizations. In terms of content, it provided what its quasi-apologetic 1998 predecessor had not: an official sorrowful declaration that residential schooling was a deliberate assault on Indigenous families, cultures, and languages, and that grave individual and intergenerational suffering had been the result.

The 2008 apology was received positively by many Indigenous individuals, spokespeople, and communities. But there were criticisms (e.g. Chrisjohn and Wasacase 2009; Coulthard 2014, 105-109; Henderson and Wakeham 2009). These advanced in a sharper and more focused way a concern that, while certainly present, had been overshadowed by the more widely voiced complaints about the 1998 quasi-apology. As we have seen, the earlier complaints focused, in particular, on the failure of the Statement of Reconciliation to take responsibility for the policy of cultural, familial, and linguistic attack effected by the residential schools. But with these particular battles over responsibility settled, what had once been a minority concern became more widely voiced and evident.⁵ This concern was about the broader meaning and import of the policy pursued via the schools. As critics

⁴ The text is at <https://www.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca/eng/1100100015644/1100100015649>; a video is at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e72Z-XGk7Ic>.

⁵ An early example is Marilyn Buffalo of the Cree nation and then President of the Native Women's Association of Canada; she responded almost immediately to the 1998 statement, criticizing the "men [who] accepted this apology without asking the rest of us" and calling the residential schools policy a "crime of genocide ... covered up for decades." Quoted in Canadian Alliance in Solidarity with the Native Peoples (1998).

explained, although Harper's 2008 apology took responsibility for the policy, it was silent about the policy's underlying, colonial goal: to weaken the ability of Indigenous communities to resist the settler agenda of conquest and exploitation. Viewed in this light, the 2008 apology was less an act of meaningful responsibility-taking than it was evidence of Canada's failure to face up to its colonial history of state-directed dispossession.

These matters were addressed in the TRC's Final Summary Report (2015), which lent its authority to the settler-colonial interpretation of residential schooling suggested above. The report declared in its very first pages that the policy's systematic and sustained assault on Indigenous cultural and social reproduction was part of a larger scheme of cultural genocide. In its words: "The Canadian federal government pursued this policy of cultural genocide because it wished to divest itself of its legal and financial obligations to Aboriginal people and gain control over their land and resources. If every Aboriginal person [were assimilated via residential schools], there would be no reserves, no Treaties, and no Aboriginal rights" (3). In what was perhaps a coordinated effort to heighten the finding's impact, Supreme Court Chief Justice Beverley McLachlin (Fine 2015) called residential schooling a cultural genocide in the week before the release of the Final Summary Report. Although the TRC's qualifier, "cultural," was clearly meant to soften its use of the international criminal law term, "genocide" (perhaps because the commission's mandate barred it from pronouncing on matters of law [James 2010]), the cultural genocide finding also highlighted a key similarity with the main international twentieth-century cases (e.g. Jones 2010). Like the others, Canada had

tried to neutralize by destructive means distinctive populations standing in the way of a national campaign of territorial consolidation and racist self-aggrandizement.

Taken in conjunction with the available wisdom on the timing of political apologies, the sequencing of events discussed here raises the question: was the 2008 apology premature? After all, had the apology been delivered after the TRC report, then the cultural genocide finding, as scholars such as Teitel (2006) and Rotberg (2006) might insist, would have been difficult to ignore. There would, at minimum, have been significant impetus for an apology that acknowledged that residential schooling was a politically motivated assault that aimed to eliminate the social reproductive basis for Indigenous sovereignty and territorial integrity. An apology that wrestled with the TRC's findings might therefore have provided a more useful basis than Harper's 2008 statement for promoting well informed Canadian discussions about self-determination and political transition in Indigenous-settler relations (Holder 2014).

There is a significant irony in this counter-factual scenario: before offering the 2008 apology, the Harper government had itself insisted on awaiting the conclusions of the TRC (Curry 2007). The Assembly of First Nations and the National Residential School Survivors' Society rejected the Harper position as an obfuscation tactic. Their sense of urgency was driven by the advanced age of many residential school survivors, which meant that even relatively minor delays would deprive large numbers of former students of the chance ever to receive an official apology (Murphy 2011, 66). Thus, rather than await the report of the TRC, these actors focused on securing a timely official declaration that would at least accept the

core charges to which Ottawa had already come close to pleading “no contest” in the Settlement Agreement.⁶ It is not our intent or place to question the judgments of Indigenous organizations in these matters; instead, we are interested in the light this case may shed on the dynamics of inquiry, timing, and informational and interpretive robustness in political apologies.

