

Governing the Past through National Reconciliation: Containment vs. Integrative Approaches in South Africa and Australia

Abstract: This paper brings the well-developed sociology of mnemonic practices to bear onto an object that is generally the purview of the interdisciplinary field of transitional justice: national reconciliation. Already implemented in over 30 countries, reconciliation is an increasingly relied-upon political and social ritual through which nations seek to address traumatic pasts. In addition to providing official accounts of past conflicts, reconciliation processes define and manage appropriate uses of the past in present-day national communities. Through successful governance the past ceases to be an unruly, chaotic force capable of generating further conflict and may be harnessed to produce political and social solidarity. But how, precisely, do reconciliation processes attempt to “govern” when, how, and by whom the past is invoked? This paper examines two cases to illustrate divergent approaches to the task of governing the past through national reconciliation. Whereas South Africa’s reconciliation *contains* a past characterized as imminently dangerous, Australian reconciliation actively *integrates* the past in order to overcome its difficulty.

Governing the Past through National Reconciliation: Containment vs. Integrative Approaches in South Africa and Australia

National reconciliation is an increasingly relied-upon political and social ritual through which nations seek to address traumatic pasts—a “moral reordering” of deeply divided political communities (Moon 2004). More than 30 nations have pursued national reconciliation over the past several decades, typically during post-conflict or post-authoritarian transitions, closely attended by an international industry of reconciliation experts and transitional justice consultants. Each with their own unique mandates, the principles and institutions of national reconciliation processes vary widely, though all draw on “restorative” philosophies of justice that emphasize the reintegration of offenders, reparations to victims, and overall social healing. Though sometimes associated with the “age of apology” and “fin-de-siècle fever of atonement” at the end of the millennium (Soyinka, 1990; c.f. Christodoulidis and Veitch 2007:1), national reconciliation has become an apparent fixture of our global political landscape: Canada’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission finished its seven-year investigation of the residential school abuses of Indigenous students and communities in 2015, and reconciliation processes are currently underway in South Sudan, Nepal, Colombia, Tunisia, and Afghanistan.

Amidst a wealth of legal, philosophical and practitioner-oriented studies of reconciliation, there remains much to learn about how national reconciliation processes shape collective memory. One important task of reconciliation is to publically examine and acknowledge the past, often by conducting investigations, taking the testimony of victims and publishing official reports regarding the nature and extent of human rights abuses. Reconciliation also establishes commemorative rituals or memorial sites to display and preserve the past. At the same time, reconciliation is also tasked with providing closure on the past so that nations can move on to peaceful coexistence without being overwhelmed by previous traumas. Real world reconciliation processes must confront the tensions inherent in their dual imperatives to remember and to forget.

This paper argues that national reconciliation processes attempt to negotiate such tensions by imposing “governance” on the past—by defining and exercising authority over the appropriate and inappropriate uses of the past in the present-day national community. Thus, in addition to creating official accounts of past events, reconciliation processes also generate narratives and institutions to regulate when, how and by whom the past is invoked. Through successful governance the past ceases to be an unruly, chaotic force capable of generating further conflict and may be harnessed

to produce political and social solidarity. However, there is no single prescription for how reconciliation should govern the past, either in theory or in practice. Each governance regime emerges from the singularities and contingencies of nations' individual reconciliation processes, which entail different assessments of how the conflictual past can best be managed.

After providing background about the literature on national reconciliation and social memory studies, two empirical cases are reviewed to illustrate divergent approaches to governing the national past through reconciliation. Whereas South Africa's reconciliation *contains* a past characterized as imminently dangerous, Australian reconciliation actively *integrates* the past in order to overcome its difficulty. Finally, the paper discusses some of the social implications of each approach to governing the past.

