



Political reconciliation in postcolonial settler societies

International Political Science Review

2017, Vol. 38(2) 227–241

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DOI: 10.1177/0192512115624517

journals.sagepub.com/home/ips



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Abstract

This article presents a theory of reconciliation for postcolonial settler societies. It asks: what are the scope, substance and limitations of a normative theory of political reconciliation for historical wrongs in these societies? The article begins with an assessment of communitarian and agonistic theories and then outlines an alternative based on mutual respect, which includes three core elements: critical reflection, symbolic and material recognition, and political participation. The case of the United States and Native Americans is used to illustrate this alternative theory.

Keywords

Reconciliation, agonism, postcolonialism, Native Americans, mutual respect

Introduction

The past two decades have witnessed the rebirth of indigenous political activism around the world. Activists have renewed demands for reparations, restitution for stolen lands, the repatriation of cultural artifacts, and greater political autonomy and sovereignty. In the wake of these claims, there is again talk of the need for reconciliation (Shriver, 2005; Torpey, 2006; Tsosie, 2006); but reconciliation on whose terms? And what would this entail? This article addresses the vexing question of how to conceptualize political reconciliation in postcolonial settler societies like Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States. The article understands postcolonial settler societies as those where “the predominant population arises from immigrants and the indigenous population has become a displaced minority” (Perry, 1996: 167), historical injustices often remain unsatisfactorily addressed, collective identity remains unsettled, and there is no possibility of “exit” for any of the main groups, such as through partition. The article asks: what is the scope, substance and limitations of a normative theory of political reconciliation for historical wrongs in these societies?¹

The discussion proceeds in several stages. First, I provide a brief overview of normative approaches in reconciliation research, including recent agonistic theories, which have advanced

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especially sophisticated critiques of reconciliation. Developed by theorists such as Chantal Mouffe and Paul Muldoon, agonism plays an important role in debates over how to frame the possibilities and limits of political reconciliation. I then outline an alternative theory of reconciliation that emphasizes the centrality of *mutual respect*, which includes three core elements: critical reflection, symbolic and material recognition, and political participation. This theory is sympathetic to agonism's concerns with domination and power, but it also attempts to provide a normative grounding for reconciliation that is more robust than agonistic theories. Mutual respect, I contend, can function as a critical baseline for reconciliation that on the one hand avoids the problematic apolitical nature of communitarian theories that privilege forgiveness and deep social harmony, and on the other moves beyond the reduction of ethical claims to power relations common to agonistic theories.

In the second half of the article, I use the example of the United States and Native Americans² to illustrate the possibilities of and challenges to reconciliation for historical wrongs in settler societies. This is a particularly salient case: the large-scale expulsion and destruction of Native groups is part of the founding and development of the country, from the early colonial period of the 17th and 18th centuries, when colonists seized Native lands through violence and coercion, to the US government's "Indian Wars" of the late 1800s, which in many cases resulted in the partial or total eradication of tribes (Patrick, 2007). The destruction was so complete that the federal government estimated that by the end of the 19th century only 248,200 Native Americans remained on its territory, about 2% of the pre-Columbian population (Sterba 1996: 430). Native Americans no longer have to contend with open warfare and discriminatory laws, but the legacies of violence still have profound effects: indigenous communities continue to suffer from higher rates of unemployment, poverty, food insecurity and mental and physical illness than the overall population, as well as continuing cultural discrimination and damaging stereotypes (Cornell and Kalt, 2007). These conditions have catalyzed efforts among activists to address the worst material and symbolic injustices, which in turn have restarted public and scholarly debates over reconciliation—what it would mean and what challenges it faces (Wilkins and Stark, 2011). Thus, the case of Native Americans is particularly insightful for articulating a theory of reconciliation for post-settler societies.

Theories of reconciliation

Current debates over political reconciliation have been heavily influenced by the democratic transitions of the late 20th and early 21st centuries. In those transitions the key question has been how to create morally acceptable coexistence between living perpetrators, victims, and so-called bystanders, and to do so in a way that promotes social cohesion and secures stability. Much of this work focuses on the value of truth commissions, trials, lustration and forgiveness in the present (Daly and Sarkin 2007; Murphy, 2010; Wilson, 2001). Historical wrongs in settler societies, however, pose a particular set of challenges for conceptualizing reconciliation: political responsibility is complicated by the passage of time and the birth of new generations whose connection to past harms is often only tenuous or otherwise highly complex, though the legacies of these harms continue to shape contemporary social relations. As Sarah Maddison notes,

in as much as later generations continue to benefit from the resources and gains produced by historical injustices, and in as much as we continue to deny that the current circumstances... have causal links to these past injustices, then our response makes us guilty as a new collective...

