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Anger and Apology, Recognition and Reconciliation: Managing Emotions in the Wake of Injustice

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This article treats rituals of apology and reconciliation as responses to social discontent, specifically to expressions of anger and resentment. A standard account of social discontent, found both in the literature on transitional justice and in the social theory of Axel Honneth, has it that these emotional expressions are evidence of an underlying psychic need for recognition. In this framework, the appropriate response to expressions of anger and discontent is a recognitive one that includes victims of injustice in the political community by showing them that they are valued members. In the aftermath of injustices, such recognitive responses are thought to include acknowledgments of victim suffering, reconciliatory gestures, and rituals of contrition. I will argue, against this narrative, that treating victim anger as evidence of an underlying need for recognition threatens to depoliticize emotional responses to injustice by treating them as symptoms of psychic injuries instead of intelligible political claims. Discussing mainly the Canadian Truth and Reconciliation process set up to deal with the history of the Indian Residential School system, I show how rituals of reconciliation and apology, in the context of settler-colonial states and neoliberal politics, serve as a biopolitical management of "bad" emotions. This will serve as a critique both of the politics of reconciliation and of social–theoretic approaches that treat expressions of discontent exclusively through a lens of recognition. Instead, I argue, in politics as well as theory, we need to engage with emotional expressions as intelligible political claims that exceed the psychic need for recognition.

Cet article traite des rituels d'excuses et de réconciliation en tant que réponses au mécontentement social, plus précisément aux expressions de colère et de ressentiment. Un compte rendu standard du mécontentement social, que l'on retrouve à la fois dans la littérature sur la justice transitionnelle et dans la théorie sociale d'Axel Honneth, veut que ces expressions émotionnelles soient la preuve d'un besoin psychique sous-jacent de reconnaissance. Dans ce cadre, la réponse appropriée aux expressions de colère et de mécontentement est une réponse de reconnaissance qui inclut les victimes d'injustice dans la communauté politique en leur montrant qu'elles en sont des membres appréciés. À la suite d'injustices, de telles réponses de reconnaissance sont censées inclure la reconnaissance de la souffrance des victimes, des gestes de réconciliation et des rituels de contrition. Je soutiens, contre ce récit, que le fait de traiter la colère des victimes comme la preuve d'un besoin sous-jacent de reconnaissance menace de dépolitiser les réponses émotionnelles à l'injustice en les traitant comme des symptômes de blessures psychiques plutôt que comme des revendications politiques intelligibles. En discutant principalement du processus canadien de vérité et de réconciliation mis en place pour traiter l'histoire du système des pensionnats indiens, je montre comment les rituels de réconciliation et d'excuses, dans le contexte des États coloniaux et de la politique néolibérale, servent à la gestion biopolitique des « mauvaises » émotions. Cela servira comme une critique à la fois des politiques de réconciliation et des approches sociothéoriques qui traitent les expressions de mécontentement exclusivement par la reconnaissance. Au lieu de cela, je soutiens qu'en politique comme en théorie, nous devons nous engager avec les expressions émotionnelles comme des revendications politiques intelligibles qui dépassent le besoin psychique de reconnaissance.

Este artículo analiza los rituales de disculpa y reconciliación como respuestas al descontento social, y en particular a las expresiones de rabia y descontento. Los relatos habituales sobre el descontento social, que podemos encontrar tanto en la literatura sobre la justicia transicional como en la teoría social de Axel Honneth, tratan estas expresiones emocionales como prueba de una necesidad subyacente de reconocimiento. Dentro de este marco, la respuesta apropiada a las expresiones de rabia y descontento pasa por el reconocimiento; que incluye a las víctimas de la injusticia en el seno de la comunidad política mostrándoles que son miembros valorados de la misma. El reconocimiento aspira a lidiar con la injusticia perpetrada a través de la asunción del sufrimiento de las víctimas, los gestos de reconciliación y los rituales de arrepentimiento. Contra esta perspectiva, argumentaré que tratar la rabia de las víctimas como prueba de una necesidad subyacente de reconocimiento amanaza con despolitizar las respuestas emocionales hacia la injusticia al tratarlas como síntomas de lesiones psíquicas en lugar de como demandas políticas inteligibles. Mediante el análisis del proceso canadiense de Verdad y Reconciliación, creado para lidiar con la historia del sistema escolar de las residencias indias, mostraré cómo los rituales de reconciliación y disculpa sirven, en el contexto de los estados coloniales y la política neoliberal, como un medio de gestión biopolítica de las emociones "negativas". Esto servirá como crítica tanto de las políticas de reconciliación como de los enfoques sociales y teóricos que tratan de abordar toda expresión de descontento desde el prisma exclusivo del reconocimiento. En su lugar, defenderé la necesidad de abordar las expresiones emocionales tanto a nivel teórico como político como demandas políticas inteligibles que exceden la necesidad psíquica de reconocimiento.