The Japanese-Canadian Internment, the 2013 Vancouver Apology, and the Landscapes of Injustice Project

On 25 September 2013, Mayor Gregor Robertson rose in Vancouver City Council chambers to apologize to Japanese Canadians. In recounting the historical injustice of the 1940s, his resolution, seconded by Councillor Kerry Jang, focused in particular on a city motion of February 1942, in which Vancouver elected officials had called unanimously on the federal government to remove “the enemy alien population from the Pacific coast to central parts of Canada.” On behalf of the Council, Robertson apologized for their civic predecessors, whose 1942 motion had targeted “anyone of Japanese descent without any consideration for place of birth or citizenship.” The apology also noted that Japanese Canadians were unable (due to federal law) to return to coastal BC (including, of course, Vancouver) until 1949.

The mayor began his words by sketching the context for the apology. This context included the 1988 Canadian federal government acknowledgement of wrongdoing, the 2012 BC provincial apology, the conferral in 2012 by the University

⁶ Indeed, the substance of the 2008 apology cleaved closely to the demands outlined by the NRSSS in an open letter to the prime minister on 3 June, 2008, <http://www.newswire.ca/news-releases/apology-to-indian-residential-school-survivors---open-letter-from-ted-quewezance-to-the-prime-minister-536190761.html>.

of British Columbia of retroactive diplomas on students who had been expelled during the internment, various antiracist initiatives then being undertaken by the City, and Vancouver's designation of 2013-2014 as the "Year of Reconciliation" (Inouye 2016). The mayor then declared that, "the City of Vancouver does hereby take full responsibility for its actions. With humility and respect, the City of Vancouver formally apologizes for its complicity, its inaction, and for failing to protect her residents of Japanese descent." He resolved further that the City would "do all it can to ensure that such injustices will not happen again to any of its residents, thereby upholding the principles of human rights, justice and equality now and in the future" (Vancouver 2013).

Many among his audience in council chambers that day remembered the events of the 1940s, which they had lived through as children. The uprooting and internment of Japanese Canadians reflected longstanding racism that found new expression at a time of war. Although the large majority (75 percent) of Japanese Canadians were British subjects and over 60 percent had been born in Canada, federal orders-in-council (which, in this case, were cabinet directives passed under the authority of the War Measures Act) required that they carry special registration cards, obey curfews, face restrictions on mobility and communications, and submit to arbitrary searches of their homes.⁷ After the government declared Canada's west coast a "protected area" in January 1942, the 21,460 Japanese Canadians residing

⁷ The War Measures Act, in force from 1939 to 1945, empowered the federal cabinet to pass laws as orders-in-council, without the approval of the legislature. Similar powers were extended after the war as the federal government steered demobilization. The uprooting, internment, dispossession, and deportation of Japanese Canadians—along with dozens of other policies regulating their lives (and those of other Canadians)—were enacted as orders-in-council. For a useful discussion of the War Measures Act and Japanese-Canadian challenges to their treatment during the 1940s, see Izumi (2000).

there (over 90 percent of the population of Japanese descent in Canada) were uprooted. The internment resulted in the separation of families, forced labour for some, and incarceration in prisoner of war camps in northern Ontario for others. Over 12,000 Japanese Canadians were taken by train to live in hastily constructed shacks and abandoned buildings in various parts of the BC interior. Approximately 4,000 were sent to gruelling labour on sugar beet farms in Alberta and Manitoba. Slightly over 1,000 were able to establish so-called self-supporting camps where they paid for the costs of their own internment. Nearly 4,000 wound up being exiled to Japan (Adachi 1976; Sunahara 1981; Roy 2007; Stanger-Ross et al., 2016). Canada maintained the internment until 1949, when restrictions on Japanese Canadians were finally lifted. But by that point, all of their homes, farms, businesses and personal belongings had been sold without their consent.

A diverse population of varied circumstances, Japanese Canadians experienced and responded to internment in heterogeneous ways. Certainly, they had cause for longstanding grievance. In September of 1946, one victim of the policies, Tsurukichi Takemoto (1946), made the case with particular force in a letter to federal officials:

Isn't the method you're using like the Nazis? Do you think it is democratic? No! I certainly think you're just like the Fascists confiscating people's property, chasing them out of their homes, sending them out to a kind of concentration camp, special registration cards, permits for traveling. Don't you think this the method used in dictatorship countries[?] Democracy means no racial discrimination, or is it the very opposite[?]