Thus contemporary identity "is not detachable from our history, for better or worse..." (Maddison, 2011: 29).

This in turn raises profound theoretical and practical questions over the appropriateness and scope of historical justice efforts (Thompson, 2002; Waldron, 1992). The key questions for reconciliation shift toward issues of historical memory, collective identity and contemporary relations of power shaped by the past (Blustein, 2008). Under these circumstances, reconciliation becomes a central term in debates over assimilation, political autonomy and the nature of social unity.

How, then, should we think of political reconciliation for settler societies? This is a normative—and not only empirical—question because it is concerned with articulating desirable forms of social relations and collective identity, rather than merely describing how various societies have or have not responded to past wrongs. There are numerous normative theories in the current literature (Bashir and Kymlicka, 2010), though here I focus on two of the most prominent: communitarian and agonist theories. Communitarian theories advocate a normatively “thick” account of reconciliation based on a fundamental transformation in relations between groups, often through practices of repentance, compassion and mutual forgiveness. The end is to create a harmonious social order through healing and reciprocal acceptance. There are a variety of these approaches, many adopting the language of restorative justice (Frayling, 2009; Kiss, 2001; Llewellyn, 2006; Thomas 2009), but they are ably summarized in theologian Rodney Petersen’s account of communitarian reconciliation as the “restoration or even transformation toward intended wholeness that comes with transcendent human grace” (Petersen, 2001: 13).

Scholars have criticized these approaches extensively (Doxtader, 2003; Hirsch, 2012b; Martel, 2012; Moon, 2007); here, I emphasize what I believe is a central problem. Communitarian approaches often advance a *non-political* account of coexistence, one that emphasizes substantive social harmony—including a shared identity and agreement on basic ethical values—as the standard for successful reconciliation. This risks treating significant differences as threats to the social order and thus inimical to reconciliation. The rejection of political disagreements leaves us with few conceptual tools to distinguish between acceptable political contestation and domination. Indeed, the tendency to equate reconciliation with consensus, if not deep harmony, means that other key aspects of politics—such as argument and disagreement—are erased.

Other scholars have responded with sophisticated agonist theories of reconciliation that take seriously the role of political difference and conflict. Naturally, there is variation among these theories, but they share in common a skepticism about the possibility of achieving a harmonious social order—a ‘thick’ reconciliation—in the face of profound differences and historical injustices (Wenman, 2013). Given the continued importance of these theories in reconciliation debates, I spend more time on them below.

Chantal Mouffe, a prominent scholar of agonism in democratic theory, has been highly influential in settler society reconciliation debates. For Mouffe, the political domain is essentially conflictual. Deep divisions are constitutive of political life. These divisions, which are often over basic normative orientations and conceptions of collective identity, inform the political domain’s fundamental heterogeneity. However, deep and persistent divisions threaten to degenerate into overt violence, or *antagonism* in her terms, which cannot be contained by traditional democratic institutions and practices.

Rather than treat antagonisms as anti-political, Mouffe argues that a theory of democracy must begin with the fact of antagonism and develop the theoretical framework and tools to address, rather than eliminate, the danger it poses (Mouffe, 2000: 80–88). It is necessary to transform antagonistic violence into *agonistic* relations: those relations that do not result in the destruction of shared political life, but establish the conditions for a vibrant but tolerant contest between groups that espouse different identities and normative orientations. This agonistic democracy represents a significant radicalization of democratic life, for it places at the center of political discourse those groups that otherwise remain marginalized, or even excluded, by majoritarian and consensus-based

democratic politics. As such, agonistic theory questions the very boundary used to distinguish who does and does not belong to the demos.