Reconciliation is a contradictory object: it emerges out of bad feelings but, at the same time, stalls in the face of them in the present. It only wants to collect the good public emotions it needs to keep going, to push itself outside of History, to narrate a present bereft of legislated pain. But ours are bodies that still shake, that traffic in the bad because we know that a world reconciled is not necessarily a world decolonized.
Billy-Ray Belcourt (2015)

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Introduction

Scholars have claimed that prevailing liberal and procedural notions of justice fail to properly account for the lived experience of facing injustice and particularly for the centrality of emotions (Celermajer 2009, 1–13; Mihai 2016). These theories tend to treat individuals as atomistic and utility-maximizing agents rather than whole persons with feelings, psychological needs, and emotional attachments. Against this backdrop, some have seen the growing popularity of public rituals of reconciliation, such as apologies and truth commission, as "a sign of late modern malaise" born out of "our disappointment with the promises of a rationalized politics" (Celermajer 2009, 3). This approach acknowledges that beyond formal legal equality and physical safety, victims of injustice also need recognition of the suffering they have endured and the hurt and anger they still feel today. When people voice their anger and indignation against injustice, so the idea goes, the appropriate response is to take seriously their feelings and their *emotional needs*: no amount of procedural or redistributive justice can make up for the psychic injury of having been treated as less than a full human being. It is this lack of *recognition* of one's worth and one's humanity that fuels the unruly waves of righteous anger against the social world. And it is, at least in part, through recognition of this suffering that the victim's dignity and membership of the political community are fully restored, and the waves of indignation give way, once again, to the calm sea of a reconciled nation.

This, anyway, seems to be a dominant narrative in the public discourse and scholarship on reconciliation and historical injustice. While there are certainly important insights in it—the critique of procedural justice is one I wholeheartedly agree with—it is the point of this article to problematize and critique this narrative of recognition and particularly the implicit or explicit view of antagonistic political emotions as reducible to expressions of misrecognition. I will claim, in essence, that by treating expressions of anger and indignation about injustices as evidence of a psychic wound of misrecognition, instead of particular political claims, we end up depoliticizing them. As Amia Srinivasan has remarked, "we think and talk about political anger in the way we do because it serves those whom anger most stands to threaten, and that this is no mistake at all" (Srinivasan 2018, 142). Unfortunately, scholars of reconciliation and political apologies, although they are often particularly concerned with taking emotions seriously, all too often uncritically reproduce narratives around anger and reconciliation that serve the status quo of power relations.

I will proceed by applying a critique of recognition (as a theoretical concept) to the contemporary politics of reconciliation and political apologies, focusing primarily on Canada's efforts to reconcile with its indigenous subjects. While there are already several well-known critiques of the politics of recognition, though, I am not simply applying these to my topic here as a case study. Whereas previous critiques of recognition have highlighted its normalizing and statist bias (Povinelli 2002; Markell 2003; Butler et al. 2021), its tendency to reify or essentialize identities (Schaap 2004), or how it diverts attention from struggles over material distribution to an inert politics of cultural difference (Fraser and Honneth 2003; Cicerchia 2021), my exploration of the politics of reconciliation and anger will lead to a slightly different criticism. By highlighting how negative political emotions become an object of depoliticizing management in the context of the neoliberal politics of reconciliation, I show that recognition theory fails to account for the ways in which the psychic need for recognition can become imbricated in power. Thus, positing an ahistorical need for recognition as the basis of normative social theory and placing it outside of power relations ends up playing into the depoliticization of anger.

Naturally, not all scholarship on reconciliation and transitional justice reproduces this depoliticizing narrative about anger, and I am not the first to critique the potentially normalizing force of the contemporary drive toward "reconciliation." It is a frequent worry that the idea of reconciliation *between* parties can slide into reconciliation *to* an oppressive political order. I certainly share this worry and my approach in this article owes much to previous critical work on the depoliticizing potential of reconciliation, national "healing," and apologies (e.g., Ahmed 2004, chap. 5; Schaap 2004; Million 2013; Bentley 2016). What this article adds to these existing critiques is a focus on the specific way in which the potentially emancipatory force of emotions such as anger may get blunted by processes of reconciliation. While others have criticized the way in which negative feelings are often dismissed in these processes from the point of view of the moral legitimacy of anger or resentment (Brudholm 2008; Muldoon 2008), my interest, rather, is in the way in which the management of these emotions can serve to conserve power relations. Thus, my perspective is not one of moral theory but one of normative social theory, and the aim is a disclosive critique of the way in which emotions are depoliticized by the politics of reconciliation rather than a moral defense of anger's legitimacy.[1]