In the years, and then decades, that followed, such individual grievances coalesced into sustained and organized political action, eventually prompting state reckoning with these wrongdoings (Stanger-Ross et al., 2017; Miki 2004).

The Vancouver apology, in citing its federal and provincial predecessors, acknowledged that it was in some senses late in coming. Most victims of the policies had already died before the City's "Year of Reconciliation." A quarter-century earlier, after a protracted campaign led by the National Association of Japanese Canadians (NAJC), the federal government had apologized in 1988. Declaring that "the Government of Canada wrongfully incarcerated, seized the property, and disenfranchised thousands of citizens of Japanese ancestry," Prime Minister Brian Mulroney offered "to Japanese Canadians the formal and sincere apology of this Parliament for those past injustices against them, against their families, and against their heritage" (Canada 1988). In 2012, the British Columbia Minister of Advanced Education, Naomi Yamamoto—who was in an unusual position as both a public representative and a descendant of the Japanese-Canadian victims for whose internment she was now apologizing—expressed the remorse of the BC Legislative Assembly for "the events during the Second World War, when under the authority of the federal War Measures Act, 21,000 Japanese Canadians were incarcerated in internment camps in the interior of British Columbia and had their property seized" (British Columbia 2012). Yamamoto voiced the legislature's deep regret "that these Canadians were discriminated against simply because they were of Japanese descent" and stressed that "all Canadians regardless of their origins should be welcomed and respected."

But while Vancouver seemed in this way a latecomer, a different perspective might suggest that its apology came too soon. Like its federal and provincial antecedents, the Vancouver apology was offered without any sustained official inquiry into the relevant wrongdoing. Although the city took “full responsibility for its actions,” officials were only dimly aware of what those actions might have been. The federal and provincial governments had been similarly under-informed. The sole official investigation of the mistreatment of Japanese Canadians, remembered as the Bird Commission, was created in the late 1940s amidst widespread outcry at the dispossession of Japanese Canadians (Royal Commission, 1951). Focused exclusively on the forced sale of Japanese-Canadian-owned property and circumscribed by deliberately narrow terms of reference, the Commission, which reported in 1950, was designed to sweep wrongdoing under the rug; rather than being tasked with exposing the extent of the injustice, its role was to offer modest compensation to Japanese-Canadian property owners for sales that had caused egregious economic harm.

For its part, the 1980s redress campaign had been informed by significant research, including Ken Adachi’s (1979) remarkable book, *The Enemy that Never Was*, and Anne Sunahara’s *The Politics of Racism* (1981). However, the former work was completed despite denial of access to federal records, while the latter represented one researcher’s best, but hardly complete, efforts within a massive state archive—comprised of hundreds of thousands of records—much of which still remained closed at her time of writing. In the course of the redress campaign, the NAJC commissioned an important study by the Price Waterhouse accounting firm

into the economic impact of the internment and dispossession, but this too accessed only a limited number of federal government files and a small sample of land title records. Naomi Yamamoto, in representing the province in 2012, spoke movingly of her own family's history and conveyed knowledge of research that had exposed the pivotal role of federal politicians from BC in the internment policies, but no in-depth research into the province's role in the internment had then been undertaken. For its part, the Vancouver apology proceeded on the basis of a review of council motions, rather than a fuller examination of the city bureaucracy. The City's wrongdoing, councillors and community-based consultants assumed, consisted in racist statements and inaction. This turned out to be a significantly mistaken assumption, particularly when it came to the dispossession of property.

As in the case of the residential schools apology of 2008, community activists urged that the City apologize before any more elderly victims of the policy could die. Vivian Wakabayashi Rygnestad (whose father Tadao had been one of three litigants in a 1943 legal challenge to the forced dispossession [Adams et al., 2017]) was among the representatives of the Greater Vancouver Japanese Canadian Citizen's Association, an NAJC member organization, in negotiations with the city. Urging immediate action, Rygnestad emphasized that she wanted her mother and other community elders to have the opportunity to attend.⁸ While some factions within the Japanese-Canadian community urged that the apology be delayed, this was due to an interest in negotiating further concessions from the city, particularly with respect to present-day human rights issues in Vancouver (Masuda 2015). It was

⁸ Author correspondence with Vivian Rygnestad, May 2017.

certainly not due to any perceived deficit of prior knowledge: city officials and community activists alike believed that the facts of the case were well established.