I. Background: National Reconciliation and Social Memory Studies

National reconciliation sits at the intersection of many disciplinary and subfield concerns, primarily located within the literature on transitional justice and bearing strong affiliations to conflict resolution and human rights literatures as well as more philosophical approaches to justice and memory. Some of the most paradigmatic cases of reconciliation include those designed to address the legacies of apartheid in South Africa, genocide in

Rwanda and Cambodia, civil war in Liberia and dictatorship in Chile. In the wake of Canada's recent Truth and Reconciliation Commission (2008-2015), exciting new scholarship has begun to explore reconciliation not merely as a concept to guide political transitions, but also as practice relevant—and even necessary—for achieving justice in stable liberal democracies (Bashir 2011; Furlas 2015). Despite numerous attempts to impose order on the profusion of definitions of reconciliation (Bloomfield 2006; Hermann 2004; Meierhenrich 2008), “it has become customary for almost every text on the subject to begin with an acknowledgement of the lack of consensual understanding, and use, of the term” (Bloomfield 2006:4). Adding to this confusion, national reconciliation is understood as *both* the aspirational end goal imagined for a society as well as the transformational process undertaken to reach this goal.

Philosophically, national reconciliation fits within the tradition of reparative or restorative justice, which eschews the punishment focus of retributive justice and takes the quality of social relationships to be its highest value (Clark 2008; Daly 2008; Walker 2015). Scholars have distilled the primary essence of reconciliation in different ways, including as creating trust (De Greiff 2008; Govier and Verwoerd 2002) and building relationships (Bloomfield 2006; Murphy 2010). Another understanding of reconciliation

suggests its central goal is to provide psychological and symbolic closure, such that “[g]rief and loss no longer plague the individual consciously or unconsciously, and the victim lives not in a state somewhere between denial and obsession, where the loss is to a large degree accepted and incorporated into the functioning of everyday life” (Hamber and Wilson 2002:37). While national unity is not necessary for reconciliation, scholars theorize that reconciliation requires individuals to at least adjust their own identities to recognize the legitimacy of others, such as in the Israel-Palestine conflict, and to move towards the pursuit of shared interests and perhaps even shared identities (Kelman 2004; Verdeja 2013). Some normative theories of reconciliation, especially those developed in South Africa, center on a Christian concept of forgiveness as integral to the process (Meierhenrich 2008; Moon 2004; Wilson 2001). However, most scholars now agree that forgiveness is not a required part of national reconciliation (Hamber 2007; Kohen 2009; Radzik and Murphy 2015), noting stark differences between reconciliation goals of national healing versus civic trust, characterized by “warm” elements of remorse and empathy and “cold” elements of social beliefs respectively (Auerbach 2009; VanAntwerpen 2008).

In practice, the goals of reconciliation processes are defined, with varying levels of precision, through mandates, which are typically passed as national legislative acts. These mandates also specify how a council or organization for legislation will be created, the purview of its activities and the timeline for their completion. Truth commissions are often, but not always, a centerpiece of reconciliation alongside formal policies of general or partial amnesty, lustration, reparations and apology. Formal commemorative rituals and memorialization efforts are also widely practiced as part of national reconciliation. Finally, reconciliation processes often include provisions for public education, rehabilitation, community-level initiatives and recommendations for future activities (Chapman 2009). Trials and punishment for perpetrators occupy a disputed place in the arsenal of techniques appropriate for reconciliation, depending on the extent to which these tactics are perceived as contributing to healing and the renewal of civic trust. Given this range of possible goals and tools, the process of deliberation about what national reconciliation will include is itself an important aspect of the reconciliation process (Radzik and Murphy 2015) — a kind of first test of groups' ability to work together and generate consensus at the national level after prolonged conflict.