To get this entangled critique of the politics of reconciliation and the theory of recognition off the ground, I first need to clarify the relations between reconciliation, recognition, and anger. This will be the task of the following two sections, which will introduce Axel Honneth's influential theory of recognition and show how his view of emotions and recognition seems, at least implicitly, to underlie much contemporary work on reconciliation and political apologies. I then provide a brief genealogy of how reconciliation as a process of managing challenging emotions has historically been conceived. By comparing contemporary discourses of reconciliation and "healing" in Canada to the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) and to the German Chancellor Willy Brandt's plea for forgiveness from victims of Nazism, I show that the idea of reconciliation-as-recognition has not always been the main way people thought about emotions and justice in post-atrocity settings. This will lead me to a discussion of the way in which the politics of reconciliation in a settler-colonial context such as Canada's fits into the prevailing neoliberal ethos. Feelings such as anger and indignation in the wake of injustice become conceptualized as evidence of emotional wounds and are presumed to be amenable to rationalized biopolitical management. Thus, seeing the politics of reconciliation through the lens of recognition ends up obscuring or, in the worst case, reinforcing the way power functions through rituals of truth-telling, contrition, and apology. In the final section, I suggest an alternative way of conceptualizing anger as a political emotion that avoids this depoliticizing tendency.

Reconciliation and Recognition

Proponents of reconciliation or "restorative justice" argue that in the aftermath of conflict, restoring equal legal status for all and holding perpetrators legally accountable do not

[1] For a moral (but not moralistic) defence of anger in the context of injustice, see Myisha Cherry's recent book *The Case for Rage* (Cherry 2021).

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exhaust the requirements of justice. A justice that takes seriously the plight of those who have suffered must go beyond the idea, often ascribed to "procedural" or "ahistorical" liberalism (Thompson 2009), that everything societies can and should strive for is a procedurally just system, which treats all citizens with formal equality. The abstract procedures of criminal and distributive justice, it seems, simply cannot do justice to the lived, or inherited, experience of victims of injustice and their descendants. Rather, restorative justice must include recognition of the particular suffering of these groups in order to restore their full standing in the political community. These are ideas also familiar from the social theory of Axel Honneth who precisely claims, on a more general level, that societies "can demonstrate a moral deficit without violating generally valid principles of [procedural] justice" (Honneth 2008, 84). Justice, for Honneth, requires, on top of equal legal recognition and the provision of basic physical security, that we create a society where every individual can see themselves as a valued and respected member of the community. This respect, it would seem, is violated when, in the aftermath of gross violations of human dignity, we simply go on as if nothing had happened without recognizing, dwelling on, and repenting for the injustices of the past.

Whether it is theoretically elaborated or, more frequently, used as a common-sense concept, theorists of reconciliation and restorative justice generally ground their approach in some idea of a need for recognition. Public recognition of, and possibly repentance for, the suffering of victims is thought to be a necessary condition for "restoring the civic and human dignity of victims, their basic self-confidence and their socially recognized self-esteem" (du Toit 2000, 138). As Minow (2000, 246) puts it, "recognizing the indignity of the abuses is vital in order to communicate to the victimized, and to the rest of the nation, that individuals do matter." Elizabeth Kiss (2000, 73) is explicit in grounding this approach to reconciliation in a normative theory of recognition: "Justice *as recognition* entails acknowledging the distinctive identity of the other, striving to repair damage done to him or her through violence, stigmatization, and disrespect, and including his or her stories in our collective histories."[2]

This moral repair is thought to be produced through various "recognitive acts," which allow victims to be seen and heard, like providing a public space for victims to tell their "truth," producing official historical records of past abuses, and publicly acknowledging the suffering victims went through. Gestures of apology from the perpetrator group are often thought to be especially central to providing recognition for victims, because they "not only publicly ratify certain reinterpretations of history, but they also morally judge" and thereby "reconstitute the moral framework that governs the communities and direct them towards an alternative future built on equality, mutual dignity and respect" (Nobles 2008, 2; Wilson and Bleiker 2013, 42). Lynne Tirrell argues that while apologies do not undo physical harms, they can redress the "recognition harms" that follow from "world-shattering wrongs," which "undermine[] an agent's sense of having a legitimate claim to moral status" (Tirrell 2013, 166). When recognition harms "cast the person out of the realm of norms and values that define his/her community," apology can function as a recognitive and reparative act by "acknowledging the wrong done to the other person [and] restoring recognition of the other through that acknowledgement" (Tirrell 2013, 165, 172).