Within the larger ordeal of Japanese Canadians in the 1940s, the forced sale of property is a distinctive chapter. In January and February of 1942, amidst mounting public and political pressure for the uprooting and internment of Japanese Canadians, property was initially overlooked. The first drafts of Order-in-Council 1665, specifying the administrative aspects of the internment, omitted entirely the question of property (Draft Order in Council 1942).⁹ A last minute intervention by a leading administrator brought the question of property to the fore, and then, in just one day, a clause indicating that the government would be vested with the property of Japanese Canadians “as a protective measure only,” was hastily inserted (Taylor 1942; Mackenzie 1942). Subject to immediate criticism, both within the federal government and the Japanese-Canadian community, for vagueness (Read 1942, New Canadian 1942, 1942a), this insertion was further amended at the end of March 1942 to assure property-owners that the federal government would hold their land, homes, businesses, and belongings for the duration of the war, with “the purpose of protecting the interest of the owner” and would “release such property [back to its owners] upon being satisfied that [their] interests . . . will not be prejudiced thereby” (Canada 1942). Thus, the forced sale of property was not one of the measures undertaken to secure the coast in 1942; rather, a protective trust was established (Adams et al., 2017).

⁹ Prior to this point, selected forms of property had been seized and, in some cases, sold by the federal government, most notably fishing vessels (see Stanger-Ross et al., 2017). Order-in-Council 1665 was the first to take into consideration all of the property of uprooted Japanese Canadians.

However, ten months later (once the Japanese-Canadian population had been interned) Ottawa reversed course. Acting on the basis of a new Order-in-Council (469) of January 1943, federal officials undertook the sale of everything that Japanese Canadians had left behind (Canada 1943). By this point, the furor over the alleged security threat had long passed. No one imagined a threat posed by the seized farms, houses, businesses, or personal belongings that Japanese Canadians had been forced to leave behind. Instead, other considerations encouraged a change in federal policy. These considerations included the interests of other British Columbians in acquiring the property, a scheme to settle returning soldiers on Japanese-Canadian-owned farms, the administrative difficulties of protecting the property of nearly 22,000 people, the mounting costs of the internment (which were to be defrayed by property sales), and the determination of key provincial politicians to exile permanently Japanese Canadians from BC (Sunahara 1981, ch. 8; Stanger-Ross and LOI, 2016). In spring 1943, officials began to solicit offers for hundreds of parcels of real estate and to organize auctions of personal belongings. While Japanese Canadians were credited with the funds realized in the sale of their property, they had no role in setting the (often highly unfavourable) sales terms and no power to refuse to sell. Those in government camps were forced to use the funds to pay for their own sustenance. The material losses of Japanese Canadians as a result of their uprooting and dispossession have been estimated conservatively at \$1 billion (NAJC and Price Waterhouse, 1986).¹⁰

¹⁰ Dollar amount converted to 2017 dollars (CAD).

Almost a year after Mayor Robertson voiced the City's apology, a major research project began the first sustained inquiry into the dispossession of Japanese Canadians. In 2016, it published findings demonstrating that the City of Vancouver played an influential role in the forced sale of Japanese-Canadian-owned property. *Landscapes of Injustice* is a 7-year multi-sector research project funded by a Canadian federal government Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council Partnership Grant to unearth and tell the history of the dispossession of Japanese Canadians. Generously funded (\$5.5 million CAD) and employing some 20 researchers every year, the project has the capacity to wade through much of the massive federal record of property loss and to uncover previously unknown details about the process. In 2016, *Landscapes of Injustice* published a paper which argued that the City played an overlooked role in the property losses of Japanese Canadians (Stanger-Ross and LOI, 2016). The paper received extensive media coverage and was presented directly to city planning staff and to Councillor Kerry Jang. The resources of the project allowed the paper to link federal to city records and to demonstrate the influence of City initiatives on federal policy decisions in the 1940s. By contrast, the apology of 2013 had been based on a reading of council resolutions that offered no hint of this connection.