While some positive outcomes for human rights and democratization have been found in relation to the use of truth commissions and amnesties in transitional settings (Gibson 2004, 2006; Olsen, Payne, and Reiter 2010), many aspects of national reconciliation are disputed. For instance, there is deep disagreement about the extent to which reconciliation is effective at providing closure for victims and overall social healing compared to other transitional justice measures, such as the retributive punishment of perpetrators. Reconciliation is criticized for sacrificing justice, even to the extent of creating a “justice deficit”, in the pursuit of national healing, such as when perpetrators of apartheid-era crimes were given amnesty in exchange for their testimony before the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (Gibson 2002, 2006; Rotberg and Thompson 2000). Additionally, reconciliation is criticized for providing internal legitimacy and international goodwill to states that fail to fully account for or to rectify past atrocities. Reconciliation may limit the space for political and interpersonal (Edmonds 2016). This issue is compounded by the fact that reconciliation rarely addresses issues of socioeconomic inequality and resource distribution that underlie and exacerbate violent conflict (Evans 2016; Sharp 2014:2014). Nonetheless, reconciliation remains an important tool in the peace-building repertoire, and may even be mandated as part of

conflict resolution negotiations after human rights abuses (Arthur 2009; Gready and Robins 2014).

Sociologists have only rarely studied empirical cases of national reconciliation (Elder, Pratt, and Ellis 2006; Teeger 2015) or theorized it as a general phenomenon (Tavuchis 1991; Trimikliniotis 2013) despite its many connections to sociological topics of interest, especially nation-building and collective memory. Social memory studies attend to the social frameworks and shared systems of meaning through which individual memories are formed and recalled. This subfield traces its lineage back to Maurice Halbwachs, a student of Émile Durkheim, who argued that “it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, recognize, and localize their memories...” (Halbwachs 1992:38; cf Olick and Robbins 1998:109). An important approach has been the development of a sociology of mnemonic practices, which focuses on the conflict-laden processes by which social actors encourage the adoption or suppression of particular memories, rather than the study of collective memory as an undifferentiated or stagnant entity (Olick and Robbins 1998:112).¹ But while “memory wars” may be considered nearly ubiquitous

¹ The trend towards “mnemonic practices” is consistent with an overall trend towards a sociology of practice.

across time and space, there are important distinctions between the issues at stake: mnemonic battles can be distinguished by concerns over the *existence, nature and/or relevance* of the past (DeGloma 2015).

Following this insight, reconciliation processes' creation of authoritative accounts of past conflict, i.e. accounts regarding the existence and nature of past conflict, bears relation to the strand of social memory studies that considers the "official memory" of states-- the "disciplinary power" associated with officially produced state histories (Olick and Robbins 1998:126–27). Official memory is never a direct or inevitable consequence of events, but must be actively shaped by social actors and embedded in institutions. Although Hiroshima is now widely regarded as a national trauma in Japan and serves as a foundational moment for its ardently anti-nuclear identity, it was not commemorated in this way until nearly a decade later after domestic actors adapted transnational discourses into a narrative of Japanese national victimhood (Saito 2006). Furthermore, once created, official memory is not stagnant. National centennial and bicentennial celebrations are often moments in which ideas about nationality and national identity are formed and reformed by activating new memories or re-narrating existing memories in new ways (Spillman 1997). Finally, the official memory of states is a deeply contested process. Multiple actors,

sometimes referred to as “mnemonic entrepreneurs”, compete to institutionalize alternate narratives about common social symbols (Pelak 2015; Schwartz 1996; Wagner-Pacifici and Schwartz 1991). Historical memory and interpretation even of the most common national symbols, such as George Washington and Abraham Lincoln in the United States, can diverge greatly according to commemorative networks and structures that can follow other social cleavages such as race and politics (Schwartz 1991, 1997). Contestation takes place not only around individual symbols, but concerning the composition of larger “national narratives”, the myths through which individuals come to understand themselves as part of a nation (Anderson 2006; Bell 2003; Geisler 2005; Schissler and Soysal 2005).

Scholars have readily observed in reconciliation processes these common social memory dynamics in the construction of official accounts (or “truths”) regarding the existence and nature of past conflicts (Buckley-Zistel 2014; McGrattan 2014; Moon 2008). However, far less attention has been paid to how reconciliation processes navigate the third kind of mnemonic battle concerning the *relevance* of the past going forward. What narratives does reconciliation produce about the appropriate uses of the past in the present? What institutions does it offer to manage these uses?