[2] See also du Toit (2000) who likewise speaks of "justice as recognition."

Honneth's theory furnishes the normative justification for this broadened notion of justice that theorists of reconciliation and apology often have recourse to. Naturally, the immediate needs of victims in the context of atrocities are to do with restoring the physical safety of human beings and next with ensuring legal equality, that is, freedom from discrimination, equal protection before the law, etc. These needs can be interpreted, through Honneth's lens, as the need for recognition of one's basic physical and emotional need for safety and integrity (Honneth terms this kind of recognition "love") and one's need for legal recognition as an equal citizen ("respect") (Honneth 1995, see especially p. 129). Yet, these two kinds of recognition do not exhaust the recognition we need in order to understand ourselves as fully autonomous beings capable and worthy of pursuing our own notions of a good life. This, on Honneth's view, requires his third type of recognition, namely social esteem, which involves the social recognition of individuals or collectives in their particularity. This would explain why—on top of the restoration of safety and legal equality—justice might require reconciliation and apology in the wake of humanitarian disasters. The idea is that even when groups that have faced injustices have their basic safety and legal equality restored, something is still missing if the state and wider society simply carry on as if the past has no further relevance to the present. Refusals to acknowledge and repent for crimes perpetrated against social groups equal a denial of full recognition of these social groups, their pain, and memory of suffering.

This perspective no doubt functions as a valuable corrective to ahistorical and formalized notions of liberal justice by highlighting the crucial fact that procedurally just societies can display significant normative deficits. This is perhaps nowhere clearer than in post-conflict or post-atrocity contexts where simply carrying on as if nothing had happened seems to compound the original harm. Nevertheless, I will be claiming that the lens of recognition offers a limiting and potentially depoliticizing perspective. While recognition theory explicitly tries to widen the question of political justice to also include the affective realm—in other words to *politicize* emotions—it ultimately falls short of this goal because of its reductive understanding of antagonistic emotions as expressions of a psychic need for recognition.

Anger and Recognition

Theorists of reconciliation tend to claim that their "expanded" notion of justice ("restorative" or "victim-centered" justice) takes seriously the emotional aspects of injustices. Mihaela Mihai, for instance, makes the case that transitional justice "includes, along with the economic and institutional dimensions, a social-emotional element" (Mihai 2016, 26). Only "by recognizing appropriate negative emotional reactions toward former oppressors" can societies fully "recognize every citizen's right to be treated with equal concern and respect" (Mihai 2016, 32). Thus, against overly rationalized models of politics, the politics of reconciliation and apology accord negative emotions such as anger and resentment a legitimate place.

This implies a view of anger as not inherently antithetical to reconciliation, thus contradicting a common understanding of anger as tied to a wish for revenge and destruction. Martha Nussbaum, for instance, argues that anger conceptually involves a wish for payback or retribution. When we suffer "recognition harms" ("status-injuries" in Nussbaum's terminology), our anger consists in a wish to down-rank the other through retaliation and thereby "symbolically to

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restore the balance of status" (Nussbaum 2016, 26). We shall see, when discussing the case of the South African TRC below, that something like this understanding of anger has sometimes been used to justify the need for forgiveness and reconciliation. However, the idea of "justice as recognition" relies on an alternative conceptualization of anger and resentment, where anger is not antithetical to reconciliation but, on the contrary, *calls for* reconciliation.

Support for this position can be found in a tradition of thought about anger, especially feminist philosophy, which sees it as a demand for recognition—not recognition through down-ranking of the other but simply, in the words of Marilyn Frye, "a claim to domain, a claim that one is a being whose purposes and activities require and create a web of objects, spaces, attitudes and interests that is worthy of respect" (Frye 1983, 87). Adkins puts it similarly: "anger is an assertion of presence and a demand for recognition," but it "does not require the lessening of another's dignity" (Adkins 2020, 192). Surely such anger *may* give rise to a wish for retribution, but on this view a thirst for revenge is not an *essential* part of anger. First and foremost, anger implies a wish to be recognized and for the obstruction in question to be acknowledged as a wrong—in Frye's words, what we want when we are angry is for our anger to gain "uptake," to be seen as a legitimate reaction to the thwarting of our legitimate interests. This is why sincere recognition of the wrong inflicted and a heartfelt apology is often more than enough to soothe our anger.