Landscapes of Injustice made two key and previously unknown claims about City responsibility for Japanese-Canadian losses. First, it argued that Vancouver provided a key rationale for overturning the 1942 federal policy to preserve internee property. This policy had required that Japanese-Canadian-owned property be protected and then returned to its owners after the war. Arguments for

the shift to forced sales emerged from an initiative of the Vancouver city government, and its Town Planning Commission (TPC), in particular; this initiative focused federal attention on the historic Japanese-Canadian neighbourhood surrounding Powell Street in the East End of the city. Federal officials then seized upon the arguments of City staff and council, using the condition of a small number of deteriorating “slum” properties as a justification for wholesale dispossession. These arguments drew upon the notion, emphasized earlier by City of Vancouver voices and sources, that Japanese Canadians had undesirable ways of living in the city and that their real estate was uninhabitable by “white” British Columbians. As these arguments traveled through bureaucratic and political channels, they expanded in scope, ultimately helping to motivate the order-in-council that called for the forced sale of all Japanese-Canadian-owned property in coastal BC. Thus, the federal dispossession measures originated, at least in part, in the City’s argument that “slum” properties could not and should not be preserved. The second claim of “Suspect Properties” was that the Vancouver government, in addition to arguing for forced sales, had used public resources to provide support for its claims. Staff hours expended by the City’s corporate counsel, building inspectors, medical health officers, and electricians provided “evidence” that federal officials then used to justify the move to forced sales. Vancouver’s targeted campaign to inspect and condemn Japanese-Canadian-owned property as “uninhabitable” gave credence to the City’s claim—and thus to the federal claim—that the properties of Japanese Canadians needed to be sold rather than rented to tenants.¹¹

¹¹ As noted above, these were important, but not the exclusive, origins of the policy.

In short, *Landscapes of Injustice* showed that the City was not merely culpable for the “inaction” and racist statements averred to in its 2013 apology. Rather, Vancouver had expended civic resources in a campaign to encourage the forced sale of Japanese-Canadian owned property, a campaign that helped in turn to change federal policy, robbing Japanese Canadians of millions of dollars. Therefore, the City’s claim in 2013 that it had taken “full responsibility for its actions”—in an apology that said nothing about its instrumental role in dispossessing Japanese Canadians of their property—was undermined significantly.

It is an irony of the relation between apology and research that previous acts of redress helped to create a project with potential to reveal the limits of prior acts of responsibility-taking. *Landscapes of Injustice* owed much to the legacies of the 1988 Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement, to subsequent grassroots activism, and to the federal, provincial, and even city internment apologies. The NAJC, the organization that led the redress campaign of the 1980s, and whose long-run viability was strengthened considerably by the terms of the 1988 Redress Agreement, is a formal partner on the project, funding student researchers. The Nikkei National Museum, an NAJC member organization, has a seat on the project’s Executive Committee and helps to direct research and project outputs. In addition to these institutional connections, the project is also shaped by individuals with backgrounds in Japanese-Canadian activism, including Vivian Rygnestad, a key negotiator of the City apology.¹²

¹² Among its lead academic investigators, two (Pamela Sugiman and Audrey Kobayashi) previously held positions in the NAJC and one (Kobayashi) was actively engaged in the Redress movement. Co-applicants in elementary and secondary education (Greg Miyana and Michael Perry-Wittingham)

In important ways, then, this history of activism, redress, and apologies gave personnel, momentum, and saliency to *Landscapes of Injustice*, whose energies and resources helped in turn to shed new light on the previously unaddressed question of the City of Vancouver's responsibility. This process of exposure would seem unlikely to end with the City of Vancouver. At the time of writing, the project was undertaking a comprehensive review of provincial records to unearth the role of the province in the dispossession. It was also advancing the additional, separate claim that the federal government's actions were unlawful in their own terms, rather than being mere examples of unjust law, the previously accepted understanding (Adams et al., 2017).

The point here is not to say that Vancouver should in its 2013 apology have taken responsibility for actions that were only brought subsequently to light by *Landscapes of Injustice*. Indeed, even after these revelations, the path forward remained unclear; Japanese Canadians were divided about the advisability of further reparative negotiation with any order of government about property loss, including the municipal level. Some community members continued to press for restitution by the city, while others believed that a broad project of anti-racist education would be more appropriate (CBC 2016, Miki 2004). It should be unsurprising that Japanese Canadians varied not only in their perspectives on their history with the Canadian state but also in their views on matters of

began working in Japanese-Canadian history by developing teaching resources on internment and redress. The original Chair of the project's Community Council and current Steering Committee member, Art Miki, was the NAJC President in 1988 and signed the Redress agreement on behalf of the organization. The subsequent Council Chair was Vivian Rynestad. Mary Kitigawa, also a key advisor, campaigned for UBC's reconciliation with its expelled Japanese-Canadian students.

acknowledgement and repair (Sugiman 2013). The present analysis does not intend to intervene in such discussions, which would involve more properly the Japanese-Canadian community and, perhaps, representatives from the relevant government entities. Rather, we are interested in the dynamics of timing, knowledge, and apology.