Several theorists have taken the insights of agonistic theory and applied them to the question of political reconciliation. Andrew Schaap proposes that any account of reconciliation must avoid a strong communitarian ethic that privileges shared identity and social harmony as the end point of post-conflict politics. For Schaap, reconciliation must be open to “accepting the risk of politics (and the opportunity it presents) rather than eliding it” (2005: 20). Accepting this risk not only opens to debate specific policy recommendations—on the appropriateness of reparations, the role of an official apology, and the like—but explicitly challenges the very terms of reconciliation itself. Agonism deepens the political dimension of reconciliation by creating a space for alternative articulations of coexistence, while retaining the conflictive experiences without which politics is impossible. Paul Muldoon and Andrew Schaap argue that reconciliation politics “tend to be” agonistic because they “open up a space of contestation and disagreement in relation to the claims identity groups make as victims of injustice” (Muldoon and Schaap, 2012: 182). Furthermore, drawing attention to the distinctly agonistic elements of reconciliation politics raises questions about who gets to establish the boundaries of legitimate political discourse and collective identity, for it scrutinizes the legitimacy of the very state whose origins are rooted in historical injustices against indigenous groups. This radicalization, and opening, of debate further problematizes unreflective conceptions of historical memory that may otherwise privilege the majority community at the expense of indigenous communities.

Agonists persuasively argue that reconciliation is much more than a search for consensus on historical interpretation and a desire to “move on” after conflict (Hirsch, 2012a); instead, reconciliation concerns contestation over the very boundaries of political discourse, collective identity and the status of democratic politics. These radical approaches scrutinize the legitimacy claims of the society that ostensibly promotes reconciliation, and underscore how normative claims are ultimately expressions of political power. The upshot is twofold: no agreement on a morally satisfactory account of reconciliation can be developed prior to political struggle; and, reconciliation will remain incomplete, for new forms of contestation and negotiation over collective identity will always emerge due to the intrinsically agonistic nature of political life. Nevertheless, agonism faces at least two challenges for reconciliation politics.

First, by privileging radical critique, it is difficult to identify, much less justify, reconciliation’s constitutive elements in agonistic terms. In agonism, reconciliation is treated as the outcome of power relations but otherwise has no substantive normative content. Mouffe herself admits this; for her, basic norms such as equality and liberty cannot be justified through appeals to human reason or natural law, but are wholly the product of particular political struggles, with their own historical specificities and contingencies (Mouffe, 2005: 2–12). And yet she also claims, correctly, that those who reject these basic democratic norms threaten the possibility of shared political life. As there can be no compelling rational grounds (on her terms) for adopting these norms, she is left with making an affective claim for their relevance, arguing for a “passionate commitment to a system of reference [i.e. shared democratic norms]” (Mouffe, 2000: 95). Taking up this challenge, Muldoon has further radicalized Mouffe’s theory by advocating a Nietzschean agonist reconciliation that respects the democratic values of peaceful contestation but defends the use of agonistic struggle by indigenous groups against the state. He writes, “...indigenous people need to appreciate the rules of the game [i.e. rules of democratic contestation] and... need to engage agonistically in it in order to expand and protect indigenous-specific rights” (Muldoon, 2010: 134). However, it is not apparent why the “rules of the game” should be respected in the first place; a theoretical perspective that treats normative claims as expressions of power will struggle with justifying various desirable

normative concepts, such as reconciliation (or equality, liberty, and indigenous rights in the examples above).

This leads to a second, more serious concern: the reduction of reconciliation to power relations undermines the possibility of establishing a critical position from which to examine responses to the past. For instance, how does one distinguish between normatively defensible versions of reconciliation that advance the claims of indigenous groups versus those that privilege state power and majority culture? Certainly, some transformative relations are more desirable than others, especially from the perspective of indigenous actors. Agonist theorists recognize the need for normative criteria—they are, almost unanimously, motivated by concerns over oppressed groups (see contributions in Hirsch, 2012a). However, the agonist perspective, which reduces norms and values to expressions of power, risks undermining the possibility of defending any normative criteria for political reconciliation. As Adrian Little has argued, “the problem with agonistic accounts is the difficulty of establishing a founding order of reconciliation which can act as an agreed basis on which to conduct a more inclusive but conflictual form of political engagement” (Little, 2012: 67). Of course, any account of reconciliation must be subjected to revision, reflection and evaluation, and not formulated as transcending politics or remaining outside the bounds of contestation. But some criteria are required if reconciliation, no matter how agonistic and thin, is to avoid undermining its very possibility and collapsing into normative indeterminacy. In the following sections, I outline an account of reconciliation that takes seriously the charges leveled by agonistic theorists but also provides some minimally defensible elements that go beyond agonism.