This general view of anger is also found in Honneth's recognition theory.[3] For Honneth, experiences of disrespect and the negative feelings they give rise to, including anger, provide both the source of motivation for social struggles and the normative grounds for a critical theory of society. They do so by (1) revealing, cognitively, that an injustice has taken place and (2) motivating subjects to struggle for greater recognition: on one hand, there is the "opportunity for moral insight inherent in these negative emotions, as their cognitive content," and, on the other hand, they "provide the motivational impetus for social resistance and conflict" (Honneth 1995, 138, 132). Thus, emotions play a key (if undertheorized) role both in grounding critique through the disclosure of social pathologies of recognition and in motivating progressive social struggle. Expressions of indignation, as we see them in social movements, for instance, are both result and evidence of deficient recognition relations in society; their normative potential comes from the fact that the experience of negative emotions in the face of misrecognition anticipates a possible future recognition and thereby the possibility of social progress (Honneth 1995, 164). Returning to Marilyn Frye: "To be or be perceived as wronged, you have to be or be perceived as right" (Frye 1983, 86).

It is this view of anger that seems to underlie the logic of the contemporary politics of reconciliation: resentment or indignation are not inherently antagonistic emotions fueling circles of violent retribution (although this may happen if they are not "channeled" in the correct way; Mihai 2016, 76), but expressions of an unmet need for recognition. This need for recognition is then met, in part, by allowing victims of injustice to express their emotions and by recognizing the legitimacy of their feelings. "Former victims need to see that their suffering is recognized" and simply "[r]ecognizing the moral validity of legitimate anger—living up to the commitment to equal respect and concern for all—can inspire citizens to retarget and moderate their resentments and indignation" (Mihai 2016, 42). This logic elegantly dissolves what Ure has identified as the "fundamental political and ethical dilemma that lies at the heart of the politics of reconciliation": that reconciliation aims, on one hand, at allowing victims to voice their feelings and suffering while, on the other hand, seeking "to overcome victims' anger and resentment for the sake of creating a viable social future" (Ure 2008, 285). Once we see that it is through the public recognition of one's emotions that the emotional need for recognition, which fueled the anger in the first place, is met, the dilemma is erased.

[3] Later on, in the sixth section, I shall explore an important difference between the way Marilyn Frye and Honneth see anger.

Emotion and Reconciliation: A Brief Genealogy

My aim in this article is a critique of the narrative outlined above: the idea that antagonistic emotions such as anger and resentment about past injustices reveal unmet needs for recognition, which are overcome through gestures of reconciliation and contrition. In this section, I want to start by denaturalizing this general conception of reconciliation through a (very brief and partial) genealogy of the relationship between reconciliation and emotions. The point of the section is to show that the idea of reconciliation as a response to victims' emotional need for recognition has not always seemed obvious and, therefore, should not remain unquestioned today either. Below, I consider two paradigmatic moments in the history of post-atrocity reconciliation, German Chancellor Willy Brandt's famous Warsaw *Kniefall* and the South African TRC, and then compare these to contemporary discourses of reconciliation with indigenous peoples in the settler-colonial context of Canada. While the idea of "managing" difficult emotions is, in various ways, present in all three cases, the management takes strikingly different forms. While I pinpoint three different historical instances where three different conceptions of reconciliation and emotions are prominent, my claim is not that each conception belongs to a distinct historical phase. In fact, any given instance of reconciliation probably contains elements of all three narratives that I identify below in different proportions. However, the below is a *genealogical* account in the sense that I highlight how the currently popular idea of gestures of reconciliation as responding to victims' need for recognition has not always seemed obvious—and while elements of this idea can certainly be found far back in history, the current popularity and seeming naturalness of the idea are the result of historical circumstances.

Consider first Willy Brandt's genuflection in front of a monument to the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising in the Polish capital during a visit in 1970. While laying a wreath in front of this monument, Brandt spontaneously fell to his knees in a silent gesture of contrition. While nonverbal, this act has widely been interpreted as an apology and constitutes, perhaps due to its visual nature, one of the most iconic examples of a state leader expressing sorrow for the past (Wilson and Bleiker 2013; Zoodsma et al. 2021, 6). This gesture took place toward the end of what has been termed the "first phase" of transitional justice, which focused on holding perpetrators of the atrocities of World War II accountable, exemplified in the Nuremberg trials (Teitel 2003). As an act that sought to deal with the memory of past atrocities not in a register of criminal responsibility, but in a register of emotional reconciliation through an exchange of sorrow and forgiveness, we can perhaps pinpoint the Warsaw genuflection as one (though not the only) point of origin of the contemporary ethos of reconciliation.