Discussion

Taken together, our two cases illuminate these dynamics in ways that help us to shed new light on the politics of apology. In both cases, political apology processes became focal points for subsequent endeavours of research, activism, and inquiry; these endeavours unsettled previous enumerations or interpretations of the relevant “facts” and challenged prior understandings about responsibility. The political mobilization that led to the 1988 Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement and apology stimulated activism and political consciousness around the internment, which then helped to prompt the Vancouver apology and to inspire the work of *Landscapes of Injustice*, which exposed the City of Vancouver’s hitherto unknown responsibility for the dispossession. Funding provided under the 1988 Agreement also helped sustain the NAJC, which has been a partner and participant helping to drive and orient *Landscapes of Injustice*. Indeed, the 2013 Vancouver apology helped to spur the interest of *Landscapes of Injustice* researchers in exploring the specifically civic underpinnings of the dispossession. Thus, rather than seeing the Vancouver apology as a failure of apologetic knowledge that could have been prevented by ensuring some prior conclusive process of inquiry, we might better

understand it as a contributing instalment in a longer-run process of activism, acknowledgement, and research.

Regretful Canadian knowledge about residential schooling began with the activism of survivors, which prompted the RCAP report to include a chapter on residential schools and to recommend a separate residential schools inquiry and apology. Although the federal government undoubtedly hoped for closure in its quasi-apology of 1998, the Statement of Reconciliation debacle only strengthened the thirst of survivors for justice. One dimension of the ensuing struggle was the insistence of Indigenous communities that Canada acknowledge not only the physical and sexual abuse that occurred in the schools but the abusive wrongfulness of the whole residential schools policy. The publicity and threats of damages from class action suits brought Ottawa closer to admitting this point. The 1998 Statement of Reconciliation also involved the creation of a federally funded body known as the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, which, before being defunded by Prime Minister Stephen Harper's Conservative government in 2010, issued significant publications (Castellano et al. 2008; Mathur et al. 2011; Younging et al. 2009) that aired diverse survivor perspectives and that featured scholarly explanations of the schools as instruments of dispossession and genocide.

Created under the terms of the 2006 Settlement Agreement, the TRC stands in particularly interesting relation to Harper's 2008 apology. The TRC found in its 2015 final report that the residential schools policy was part of a settler-colonial project of cultural genocide aimed at dispossessing Indigenous nations of their sovereignty and lands. Thus, viewed from one angle, the 2008 apology—which was

silent on these matters and presented the schools instead as products of prejudice and disrespect—might better have been timed to have awaited the conclusions of the TRC. But a different perspective might see the apology as a baseline of official civic admission from which the subsequent TRC conclusions could then be better appreciated and understood. The failures of the very limited 1998 apology for residential schools abuse helped more emphatically to focus subsequent activism and attention on the wrongful character of the whole policy. Similarly, and as numerous critics pointed out at the time, the broader admission of 2008—that the schools were deliberate instruments of cultural, linguistic, and familial assault—begged further explanation. By establishing more deeply the political meaning and import of the assault, such an explanation was precisely what the TRC’s cultural genocide finding—in complex interaction with prior survivor activism, the work of the Aboriginal Healing Foundation, and scholarly critique—helped to provide.

The point is not that the TRC offers the final word on the question of genocide, which, in both international law (MacDonald and Hudson 2012) and sociological terms (Woolford 2015), deserves more engagement than it has received. Further, aspiration to a “final word” would run counter to the realities emphasized in this article. Critical analyses of the TRC have already emerged; as historian and former TRC researcher Brian Gettler (2017) recently explained, “as a discipline, historians have a duty to critically assess the limits of the commission’s method and process to better understand and contextualize what it ultimately produced” (643). Public knowledge, including in its relation to public apology, remains dynamic.