Reconciliation and mutual respect

Every case of historical injustice raises unique challenges, but there are some claims that often emerge in postcolonial settler contexts and provide justifications for their inclusion as elements of a broader theory of reconciliation. Below, I sketch an account of political reconciliation for these societies that is rooted in *mutual respect*.³ By respect, I mean the inter-subjective recognition of the moral worth of others, including indigenous peoples; an acknowledgment, in other words, of the equal moral status of other people. Respect is based on reciprocity: it is exercised by providing justifications to those who are affected by our actions and values, but also accepting their claims to judge, respond and act as well. Respecting others as moral persons means that we cannot assume, *a priori*, that our values are universal (or, say, patriotic) or our practices justified and thus not subject to critique, nor can we measure the worth and claims of others solely according to our own particular interests. Given the reciprocal nature of respect, the same demands hold for other parties. This is more than Kant’s (1996) formal deontology: mutual respect requires opening to public debate those political practices, fundamental values and even collective identities that are of shared relevance; in this context, those that are relevant to indigenous–majority group relations. This formulation of respect is meant to provide a baseline for reconciliation politics and thus remains relatively thin. It is skeptical of the communitarian claim that deep differences are resolved through “healing” or a “transformation toward intended wholeness” (Petersen, 2001: 13; Volf, 2006: 157), which may in practice justify the majority’s assimilationist policies that destroy indigenous communities and continue “internal colonization” (Tully, 2008: 38). Nor does the baseline of respect foreclose disagreement or remove difficult questions from critical scrutiny, in line with William Connolly’s call for “critical responsiveness” (Connolly, 1995: 184–187). Mutual respect shares with agonists the concerns about indigenous domination inherent in assimilationism. However, it goes further than agonism by functioning as a criterion through which to evaluate—and contest—contemporary social practices, identities, values and institutions. Respect thus avoids the normative indeterminacy in agonism discussed earlier.

Below, I argue that reconciliation as mutual respect in settler contexts includes three elements: (1) *critical reflection* on the past; (2) *symbolic and material recognition*; and (3) securing the means for *political participation*. These elements reflect the ethical issues that continue to arise in these societies, give greater conceptual coherence to reconciliation, and assist in assessing the ways in which contemporary reconciliation politics remain inadequate.⁴

How these elements will be manifested concretely in postcolonial settler societies will naturally depend on the context, given the social complexity of reconciliation. An apology issued by the government may have little resonance with most citizens, whose personal lives remain indifferent to acts in a faraway capital made by distant politicians. Community-based reconciliation programs may achieve significant results even in an unreceptive national environment. Indeed, reconciliation does not develop evenly across social space—rather, it is characterized by specific logics operating at (theoretically) distinct social levels: political society (between political leaders), institutional, civil society and interpersonal (Verdeja, 2009). Here I can only note, and not examine in depth, the complexity of these multiple levels of reconciliation, though examples of some of these levels will be touched on in the following pages. The remainder of the article is devoted to the systematic conceptual justification and elaboration of the three elements of critical reflection, recognition, and political participation.

Critical reflection

Reconciliation requires a sustained process of critical reflection on the past—an investigation of past injustices, their present legacies, and their relationship to contemporary political values, power relations, and identities. This is common in agonistic approaches as well, but the formulation here is more substantive. First, reflection requires deliberation, that is, unrestrained public debate over issues of collective concern. In addition to voting, citizens participate politically through civil society groups where they advance their values and interests and seek to influence state policy. Deliberative democrats argue that deliberation reinforces the democratic principle of equality by requiring the inclusion of everyone who is affected by decision outcomes, which in turn secures diverse participation and promotes multiple perspectives. In this reading, these deliberative exchanges transform actors' claims and, over time, their social identities (Benhabib, 1994; Habermas, 1996; Rawls, 2005).

However, this robust understanding of deliberation at the center of deliberative democratic theory is perhaps less appropriate for contexts of deep social mistrust rooted in long histories of animosity and conflict. Rational deliberative discourse, with its assumption that reasoned debate can generate normatively defensible forms of social cooperation and solidarity, underplays the profound challenges to reconciliation posed by these kinds of differences. Indeed, the distinction between rational and emotional speech on which mainstream deliberative theory rests is not only unfeasible in these contexts but is also problematic theoretically: it denies any value of emotions to discourse and, more importantly, may delegitimize certain actors before they can even engage in debate. Unpopular claims and critical arguments may be dismissed as irrational, emotive or disruptive, an especially common occurrence in debates over indigenous issues (Johnson, 2008; Turner, 2006). A less stringent account of deliberation, which I advance here, focuses on debate over issues of collective importance, in this case understandings of the past and political responsibility, but allows for emotional, contested and often divisive discourse (Young, 2001). It is not aimed at a robust consensus over history but rather at unearthing and exposing violent histories and their impact today as an important step for furthering mutual respect. Part of this process is the public resignification of certain historical events as *historical injustices* that require collective reckoning. Framed as injustices, these historical events can catalyze contemporary debates over present

legacies and collective identity. Furthermore, they can advance, if only imperfectly, claims to moral respect by emphasizing the rights of victims and their descendants, and thus move beyond the minimal contestation of agonism.

