

Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress. Edited by Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2013. Pp. 480. \$45.00 paper.

With the five-year Indian Residential School Truth and Reconciliation Commission coming to an end, the publication of Jennifer Henderson and Pauline Wakeham's edited volume, *Reconciling Canada: Critical Perspectives on the Culture of Redress* comes at a critical time in Canadian history. By launching the TRC in 2008, Canada became the world's first "established democracy" to initiate an official truth and reconciliation commission [3]. In offering apology and redress to First Nations and other wronged groups in recent years, the Canadian government seems eager to "turn the page" on dark chapters of the past, while at the same time underscoring its enlightened approach to managing the country's ethno-cultural diversity [15]. This book cautions that all is not what it seems, however – rather than promoting genuine reconciliation for historical injustices, the "culture of redress" that has taken shape in Canada allows the nation to evade genuine confrontation with deep-rooted patterns of discrimination, marginalization, and colonialism that endure today.

To expose these contradictions, the fifteen chapters in this book investigate six overlapping themes. The first, "Settler Culture and the Terrain of Reconciliation," alleges that the Canadian government has demonstrated little interest in engaging in forms of redress that might disrupt dominant historical narratives or dismantle existing power structures. Instead, as contributor Matt James argues, the state engages in "neoliberal heritage redress" whereby apology is routinized, memory of unjust acts is anesthetized, and critical debate is quelled [41]. Eva Mackey similarly cautions about the potential "silencing" effect of the TRC – by focusing on residential schools, the commission deflects confrontation with the "longer and more brutal history of colonial violence that preceded and paralleled" it [48]. Moreover, she maintains, by drawing attention to "damaged" survivors and "dysfunctional" families, the truth commission perpetuates the dehumanization of Aboriginal people.

Turning to "Citizenship, Nationhood, and Law," Lily Cho considers whether redress such as that awarded for the Chinese Canadian Head Tax comes with a hidden cost: the loss of leverage in larger efforts to achieve "postcolonial citizenship", a status whereby minority groups – at long last – are recognized and respected as members of the Canadian national community [95]. At the same time, James (Sa'ke'j) Youngblood Henderson notes that, in the case of First Nations, reconciliation is impossible without state recognition that "Canadian citizenship is not a gift or even reparative gesture to be bestowed upon Aboriginal peoples by the state" [115].

The sections that follow, "Testimony and Truth Telling" and "Grieving and Grievance, Mourning and Memory" explore how current tensions within Canadian society stem from injustices and indignities inflicted upon various racialized and marginalized minorities within Canada's multicultural mosaic. Amber Dean offers a particularly fascinating chapter in which she compares public mourning in the wake of three national tragedies: the murder of four RCMP constables, bombing of Air India, and abduction and murder of Aboriginal women. Whereas the fallen RCMP members – representing an idealized (white) "Canadianness" – prompted an outpouring of national sorrow, the loss of Indo-Canadian and Indigenous lives has received

belated or muted response in comparison. Dean attributes this “uneven public mourning” to the larger nation-building project in which Canada seeks to define itself as post-racial and post-colonial; to do so requires the state to actively suppress confrontation with the ways in which such ghosts continue to haunt Canadian society.

The last two sections of the volume, “Performing Redress” and “Redress and Transnationalism”, highlight the ways in which communities and individuals are pushing back against the “deafening silence” of state inaction and public disinterest [231]. Len Findlay, for example, offers an insightful chapter on the ways in which Indigenous scholars, performance artists, and media producers engage in various acts of resistance as part of a longer struggle for redress and decolonization. Pauline Wakeham closes out the book by using the deportation and torture of Maher Arar in 2002 to remind us that this was certainly not the first time that a national crisis has been used to justify the unjust. Although the Canadian government has gone to great lengths to frame the Arar case as an aberration within an otherwise tolerant society, *Reconciling Canada* begs the question: how many “exceptions” will it take to make Canadians confront whether such treatment of minorities is perhaps the rule?

The volume represents a missed opportunity to hold a mirror up to Canadian society, however. Highly theoretical and thick with academic prose, it is written by and for scholars. Despite describing the work as an “intervention” – and clearly advocating for redress policies that upend unequal power dynamics and rectify deeper social and economic inequalities (e.g., Aboriginal land claims) – this book is an unlikely read for policymakers or other stakeholders. Given the conclusion of the TRC this year, it would seem an opportune time to produce a volume more readily appealing to a broader audience. Although *Reconciling Canada* shares many similarities with Roy Brooks’ edited volume, *When Sorry Isn’t Enough: The Controversy over Apologies and Reparations for Human Injustices* (New York: New York University Press, 1999), it does not speak in an equally accessible voice.

Aiming to locate points of similarity and divergence across different redress claims in Canada, and sensitive to the ways in which ethnicity and racial categorization have been used to flatten the heterogeneous experiences of wronged groups, the editors have opted to organize this volume by theme rather than by case. Although a contentious choice, it creates a rather awkward flow, as chapters shift from one historical injustice to another and then back again. Moreover, many authors within the volume point out that Aboriginal redress, as a form of nation-to-nation negotiation, represents an inherently different reconciliation process.

The editors also make clear that they neither attempted nor intended to provide an exhaustive examination of all ongoing redress claims in Canada [18]. This is a reasonable decision, but the volume feels incomplete without fuller treatment of the struggles and shortcomings of other groups’ redress campaigns. A particularly critical omission is that of Japanese Canadian redress in 1988, the first formal apology and compensation extended by the Canadian government for a historical injustice. Roy Miki’s chapter, “Rewiring Critical Affects,” addresses the Japanese Canadian experience in the context of Asian Canadian literature and transnational efforts to come to terms with Japanese imperialism during WWII. However, it would be helpful to learn about the events that have unfolded since the ink dried on the Japanese Canadian Redress Agreement. For example, the Canadian Race Relations Foundation was established under the

terms of this act, but in my own research, I have found that this government-funded foundation, like many other public institutions across Canada, has largely failed to work with the Nikkei community in order to educate the public about WWII confinement, or to connect this historical injustice with ongoing discrimination in contemporary Canadian society. A chapter that examines the extent to which reconciliation has been achieved for this particular episode would thus help us better ascertain the contours of the “culture of redress” that has emerged in Canada since 1988. Similarly, although the extensive appendices provide useful primary documentation regarding a range of historical injustices, it is unfortunate that none of the content chapters discuss the Africville redress claims, for instance.

Even so, this book’s major contribution to scholarship on redress is its proposition that reconciliation should remain “unreconciled” [8]. It demonstrates that, at the theoretical level, scholars must continue to problematize redress and the ways in which the state attempts to make amends for past transgressions. Imposed historical closure, as well as failure to address the root causes of injustice and discrimination endured by different wronged groups, will do little to mend rifts within Canada; in fact, this volume suggests that such an approach is likely to make such cleavages even deeper.

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