II. Empirical Cases: Governance through Containment vs. Integration

Despite being two of the earliest examples of the phenomenon in the early and mid-1990s, South Africa and Australia occupy extremely different places in the history of national reconciliations: the former became the most widely known and referenced model with its globally renowned Truth and Reconciliation Commission, while the latter remains little more than a footnote internationally. This paper argues that South Africa and Australia also occupy opposite places on a spectrum of national reconciliation approaches to governing their conflictual pasts. These two reconciliation processes exemplify two distinctive approaches of *containment* and *integration* respectively, with important implications for their accompanying mnemonic strategies, narrative frameworks, and reconciliation institutions.

[Table 1: Containment vs. Integration Strategies of Governance in South Africa and Australia]]

In particular, Australia's long-term integrative approach governing the past through reconciliation offers an important corrective to the theoretical and empirical literature on reconciliation, which often tends to assume that national reconciliation necessarily seeks to distance or contain the past. The following sections demonstrate how differing narrative characterizations of

the past in South Africa and Australia correspond to distinct mnemonic strategies and institutional remedies for governing the past.

An important issue here is the extent to which national reconciliation processes can be considered to itself characterize or position the past, activities that might more appropriately be accredited to the social actors who carry out reconciliation. Moreover, there is a question of the degree to which national reconciliation can be considered to possess a unified approach to the national past given that these are often heavily contested processes. This paper argues that national reconciliation processes *do* serve as appropriate and important units of analysis because of the “disciplinary power” associated with officially produced state histories (Olick and Robbins 1998:126–27). Deciding to hold a national reconciliation is in some ways akin to building a stage: though there may be conflict behind the scenes, the actors who emerge from the curtains to speak in the spotlight will offer significant pronouncements to the national audience. The final reports published by reconciliation institutions will be quoted in sources from schoolchildren’s textbooks to international media. Even if their findings and recommendations are rejected by important groups, reconciliation processes nonetheless mark the parameters for future debates. In other

words, pronouncements uttered or printed under the auspices of a reconciliation process are consequential.

A. Containment: South Africa (1995-2002)

“Having looked the beast of the past in the eye, having asked and received forgiveness and having made amends, let us shut the door on the past - not in order to forget it but in order not to allow it to imprison us. Let us move into the glorious future [...]”

-Chairman Desmond Tutu’s Forward to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission Report (1998: 22)

South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was part of the negotiated transition out of the era of apartheid created by the National Unity government’s legislation in 1995. Under international pressure including the famous divestment campaigns, the white apartheid government had already begun repealing the foundational laws of apartheid when the African National Congress (ANC) was swept into power in the country’s first multiracial elections in 1994. As defined in its mandate, the goal of the South African TRC was to “provide for the investigation and the establishment of as complete a picture as possible of the nature, causes and extent of gross violations of human rights” with authorization to grant

amnesty, provide reparations, reporting on the violations, and making recommendations to prevent future violations (Parliament of South Africa 1995). In this founding legislative act, the purpose of the TRC was strictly delimited to hearing testimony on designated types of apartheid-related crimes taking place between 1960-1994. Its seventeen commissioners led by Chairman Desmond Tutu were supported by around 300 staffers as they eventually granted 849 amnesties, refused 5,392 others, and heard 2,000 testimonies at public hearings out of more than 21,000 total submissions (USIP n.d.). Its final report was finalized in five volumes in 1998, with an additional two volumes published in 2002-3.