Emphasizing this dynamism seems particularly pertinent in cases of long-run structural injustice. Consider the struggles over residential schooling, which confronted the persistent evasion and denial of the Canadian state under the shadow of massive power imbalances between settler colonialism's victims and beneficiaries. Amidst these difficulties and complexities can it truly be said that there was some proper moment of full civic understanding that could consensually have been identified as the occasion for a definitive, one-time-only apology? We suggest instead that campaigns for historical justice, official apologetic responses, and enterprises of inquiry are disposed to interact in iterative and recursive ways; far from imposing closure, the apologies in our cases helped to fuel, focus, and deepen subsequent activism and inquiry.

But we need also to be mindful of the differences between our two cases. One difference has to do with the kinds of knowledge and inquiry operative in each. The residential schools policy was the subject of a significant 100-page report prepared for RCAP in 1996. It was then the topic of seven years of formal inquiry by the TRC, which involved the participation of more than 9,000 former residential school students and formal statements from over 6,750 survivors, followed by the commission's six-volume report of 2015 (TRC 2015, 29-31). By contrast, although the basic outlines of internment are reasonably well known, there has, with the very limited exception of the Bird Commission, been almost nothing in the way of official, state-sanctioned knowledge created about it. The budget and duration of *Landscapes of Injustice* certainly help to remedy some of this knowledge deficit, but

these core differences—in investigative scope and in the forms of authority underlying the investigations—are likely to remain.¹³

The injustices in the Vancouver case are also of lower political salience and visibility than those pertaining to residential schooling. One reason, easily overlooked, is institutional: traditionally, historical justice campaigners have shown comparatively little interest in targeting sub-national levels of government, which provide more narrow terrains for activism and smaller political payoffs than their more senior counterparts (James 2009). Other differences are demographic and political. The Japanese-Canadian community in Vancouver is relatively small and in some respects not politically mobilized; Indigenous nations in Canada control land bases and governments and are engaged politically behind a range of pressing, present-day concerns (e.g. Kino-nda-niimi Collective 2014). Whereas residential schooling touches on a host of ongoing, large-scale disputes about Canadian legitimacy and minority self-determination, internment is not similarly implicated, despite some recent scholarly efforts to position it within this frame (Oikawa 2012). These differences compel caution in comparing the two injustices and suggest the futility of thinking predictively about outcomes and trajectories across widely divergent political apology cases.

Conclusion

¹³ Indeed, these differences in public knowledge and inquiry about the cases explain why our account of the Vancouver dispossession in this paper is more finely grained than its residential schools counterpart.

Nevertheless, the comparison in this article sheds new light on the interrelations of timing, knowledge, and apology and their implications for political apology practice. To the extent that the general literature on apology addresses timing, it focuses on the temporal intervals between wrongful deeds, calls for apology, and regretful words, with some dispute over the importance of timeliness (cf. Lazare 2005; Smith 2008; Tavuchis 1991; Wenzel et al., 2017). The more specific and hitherto largely neglected question of timing *in relation to knowledge* seems particularly crucial in political apology, involving as it does complexities of inter-group relations, difficulties of evidence and interpretation, and unequally situated protagonists on tilted fields of struggle. Transitional justice scholars (Rotberg 2006; Teitel 2006) have addressed these matters by recommending that political apologies be timed to come after conclusive processes of official inquiry. But we have argued that this is a problematic proviso; survivors may not want or be able to wait, and the window of opportunity for apology may open only fleetingly.¹⁴ Finally, and particularly in relatively stable contexts, the realities, and indeed benefits, of pluralistic and open-textured approaches to historical justice give further reason for doubting the transitional justice emphasis on official processes and prescribed sequencing.

Our perspective is thus broadly aligned with those scholars who argue for political apologies that promote learning, reflection, and transformation (e.g. Lightfoot 2015; Muldoon and Schaap 2012; Maddison 2011; Verdeja 2010; Winter 2015). It also concords with recent work by psychologist Michael Wenzel and his

¹⁴ For example, Vancouver's 2013 Year of Reconciliation and the 2006 Indian Residential Schools Settlement, which was finalized only in late 2007, created openings for the 2013 city and 2008 residential schools apologies, respectively.

colleagues (2017), who find in experimental trials looking specifically at political apologies that efforts at closure are self-defeating; apologies seem to elicit more positive survivor responses when the “offender group's active and ritual commemoration of past wrongdoing also represents a commitment to maintaining the memory and not wanting to expunge their collective guilt” (4).