Achieving even this degree of critical reflection is difficult, given the enormous resistance to any efforts to revisit the past. Nevertheless, we can propose some minimal standards for adequate deliberation. Following John Dryzek (2005: 224–225), deliberation should be capable of generating reflection among contending parties, non-coercive, and capable of connecting particular experiences to generalized principles. These principles, I would add, should themselves be open to critique and interrogation in public debate. This type of deliberation may not satisfy the rigid epistemic requirements of reciprocity and equality typical of some deliberative democratic theory (Estlund, 1997), nor will it generate a rationally justified historical consensus (a concern shared by Hirsch 2012a; Little, 2007, 2011; Schaap, 2006). However, it does create the conditions for a sustained, vigorous critique of historical wrongs and their consequences for the present.

Furthermore, critical reflection includes publicly *questioning the assumptions* that inform popular interpretations about the past. It may raise profound challenges to those facile histories that vindicate triumphalist settler histories (such as America's "manifest destiny") and disregard the claims of historical victims. These struggles over the "politics of memory," or how to remember the past, are naturally fraught and contentious. But they can be based on culturally specific conceptions of moral personhood that are often already present in contemporary debates over other political issues. The point is that fundamental assumptions about the past are also subjected to critical interrogation.

Finally, critical reflection requires the *critique of basic social values*. Unchallenged past injustices will continue to shape the dominant values of society, and consequently the practices and policies directed toward historically disadvantaged groups. Critical reflection helps reframe past events as violations of basic social norms and values, and thus challenge society to confront these wrongs and address their impact on national identity. Ultimately, critical reflection raises questions about what kind of society citizens want and which values they espouse.

In the American context, this would mean going beyond discussions over the use of indigenous symbols for sports teams or the purported benefits of indigenous-owned casinos that have dominated recent debates (Economist, 2015; Think Progress, 2015). It would include addressing a host of core issues affecting Native populations: poverty and unemployment, education, child welfare, as well as more contentious questions like indigenous sovereignty and land ownership (Wunder, 2005). But it requires more than this: critical reflection also enjoins citizens to examine the ways in which the country's founding principles of self-rule and democracy are implicated in the systematic exclusion and destruction of indigenous communities (Griffin, 2007; Williams, 1990), and what this means for national identity today. Critical reflection includes, among other things, a sustained inquiry into the contested meanings of democratic principles, institutions and understandings of identity in divided communities. As Muldoon (2010: 117) has argued, "...democracy cannot cordon off its own values and institutions from contestation without opening itself up to claims of arbitrariness and violence." This critique of values and constitutional principles shifts reconciliation politics to the continued re-examination and reconstitution of the political community rather than securing a harmonious society.

As a public deliberative process, critical reflection entails citizen engagement, which is admittedly less ambitious than what is found in mainstream deliberative or communitarian theorizing (the latter concerned with social harmony) but nevertheless of fundamental social importance. Critical reflection is thus both normative and political. It is normative in that it deals with fundamental issues of justice (what is owed to whom, by whom) and political because it raises difficult questions about responsibility and collective identity, and contests society's positive self-perception. Certainly,

reflection on its own does not secure a transformation of relations nor does it qualify as appropriate repair for past harms; it is only one of several elements for reconciliation. But without some kind of reflection, it is difficult to envision relations based on mutual respect developing in the long term. The type of critical reflection envisioned here, involving uncomfortable challenges to the accepted truths and self-understanding of the majority, is central to reconciliation politics.