One of the concerns of South Africans and international observers of the TRC was avoiding the bloodshed and further violence that many predicted would come as a result of the end of apartheid. Many in South Africa disagreed that the TRC was a better option than pursuing trials. For instance, did the granting of amnesty to the five policemen who came forward to publicly admit to killing Steve Biko, an activist whose brutal death was one of the most high-profile cases of the apartheid era, constitute an “acceptable compromise” by the metric of justice (NYT 1997)? However, the TRC eloquently and repeated its case for reconciliation as an innovative “third way” between blanket amnesty and general amnesia on one hand,

and the prosecution of all perpetrators of apartheid-era crimes of the other (Boraine 2000; Tutu 2000). The founding act of the TRC argues directly against retributive justice, saying, “there is a need for understanding but not for vengeance, a need for reparation but not for retaliation, a need for *ubuntu* but not for victimization” (Parliament of South Africa 1995).

In the TRC’s argument against amnesty and amnesia, the past is painted as dangerous entity—a “skeleton” or a “beast” capable of haunting, imprisoning, holding hostage, or dooming the new South African democracy. In his opening address to the first meeting of the TRC commissioners, Chairman Tutu warned against the dangers of indiscriminate amnesty and national amnesia:

We are privileged to be on this Commission to assist our land, our people to come to terms with our dark past once and for all. [...] It is not dealing with the past to say facilely, let bygones be bygones, for then they won't be bygones. Our country, our society would be doomed to the instability of uncertainty – the uncertainty engendered by not knowing when yet another scandal of the past would hit the headlines, when another skeleton would be dragged out of the cupboard. (Tutu 1995)

Similarly, in his Chairperson's forward to the final report, Tutu makes a plea to consider the Commission's report as the final word on the past: "Having looked the beast of the past in the eye, having asked and received forgiveness and having made amends, let us shut the door on the past - not in order to forget it but in order not to allow it to imprison us" (SATRC 1998:22).²

The TRC represented itself as the only viable solution for creating a barrier or boundary between this dangerous past and the idealized, "glorious" future of South Africa as the Rainbow Nation (Moon 2008). Tutu's first address to the TRC stated: "we have the privilege of helping to heal the hurts of the past, to transcend the alienations and the hostilities of that past so that we can close the door on that past and concentrate in the present and our glorious future" (1995). When President Mandela received the TRC's final report in 1998 and warned against "endless finger pointing" that could ensue as a result of publishing historical facts, advocating instead that "the Report that today becomes the property of our nation should be a call

² The metaphor of the past as a beast is repeated several times in Tutu's 2000 monograph, *No Future without Forgiveness*, such as in this passage: "the past, far from disappearing or lying down and being quiet, has an embarrassing and persistent way of returning and haunting us unless it has in fact been dealt with adequately. Unless we look the beast in the eye we find it has an uncanny habit of returning to hold us hostage" (2000:27). Even in 2016, President Jacob Zuma's Day of Reconciliation Address stated: "black people are implored to come to bury the pain of the past and move on" (Zuma 2016).

to all of us to celebrate and to strengthen what we have done as a nation as we leave our terrible past behind us forever” (Mandela 1998:136).³ Mandela continued, “[t]he report we receive today - and which is to be completed when the Amnesty process has run on its course - cannot but help signal the end of one season and the beginning of another” (1998:133). Ten years later scholar Clare Moon would agree that “the TRC has come to demarcate symbolically the singular social, political and historical event marking the boundary between South Africa’s apartheid past and its more democratic present” (Moon 2008:3).

The containment strategy of the TRC to “close the door” on South Africa’s past were not only discursive, as in Mandela and Tutus’ framing of the Commission’s work and findings, but were also institutional. The primary tool of South African reconciliation was its famous truth commission, which it combined with additional mechanisms of amnesty in exchange for testimony and meagre monetary reparations for recognized victims. Scholars have theorized truth commissions in general as an institutional form that promotes mnemonic closure:

³ Similarly, in the conclusion to his speech Mandela states: “Above all, we should remember that [the TRC] was when South Africans of all backgrounds came together for the good of all that we confounded the prophets of doom by bringing an end to this terrible period of our history” (Mandela 1998:136).