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As a visual gesture, there will of course be several possible interpretations of the meaning of Brandt's kneeling. However, for our purposes, we can stick to the explanation Brandt himself offered. "At that point," he told interviewers years later, "I could do nothing else but to signal that I plead […] for forgiveness for my people and pray that we might be forgiven."[4] This was clearly an attempt to deal with the difficult emotions surrounding the memory of the Holocaust. It was not only an expression of Willy Brandt's emotions—sorrow, contrition, shame—but also a plea for the Polish and Jewish victims of German atrocities to change *their* emotions. It was a plea, that is, for the victims to overcome some of their rightful animosity toward the German people and instead offer their forgiveness. Importantly, however, there is no talk here of the emotional needs of victims to overcome misrecognition; rather, the focus is the emotional need of the *perpetrator* group to be forgiven, to be recognized as a now-contrite, morally reformed people.[5] For the victim group, the overcoming of anger and animosity toward Germany is conceptualized not as part of a process of healing but rather as an act of extreme benevolence—if it is forthcoming at all.

Elsewhere, Brandt offered the following explanation of his act: "At the abyss of German history and under the weight of the millions who had been murdered, I did what people do when language fails" (cited in von Kieseritzky 2004, 248).[6] The fact that language here "fails," that is, the impossibility of expressing this plea linguistically, can be interpreted as a reference to the irrationality of the forgiveness Brandt is requesting. To quote Jacques Derrida, "[f]orgiveness is not, it *should not be*, normal, normative, normalising. It *should* remain exceptional and extraordinary, in the face of the impossible: as if it interrupted the ordinary course of historical temporality" (Derrida 2001, 32, emphasis original). Thus, we can see in this plea for victims to change their emotions a plea for an entirely irrational act of extreme benevolence—Derrida would even say an inherently impossible act because "there is only forgiveness […] where there is the unforgivable" (Derrida 2001, 32–33).

This image of emotional reconciliation underwent a significant change during the "second phase" of transitional justice associated with the "democratic transitions" of the 1980s and 1990s (Teitel 2003, 75ff). Rather than establishing criminal accountability, this wave of transitional justice focused on (re)building national unity through "truth and reconciliation" in post-transition or post-conflict contexts. The paradigmatic example of this phase of reconciliation is the South African TRC, which, in the words of the commission's chair Archbishop Desmond Tutu (1999, 65), aimed at "the promotion of national unity and reconciliation." For Tutu, the process of reconciliation was a necessary part of dealing with the negative emotions, the rage and wish for revenge, which still lingered despite the "spectacular victory over injustice, oppression, and evil" (Tutu 1999, 11). For the transition to a just and democratic South Africa to be a success, it was necessary to manage these emotions, "since anger, resentment, and revenge are corrosive of that *summum bonum*, that greatest good, communal harmony" and thus "to forgive is indeed the best form of self-interest" (Tutu 1999, 35). Here, then, we see quite a different image of emotional transformation in relation to past injustice. To overcome anger and animosity is no longer conceptualized as an act of irrational benevolence but rather as a rationally self-interested act in the service of the political goal of stability and harmony.

Notwithstanding the fact that overcoming anger and bestowing forgiveness now became conceptualized as being in victims' self-interest, Tutu's account still does not treat reconciliation as a way of meeting victims' emotional need for recognition. Rather, Tutu conceptualizes it explicitly as a way of managing anger and resentment in the interest of a political aim: nation-building and "communal harmony." Victims are asked to put a lid on their boiling rage and forgive the perpetrators of apartheid as a form of affective labor in the interest of the nation to avoid "the kind of carnage and unrest that have characterized places such as Bosnia, Kosovo, the Middle East, and Northern Ireland" (Tutu 1999, 164). This forgiveness, Tutu reminds us, is "neither cheap nor easy" but a difficult and painful process (Tutu 1999, 271). In practice, this narrative can and should of course be questioned—to whom does this affective labor disproportionately fall? What happens to those not willing to conform to the expectation of a grieving, but ultimately forgiving, victim? etc.[7]—but this is not my aim here. I want to note simply that reconciliation is conceptualized as a process of overcoming antagonistic feelings in the interest of a *political project* of national unity and stability. To rid oneself of anger is a strategic political act that requires a kind of emotional self-disciplining.

I do not want to suggest that discourses treating reconciliation as a response to victims' psychic needs were absent from the South African TRC—while Tutu does not generally frame the TRC in this way, other key figures sometimes did. For instance, Charles Villa-Vicencio, the Director of Research for the TRC, highlighted that "victims and survivors can be enabled to get on with the rest of their lives in the sense of not allowing anger or self-pity to be the all-consuming dimension of their existence" (cited in Brudholm 2008, 37). Indeed, Moon (2009) traces the idea of reconciliation as a process of psychological healing back to precisely this TRC. However, she also shows how this idea was tightly bound up with the political aim of securing the legitimacy of the new post-apartheid state as "healing" was portrayed as necessary for establishing a new political order. It is once this explicit political aim falls away, I argue, that the therapeutic aims of reconciliation really come to the fore.