Symbolic and material recognition

Critical reflection can assist in creating a space for the moral *recognition* of victims and their descendants. Recognition concerns reinterpreting historical narratives of past injustices through the explicit acknowledgement of the communities that suffered. It also involves rejecting harmful stereotypes and restoring a sense of dignity and moral worth, and in this regard serves as a principal expression of political responsibility.⁵ Naturally, the specific kinds of appropriate recognition will vary based on the types of harms, their legacies, and the current status of indigenous peoples, which may range widely. But in more general theoretical terms, recognition is concerned with correcting mistaken or purposely misleading accounts of the past, promoting strategies that address contemporary legacies of harms in ways that are normatively appropriate and practically consequential, and restoring victims' dignity by acknowledging the moral wrongness of what happened to them. Recognition, in other words, is ultimately about promoting mutual respect beyond agonistic conflict.

Recognition efforts can take a variety of forms, though they can be broadly classified as symbolic or material. *Collective symbolic* recognition, for example, focuses on the structures and policies that facilitated group targeting, as well as society's obligation to recognize the experiences and moral dignity of victims. Collective symbolic recognition may include official apologies, museums, monuments to promote collective memory, and the reform of educational history curricula. Truth commissions and other historical inquiry commissions may also play a role in promoting symbolic recognition by drawing public attention to past injustices, as in Canada's commission to investigate the abuses of indigenous children in the residential school system (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; also see Hinton, 2010).

There are a number of examples that can be chosen, but here I use one illustrative case—the US Bureau of Indian Affairs' official apology to indigenous peoples in 2000. The apology draws attention to the promise but also limitations of official recognition efforts, and highlights how symbolic recognition is only one part of reconciliation. Kevin Gover, then Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, apologized to Native Americans for the wrongs committed by the Bureau since its founding 175 years earlier. Gover recounted the history of the Bureau's misdeeds and the need for "reflection and contemplation." He stated, "on behalf of the Bureau of Indian Affairs, I extend this formal apology to Indian people for the historical conduct of this agency," and continued, "we cannot yet ask for forgiveness... what we do ask is that together we allow the healing to begin" (Gover, 2000). This apology is noteworthy for several reasons. First, it marks an attempt to recognize and take responsibility for the injustices committed against Native Americans by a federal agency, thus highlighting the systematic and institutional nature of historical injustices. Furthermore, it links historical wrongs to present conditions, showing how continued cultural and material harms are rooted in past practices. Finally, it recognizes the moral status of indigenous peoples by condemning the "racism and inhumanity" of government policies and calls for a refounding of relations on equal terms. Indeed, Melissa Nobles notes that the apology "was quite meaningful for its intended audience of Native Americans" (Nobles, 2008: 123), while Rebecca Tsosie defends its ability to "inform the 'collective conscience' of contemporary Americans" by challenging racist assumptions (Tsosie, 2006: 186).

There are, to be sure, shortcomings with relying too heavily on symbolic measures like apologies. First, the apology is tightly circumscribed: although Gover was a government official at the time, he was clear to note the limits of its illocutionary force (“I do not speak today for the United States,” either the nation or the government). Second, the apology’s sincerity has been openly questioned among some Native American activists, who have underscored that without sustained changes in federal policy on housing, education, political power and indigenous autonomy, the apology is simply cheap talk (Blackstone, 2007). The apology may also reinforce the monological nature of some forms of symbolic recognition; after all, there was no primary addressee who could either accept or reject the apology. Rather, it could be read as one more instance of the state’s power to set the terms of acknowledgement and debate (a danger repeatedly raised by the agonistic thinkers discussed earlier). Nobles confirms some of these limits when she writes, “it had no effect on the legal status of Native Americans or relations between tribes and the federal government” (Nobles, 2008: 123). What should we conclude from this? Symbolic measures such as apologies can make important if limited contributions to reconciliation, and should be combined with other strategies for material support and political access, as discussed below.

Collective material recognition concerns the material conditions required for the community to overcome systemic poverty and structural violence (Galtung, 1969: 168) resulting from past injustices. Collective material programs can cover a broad range of policies, such as financial disbursements, restitution of land and cultural patrimony, and investments in public education, housing, employment and economic development (Corlett, 2003: 147–153). The goal of these programs is to overturn entrenched patterns of economic inequality that have resulted from past violations.

A number of federal initiatives have made important contributions to material recognition, including policies on addressing poverty and economic development (Community Development Financial Institution Fund), housing (the Native American Housing and Self-Determination Act), the restitution of cultural patrimony (The Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act), and the return of seized land (the Indian Claims Commission Act), among other issues (Barkan, 2000; National Congress of American Indians, 2007). These and other policies have helped decrease the number of indigenous homes with no or partial plumbing, expand affordable housing stock, widen healthcare coverage, and facilitate the return of some important cultural artifacts to Native tribes (though indigenous people still fare significantly worse than other Americans on nearly all development measurements [National Congress of American Indians, 2013]). The result has been an important—if modest—improvement over the past two decades in the material status of Native peoples, which if sustained and amplified can support greater participation in social, political and economic life and further reconciliation by addressing some of the deeply divisive consequences of historical injustices.