If one follows Michael Humphrey, truth commissions are composed of two distinct elements: the process and the product (Humphrey 2003: 176). While the process of truth-searching is legitimised by the wide-scale involvement of all parties concerned, often through public staging, the product in form of a final report (including, at times, the promise of reparations) resembles an attempt at shutting down all interpretation of the past. In this sense, the process of speaking the truth serves a performative function, whilst the final report is meant to facilitate closure. (Buckley-Zistel 2014:150)

To conclude, South Africa's TRC is an excellent example of the *containment* type of national reconciliation featuring strong discursive and institutional strategies for distancing and separating the past, which is painted as imminently dangerous. The TRC was framed as creating a boundary or barrier between the past and present, which were assumed to be antagonistic to one another. The relatively short-lived institution of the TRC structured the transition from the top-down by defining categories of abuses and setting restrictions on testimonies as well as retaining ultimate control over amnesty and reparations processes. Finally, as the TRC presented its final report in 1998, it recommended that the door be shut on the past contained in those five volumes lest it do further harm to the fledgling nation.

B. Integration: Australia (1991-present)

“We cannot change the past but we can learn from it. We can make amends and we unless we can heal historical wounds, they will continue to play out in our country’s future. Reconciliation can only truly evolve when the Australian community and our major institutions acknowledge and repair the wrongs of the past, understand their effects—and make sure that these wrongs, or similarly damaging actions, are not occurring today and are never repeated in the future.”

- Reconciliation Australia, “The State of Reconciliation” Report (2016:9).

When the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) was created by the Australian Parliament in 1991, reconciliation was not yet a global phenomenon and seems to have emerged endogenously in Australia as a practical solution to a difficult political issue: the growing demand for land rights by Indigenous peoples (Attwood 2005; Pratt 2005).⁴ A few months earlier, the lamentable state of Indigenous non-Indigenous relations in Australia had taken over the national spotlight when the Royal Commission

⁴ Just months before in what is widely recognized to be the first national reconciliation in the world, Chile’s National Commission for Truth and Reconciliation had released its final report documenting thousands of cases of forced disappearance, torture, and killings during Augusto Pinochet’s decades-long dictatorship. Afghanistan’s much-less known 1986 National Reconciliation Policy (*Ashti Milli / Musaleh-e-Milli*) might also be considered the first attempt at national reconciliation (Najibullah 2017).

into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody released its final report on social and legal issues underlying the disproportionate deaths of Indigenous prisoners. Moreover, the recent establishment Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC), one of the first Indigenous-led bodies to oversee governmental portfolios of government affairs, had reignited debates about appropriate forms of Indigenous representation, and the current Hawke government was facing calls to implement its campaign promises regarding land rights (Pratt 2005). The CAR, which had 25 members from both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander as well as non-Indigenous backgrounds⁵, ran from 1991 until 2000, whereupon it established Reconciliation Australia as a permanent organization to inherit its mission and national leadership for reconciliation. Patrick Dodson, who had recently finished his term as one of five commissioners for the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, was appointed as Chairman presiding over the new CAR and would later become known as the “father of reconciliation.”

Throughout all of its institutional phases, one prominent feature of Australian reconciliation, which today remains one of its most globally

⁵ Dodson was also the first Indigenous Australian Roman Catholic priest who later left the priesthood.

unique aspects, has been its broad mandate to address issues of present-day Indigenous inequality. The CAR's founding legislation states: "to promote, by leadership, education and discussion, a deeper understanding by all Australians of the history, cultures, past dispossession and continuing disadvantage of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders and of the need to redress that disadvantage" (Australian Government 1991:6.1.b). In this way, founding act of the CAR forges a strong link between Indigenous dispossession and contemporary difficulties faced by Indigenous communities. Twenty-six years later, Australian reconciliation still positions the past as a key to navigating present-day issues: Reconciliation Australia's most recent agenda-setting report on "The State of Reconciliation in Australia" reiterates the injustice of past policies towards Indigenous peoples and states that historical acceptance, one of its five cornerstones of reconciliation, "is about understanding the immediate and devastating impact of these actions and the intergenerational trauma they caused, including their effect on the lives of many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians today" (RA 2016:26).