By emphasizing impermanence, our approach also responds to scholars who offer categorically negative views of political apologies as neoliberal tools for managing dissent. For example, anthropologist Michel-Rolph Trouillot (2000) scorns political apologies as ritualized attempts to cloak oppression with an aura of pastness, while political scientist Jenny Edkins (2003) declares that they are “made to deflect legal consequences” so that “acceptance of moral responsibility is ... the end of the matter” (206).

To be sure, officials, pundits, and publics often expect political apologies to serve as instruments of closure. Vancouver City Councillor Kerry Jang expressed this view when confronted with the findings from *Landscapes of Injustice*: “I don’t understand what you want from us, another apology?”¹⁵ Journalist Rex Murphy (2013) went further, attacking what he saw as the ingratitude of Indigenous leaders after Canada’s 2008 residential schools apology: “it's hard to believe the apology was made, and accepted. It seems to have completely slipped out of memory.” These responses call to mind political scientist Sarah Maddison’s (2011) observation; as historical injustice lingers in public discussion and politics, some ask, “Didn’t we try to reconcile? Didn’t we even say sorry” (142)?

¹⁵ Meeting, January 15, 2016.

But if political apologies are meant to impose closure, they have a poor success rate. For example, anthropologist Bonnie McElhinny (2016) notes an apparent trend in which more elaborate political apologies appear after the failings of less satisfactory predecessor utterances are exposed; the result is political apologies that “increasingly tend to include complex historical accounts” (56).¹⁶ The contrast between Canada’s 1998 and 2008 residential schools apologies certainly supports McElhinny’s observation. The cases of the BC provincial and City of Vancouver internment apologies suggest additionally that apology pressures are spreading from national to sub-national actors, a trend also underway in the United States (Aderet 2017). We therefore suspect that fears about closure in political apology have been greatly exaggerated. While individual survivors of political violence often indicate that an apology allows them to “move on” or to otherwise find personal closure (outcomes that surely should not be resisted), on a social and political level apologies tend instead to participate in the iterative dynamics of struggle, learning, and inquiry.

There is, however, no guarantee that apology processes will be progressive; countries in Eastern and Central Europe have repudiated tentative earlier moves towards introspection, passing “memory laws” that criminalize supposed insults to the dominant group’s preferred version of identity and history (Aderet 2017; Belavusau and Gliszczynska-Grabias 2017). The German case is of course the best-known converse instance. Early expressions of Holocaust regret were “vague, passive constructions” oriented towards evasion and expediency (Art 2006, 54). By

¹⁶ Her Canadian examples include the Komagata Maru incident and the High Arctic Inuit Relocation.

the 1990s, however, and against the strong initial preferences of postwar German elites, publics, and even foreign allies, a “culture of contrition” (Wilds 2000; Art 2006) had taken hold amidst the complex interplay of domestic debates, survivor pressure, and ongoing scholarly, legal, and public inquiry. This culture has fostered the application of reparations, apologies, and regretful commemoration to a seemingly ever-widening array of German failings and crimes (Aderet 2017; Bindenagel 2006; Braun et al. 2014).

Introspective public memory develops fitfully and contingently amidst all manner of defense mechanisms and aversions (Wolfgram 2014). But, contrary to what progressive critics fear and neoliberal officialdom desires, there is a dynamism in political apology that militates against closure. Realizing its potential requires mobilization, and it faces significant challenges from today’s authoritarian populism (Smith 2017); the fates of political apologies are subject to politics.

This argument reads political apologies as more akin than previously imagined to critical understandings of other commemorative acts. For example, in his foundational analysis of historical monuments across three continents, *The Texture of Memory*, cultural theorist and Holocaust scholar James Young writes that “time mocks the rigidity of [historical] monuments, the presumptuous claim that in its materiality a monument can be regarded as eternally true, a fixed star in the constellation of collective memory.” As an alternative—and in admission of the impossibility of fixing the past in place—Young proposes the “countermonument,” which embraces impermanence and the “contingency of all meaning and memory” (1993, 47-48). Modern curatorial practices in museums and cognate institutions are

premised similarly on the observation that the exhibit is “a public site and an event, rather than a static text divorced from historical legacies and real world struggles” (Butler and Lehrer 2016, 5). State apologies should also be understood as contributing participants in the dynamic and ongoing politics of social memory. The ideas of finality, closure, and the linear relation between inquiry and apology would be welcome casualties of this understanding.

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