Nevertheless, most material recognition efforts have focused narrowly on improving indigenous standards of living *within* the postcolonial framework, and other pressing questions about indigenous political voice and power remain cast aside in practice. However, in postcolonial settler societies, debates over what are appropriate policies for material recognition are enmeshed in profound questions of identity and power and raise challenges for reconciliation. Some indigenous groups, for instance, seek the return of seized lands at the center of their collective identity, and they thus oppose federal financial compensation (Corlett, 2003: 188; Wilkins and Lomawaima, 2001). As Barkan argues, the debate over material recognition is actually “over *Indianness*—that is, over Indian identity and sovereignty. Who owns it, who controls it, and what is its place in the American fabric?” (Barkan, 2000: 172). Material recognition, while important, on its own may be seen as little more than an attempt to manage indigenous demands (Tsosie, 2006). For many Native Americans, political participation and autonomy are central concerns.

Symbolic and material recognition underscore the moral status of indigenous peoples and thus strengthen reconciliation as moral respect. They also serve as evaluative criteria for actual reconciliation politics; in this regard, they are a response to the problem raised earlier of agonism's normative indeterminacy, the inability to provide justifications for particular reconciliation values, institutions and practices. Nevertheless, as these examples above show, on their own recognition efforts remain limited in their impact. Reconciliation also requires establishing the conditions for political participation by Native communities.

Political participation

Political participation is the third element in this account of reconciliation for historical wrongs in settler societies. Its importance stems from the limitations of material and symbolic recognition. Without adequate political agency, economic assistance policies may reinforce damaging stereotypes of laziness and dependence on the state's coffers, while symbolic recognition efforts for their part may pre-emptively limit difficult debates over the distribution of power by redirecting public attention towards questions that are more politically palatable, such as an official expression of remorse for past harms. These limitations of symbolic and material recognition underscore how reconciliation also requires securing political voice for marginalized groups. This final element involves ensuring formal access to *and* actual participation in political governance and decision-making institutions.

The nature of political participation undoubtedly will vary across and within postcolonial settler cases and depend on the legacy of violence and types of groups affected. A variety of institutional responses may be appropriate. At the most basic level, this consists of securing standard political and civil rights, including the rights to assemble, vote and run for office. It will also likely include devolving some—perhaps extensive—political power to indigenous communities, in order to ensure their own substantive political agency and control. This requires indigenous governing authority to “make core decisions about resources, policy, and institutions” through “institutions and activities” that are rooted in Native cultures, rather than wholly dictated from without (Taylor, 2008: 3, 4). Thus, political participation is not merely the formal right to vote; there must be real opportunities to exercise political power.

In the wake of significant Indian political activism and civil disobedience campaigns of the 1960s through the 1980s, including the so-called Red Power occupation of Alcatraz prison by the Indians of All Tribes organization, the federal government adopted a policy of “self-determination” for Native American tribes through a variety of laws, such as the Indian Self-Determination Act and its subsequent amendments. And yet the shift to self-determination was hardly transformative: it consisted of transferring the administration of social and economic policies from federal to tribal bureaucracies, but gave relatively little independent political decision-making power to tribal governance entities (Esber, 1992; Getches, 2001). The self-determination and sovereignty powers of indigenous groups have continued to remain highly curtailed and in some cases have regressed: Native American nations are still “domestic dependent nations” under national trusteeship (Wilkins and Stark, 2011: 47).

These limitations have nevertheless catalyzed the creation of new indigenous social movements and reinvigorated older ones. Many of these movements have launched campaigns for greater self-determination, more robust sovereignty rights vis-à-vis federal and state governments, and extended political authority over natural resources on tribal lands. For instance, the Native American Rights Fund and the Indian Defense League of America have worked to expand tribal treaty rights and sovereignty claims against federal and state governments, while the National Congress of American Indians—an umbrella organization for indigenous tribes across the country—advocates for territorial