The process of national reconciliation certainly refers to the past as a source of difficulty and injury. In its final "Declaration Towards Reconciliation", the CAR states: "[o]ur nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal

the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves” (CAR 2000). More recently, Dodson has written of “fundamental and unresolved wounds that diminish Australia’s collective sense of nationhood” (RA 2016:iv), relating to a second theme of “unfinished business” that considers the work of reconciliation to be far from complete due to ongoing Indigenous disadvantage and the failure of comprehensive reform. However, in the words of Evelyn Scott, the Chairwoman of the CAR after Dodson’s retirement, the nation is “haunted and undermined by these issues of unfinished business between Indigenous people and other Australians” rather than being haunted by the past itself (2000). And despite this language of “moving on” used by the CAR, the past is not generally characterized as dangerous or threatening. Instead, Australian reconciliation tends to employ strategies of mnemonic bridging by emphasizing the continuing effects of colonization and assimilation policies on present-day Indigenous disadvantage and by characterizing reconciliation as an ongoing process.⁶

Thus, Australian reconciliation does not position the past antagonistically, but seeks to integrate ongoing knowledge and understanding of the past as

⁶ If there is any sense of boundary creation in Australian reconciliation, it refers not to the start or end of the reconciliation process, but to 1788, the year in which Captain Cook’s “First Fleet” began settlement of the continent without any regard for Indigenous peoples’ rights to the territory.

a form of justice and healing. In fact, part of the contemporary work of reconciliation involves collecting and examining statistics regarding Australians' evaluation of themselves as knowledgeable about Indigenous history (30%), support for the compulsory teaching of Indigenous history in schools (84%), and agreement on the importance of learning about the past (85%), and (RA 2016:9–10). "Understanding of the past varies in the broader Australian community, but there is a prevailing sense that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are responsible for their own disadvantage," reports Reconciliation Australia, "This presents an opportunity to raise awareness and better educate people about the negative effects of colonisation, systemic racism and exclusion" (*ibid*).

While Australian reconciliation also uses the language of forgiveness to some extent, its underlying philosophy concerns respect and relationship-building. Its most important metaphor/metonym is the "long walk." Rather than marking the end of the CAR as an important boundary between the conflictual past and the peaceful future, the speeches at the celebratory Corroboree tended to emphasize the ongoing work of reconciliation. The CAR's Chairperson said: "I hope this will be a day that future generations will look back upon as one of the landmark steps on the long road toward genuine reconciliation between Indigenous peoples and our fellow

Australians.” This metaphor of reconciliation as a journey or a walk features very strongly. From the earliest stages of the CAR-led reconciliation in 1991-1994, the program theme “Walking Together” (CAR). Years later at the closing Corroboree of the CAR, Mick Dodson states: “There are those who will come along and try to denigrate and obstruct reconciliation and our efforts. We must try our best to bring them along on our journey. And, if they are not willing to walk with us, we must leave them behind” (2000). And more than a decade after his brother’s statement, Patrick Dodson returns to the long walk metaphor to contextualize contemporary struggles regarding reconciliation:

The road to reconciliation in Australia has been a long, slow and incremental one. It is often bumpy and difficult to navigate. Sometimes we lose our way or get off track and encounter things that challenge our commitment. At one point I think I even described it like being bogged in a sandy spot, and having to engage four wheel drive. (Dodson 2013)⁷

III. Discussion & Conclusion

⁷ “The past is not going to be forgotten or forgiven. Its reconciliation will come when governments stop trying to make us the same as everyone else.” (Dodson 2013)

This paper does not attempt to explain factors that lead to the adoption of distancing versus integrative approaches to positioning the past in national reconciliation. However, it does attempt to dispel one potential conclusion that could be drawn from the case selection, namely that transitional countries tend towards closure-oriented processes while established democracies have the leisure to pursue perpetuating approaches. In fact, the examples of Rwanda and Canada show us that quite the opposite can be true.