Consider the notion of reconciliation at play today in settler-colonial contexts such as Canada. It is significant that Canada's TRC, established to deal with the history of injustice in the so-called Indian residential schools, unlike virtually all other TRCs, was not established in a post-transitional context but born out of the litigation of residential school survivors (Stanton 2011). That is, while TRCs are usually seen as an alternative to post-transitional governments holding past perpetrators legally accountable, in the Canadian case it is an alternative to the government itself being held legally accountable for past atrocities. In fact, the Settlement Agreement, which established the TRC as well as

[4] This quote is transcribed and translated from a video available on the German site Zeitzeugenportal maintained by the Stiftung Haus der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland. Available at https://www.zeitzeugen-portal.de/videos/hguYEbpwVZU.

[5] Borneman (2005) interprets Brandt's gesture somewhat differently and more in line with the currently popular idea that political apologies are given to meet the needs of victims. Indeed, he goes as far as claiming that "Brandt's apology was […] a symbolic act intended to right a wrong" (Borneman 2005, 62). However, the idea that the gesture was meant to, or could have ever, "righted" the wrong of the Holocaust flies in the face of Brandt's own explanation of his act. I suspect that Borneman's account might be colored by the contemporary popularity of apologies as a form of symbolic redress to victims. I thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing me to Borneman's alternative interpretation of the *Kniefall*.

[6] Translation mine.

[7] These questions become especially salient in relation to the gendered expectations around victim narratives (see Krog 2001; Ephgrave 2015).

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standardized mechanisms for paying out compensation to victims, was set up with the explicit intent of "shut[ting] down the wave of litigation that propelled the issue of residential schools onto the political stage" (Jung 2009, 14). This is not to say that the TRC process was by any means forced upon survivors top-down by the government—indeed, many indigenous groups had been calling for such a process as a way to create public attention around the residential school system and as an alternative to often costly, painful, and protracted legal processes—but, from the point of view of the government, we should see it as a defensive move: an attempt to preempt further claims by drawing a line over the past.[8]

In this context, the emotional component of reconciliation takes on a very different meaning from the one explicated by Archbishop Tutu. The emotional transformation involved in reconciliation—if not necessarily the granting of forgiveness, then at least the calming of an inner rage—is now no longer seen as a taxing act of affective labor in the service of a higher political objective. Rather, it becomes an aim in itself in the form of individual and collective "healing" disconnected from any explicitly articulated political goal (see Million 2013). The official mandate of the TRC frames the reconciliation process as a "sincere indication and acknowledgment of the injustices and harms experience by aboriginal people and *the need for continued healing*" as well as a "commitment to establishing new relationships embedded in *mutual recognition and respect*" (Schedule 'N' 2006, emphasis added). The anger and indignation that stem from living through injustice have here changed meaning: they are no longer seen as a (justified) wish for retribution and revenge, which must be curtailed in one's own self-interest, but rather as evidence of a psychic injury, which points to a need for "healing." Entirely in line with Honneth's theory of recognition, anger is not a fundamentally antagonistic and potentially subversive force but rather evidence of an underlying need for intersubjective recognition. Anger, thus, becomes depoliticized because it is seen not as a challenge to current political structures but only as a call to extend and diversify the already existing relations of recognition *within* the existing structures.[9]

This need to overcome bad emotions through recognition of one's psychic pain is also echoed in the official apologies issued by the Canadian government. When apologizing to survivors of Newfoundland and Labrador residential schools in November 2017, PM Justin Trudeau explicitly claims that the "absence of an apology recognizing your experiences has been an impediment to healing and reconciliation." "It is my sincere hope," he continues, that through receiving the apology *qua* recognitive act, survivors "can finally get some closure—that you can put your inner child to rest" (Trudeau 2017). Again, compare Trudeau's *offer* of "closure" to Brandt's *plea* for forgiveness. My claim, of course, is not that "closure" or recognition is never desired or perceived as meaningful by survivors; rather, to anticipate the discussion in the next section, I am claiming that *as a response to political claims* it is inherently *depoliticizing*. The TRC, after all, arose not from survivors seeking recognition for their suffering but, in the first place, as a response to survivors' attempts, through litigation, to hold the government and the church accountable for atrocities.