autonomy and the active protection of indigenous cultures. Somewhat more radical groups, such as the National Indian Youth Council and the American Indian Movement,⁶ have carried out a variety of voting rights and direct action programs over the years. There is enormous variety in the strategies and specific goals of these and similar organizations, but an overarching aim is to expand the ability of indigenous groups to rule themselves democratically, while simultaneously participating actively in the political life of the country. The very terms of Native American citizenship—which simultaneously includes legal membership in the United States as well as in specific indigenous tribes—highlight the complexity of achieving this. Indeed, greater political participation, and the questions of autonomy and power it raises, may ultimately raise “fundamental challenges to the conventions and tacit assumptions that underpin the governance of white-settler dominions” (Fleras, 1999: 188). Certainly, indigenous self-rule also requires accountability mechanisms to prevent internal corruption and paternalism, which have sometimes proven to be serious. Nevertheless, recent comparative research suggests that increased autonomy exercised through democratic indigenous institutions is strongly correlated with material and cultural well-being as well as political efficacy (Cornell, 2006).

Political participation is at its core about the autonomous exercise of political power in the present and future. Without robust participation, efforts to address entrenched legacies of injustice only reproduce the conditions of dependence at the heart of settler colonialism. As Cornell and Kalt (2007) find, indigenous political power is one of the central determinants for escaping poverty. But participation is also crucial to reconciliation, for it contributes to ensuring that indigenous peoples have control over their own lives as well as are active members in national political life.

Conclusion

I have sketched a theory of reconciliation for settler societies based on mutual respect, which includes the three core elements of critical reflection, symbolic and material recognition, and political participation. As an intervention in normative debates, this discussion did not focus on practical guidelines for reconciliation, though a number of strategies were suggested (greater political debate and critique of collective identity, land reform, poverty reduction and economic development, collective memory efforts, further devolution of political power, etc.). The aim of this theory is to set the normative conditions for living together that do not simply reinforce the values and self-understanding of the majority culture. This is difficult to achieve in practice, as the previous pages have shown. What qualifies as a reconciled society may reflect the values and identity of the majority population. In the United States debates over reconciliation with indigenous communities frequently draw on “expert” opinions and policies meant to “modernize” those communities and integrate them into the wider society, a pattern repeated in Australia, New Zealand, Canada and other settler societies (Bodley, 2008). Ultimately, the risk is that majority opinion becomes the final arbiter of reconciliation while excluding the voices of historically disadvantaged groups, a particularly common occurrence in these societies. This article has attempted to respond to this risk by placing indigenous groups at the center of reconciliation theory and emphasizing the centrality of mutual respect; that is, recognition of the equal moral worth of Native peoples, which in turn requires subjecting social values, practices and collective identity to open and inclusive debate as well as securing the conditions necessary for indigenous peoples to participate meaningfully in shared political and social life. Doing so will raise uncomfortable questions about who “we” are, but such discomfort is necessary if the present legacies of injustice are to be faced squarely.

Of course, reconciliation is slow and uneven, and is subject to numerous setbacks—there are no uniform “lessons learned” available for easy implementation, and long histories of violence and exclusion can poison efforts to build a just society. Nevertheless, this account of reconciliation provides a normative baseline for thinking about morally acceptable coexistence, one that goes

beyond the minimal contestation of agonism but is shy of the apolitical social harmony of communitarianism. The challenges to achieving and sustaining respect are significant but not insurmountable. To turn away from these challenges, however, would constitute a further injustice.

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Adrian Little, Sarah Maddison, Mark Kesselman, and the anonymous reviewers for their comments.

Funding

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Notes

1. *Re*-conciliation implies a society is “returning to” some prior just condition, which is not the case in settler contexts. There are no historically just relations between colonizer and colonized. I use “reconciliation” with the awareness that it is an imperfect but widely adopted term in these debates. If anything, it highlights how even our normative vocabulary may fail us in trying to grapple with enormous historical injustices.
2. There is still controversy over proper terminology. Here, I use the terms employed by many activists and scholars: Native American, indigenous, and more recently, aboriginals. The US government still uses Indian and American Indian, but these are considered offensive or outdated.
3. An extended account of mutual respect for recent political violence is in Verdeja (2009).
4. Societies emerging from recent civil war or authoritarian rule may require a different formulation of reconciliation (Bashir and Kymlicka, 2010).
5. Some scholars refer to this combination of symbolic and material recognition under the rubric of reparations. See De Greiff (2008); Verdeja (2006).
6. The American Indian Movement (AIM) is split into two main groups, the AIM-Grand Governing Council and AIM International Confederation of Autonomous Chapters.

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