Although Canada and Australia share many historical roots as British colonies and are today both mature, industrialized democracies with comparable populations, Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission was notably similar to that of South Africa. In Canada, although there is some engagement the deep past, the TRC only formally considered residential school abuses and is criticized for being closure-oriented and largely unwilling to address either the colonial past or its legacy in the form of ongoing structural inequalities even though Indigenous activists have pursued bridging strategies in parallel to official activities (Nagy 2012:262–64). Likewise, Rwanda and South Africa shared fundamental concerns about avoiding further bloodshed while addressing the recent violent past. However, Rwanda is an example where reconciliation is a long-term

institutional project with ongoing aspects that tend to integrate the past into the present. Similar to Reconciliation Australia, Rwanda's National Unity and Reconciliation Commission was made permanent in 2002.

Social Implications

The positioning of the past in national reconciliation is a consequential decision, with important social and political implications. A major concern with *containment* types of national reconciliation, and their strategies of mnemonic closure, is that present-day actors will be less able to understand and explain how the past continues to exert an influence on even mundane daily occurrences, further obscuring issues of responsibility and appropriate mechanisms for change. Chana Teeger's work demonstrates how mnemonic closure—far from 'merely' existing in the realm of discourse—affects young South Africans' ability to recognize and name racism. The *mnemonic logic of rupture* in a state-approved discourse of teaching history that portrays racism as part of the apartheid past rather than the post-reconciliation present, makes it difficult for students to understand their personal experiences of interpersonal and structural racism in racist terms. "In my interviews with students," writes Teeger, "I was struck by the fact that they almost uniformly told me they had never experienced racism, despite

the fact that many described incidents I coded as racist” (2015:233). For instance, students who tried to introduce discussions of structural racism in classes routinely received responses from teachers that while things may not be perfect in the present, that many laws and social norms had changed for the better since the blatant racism of the apartheid era. In other words, the “ruptured” logic of South Africa’s official history contributes to ways of thinking and teaching that minimize, rather than validate or address, students’ experiences of interpersonal and structural racism.

Even if national reconciliation processes pursue *integrative* approaches that seek to emphasize connections between the past and present through strategies of mnemonic bridging, it does not mean there is political or social will to rectify the legacies of past in justice. In Australia, reconciliation has made important progress in providing acknowledgement and recognition for Indigenous peoples as well as created movements to address Indigenous inequality. However, it has not addressed serious political reforms important to Indigenous peoples, such as land rights, sovereignty, constitutional recognition, and treaty—in fact, reconciliation was the government’s alternative to simply providing land rights (Attwood 2005:245). Meanwhile, the Australian state has been able to benefit from the legitimacy of staging good relations with Indigenous peoples, such as at the 2000 Sydney

Olympics (Elder et al. 2006; Heinz Housel 2007; White 2008, 2011). The consensus-oriented nature of the reconciliation process as well as the lack of political will from mainstream Australian parties makes it difficult for reconciliation to be a vehicle for changing the structural status-quo. Some Indigenous people consider it to have been a failure or a sham from the beginning, while others believe it is still worthy of investing time, effort, and hope. (Edmonds 2016; Moses 2011; Wilson 2003).

Conclusion

To the extent that we can identify how national reconciliation processes attempt to impose governance on the past, we will have an easier time discerning these and other important social consequences of reconciliation. The cases I have offered here as containment and integrative types are tools for scholars to more easily identify the strategies of official reconciliation actors as well as to better understand those who might contest reconciliation. It is important to refrain from assuming that reconciliation promotes strategies and to instead pay attention to the wide range of actions taken by social actors to govern the national past.

Finally, this paper has merely begun to suggest how a productive and necessary scholarly conversation, with sociology providing a rich theoretical

tradition through which reconciliation processes can be better understood and substantive work on reconciliation and transitional justice offering rich, well-researched empirical cases with consequential implications for social life.

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