The emotional management, which is always a key component of "reconciliation," has here become disconnected from any political aim and becomes an aim in itself. Putting one's rage to rest is not seen as an act of magnanimity (as in Willy Brandt's plea) nor as an act of self-discipline in the interest of contributing to the stability of a new, post-transitional order (as in the South African case); it is now simply a psychic need of individuals for "healing." Crucially, this way of conceptualizing emotional reconciliation entails a shift of agency from the victim group to the representatives of the perpetrators. Whereas, in the narratives of Brandt and Tutu, overcoming one's anger toward the perpetrator group in an active choice (be it for altruistic or instrumentally political reasons), victims are now in a position of *neediness*. It is through the agency of the perpetrator group, through their generous gestures of apology and reconciliation, that victims are *allowed* to "put their inner child to rest"—the cool embrace of recognition extinguishes the flames of rage that supposedly have been consuming victims from the inside.

This genealogy has been brief and partial, but it should be sufficient to denaturalize contemporary narratives of reconciliation and the emotional needs of victims. While reconciliation inevitably involves some "management" of antagonistic emotions, it is by no means obvious that this should be conceptualized as a way of meeting the victims' psychic need for recognition. The following section will now explore in further detail the role that this notion of emotional reconciliation plays in a contemporary political context.

Neoliberalism and the Management of Emotions

To fully understand contemporary rituals of apology and reconciliation, I would claim, we have to understand them in the context the hegemonic neoliberal political ethos and governmental rationality (see Friedrich 2022). While some see in these rituals of interpersonal recognition an alternative to the cold logic of liberal contractualism and individualism (Pateman 2007, 76; Celermajer 2009), I would argue that, as a way to deal with the negative emotions arising from experiences of injustice, they embody, rather than negate, the logic of neoliberal governmentality. They do so precisely through a conceptualization of individuals not as political actors who may or may not choose to forgive perpetrators of injustice, but rather as rational agents whose emotions and needs become the objects of knowledge and government because individuals are presumed to react systematically to changes in their environment in the pursuit of self-maximization. In the following, it has to be kept in mind that I am analyzing a certain *conceptualization* of the processes of emotional change involved in reconciliation, which is found in the language of liberal politicians, official reconciliation initiatives, and academic work. When I claim that this narrative is inherently *depoliticizing*, I am not implying that this narrative, in practice, is always successfully deployed or that this depoliticization goes uncontested—quite to the contrary, victim groups often successfully use the state's language of reconciliation to strategically *re*politicize issues, which official discourses seek to bury (Somani 2011). Nevertheless, and with this caveat out of the way, my purpose here is to challenge a certain narrative, which seems hegemonic in contemporary political discourse and is all too frequently uncritically accepted by scholars of political apologies and reconciliation.

There is, of course, a strand of left thought that frames the politics of recognition in general, which is more or less

[8] TRCs and apologies always, to some extent, include what Tom Bentley terms a "performative temporal segregation" by drawing a line between the past with its injustices and a normatively superior present from which such injustices are judged as wrong (Bentley 2021).

[9] This is of course not to claim that attempts to extend the existing recognition relations are not also worthwhile political projects. I am merely claiming that a perspective which, a priori, reduces anger to the need for recognition *within* the existing social structures forecloses many political possibilities.

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equated with "identity politics," as complicit with neoliberalism. The idea is that certain currents of left thought and politics since the 1960s associated with the new social movements, in their eagerness to overcome the perceived economism and exclusive focus on class politics in earlier leftist thought, ended up displacing struggles over material inequalities with struggles over cultural recognition. Such struggles, according to Nancy Fraser (Fraser and Honneth 2003, 92), served "less to supplement, complicate, and enrich redistribution struggles than to marginalize, eclipse, and displace them" and, furthermore, could easily be incorporated into the emerging economic order of neoliberalism as cultural identities were reinterpreted as commodifiable difference and human capital. Thus, the politics of recognition, equated with identity politics, is seen as entirely depoliticizing because it channels progressive energies away from economic injustice into completely unthreatening assertions of cultural difference. As much as this narrative, at least in its more sophisticated versions,[10] contains a lot of insight, it is ultimately too rash in its dismissal of recognitive politics. Honneth's dialectical account of recognition explicitly makes deficient recognitive relations the ground for a *critique* of society and therefore cannot simply be equated with depoliticized neoliberal identity politics. Likewise, the politics of reconciliation cannot be dismissed in this way either. After all, the reconciliatory gestures discussed above are responses to claims, which, while associated with groups of a particular cultural "identity," contain explicit and radical challenges to the political status quo.[11] As such, we should see rituals of reconciliation and apology as *defensive* moves on the part of the state in response to such challenges rather than merely positive affirmations of claims to cultural recognition.

Instead, I will argue, the complicity between neoliberalism and the politics of reconciliation and recognition lies in a specific conception of social discontent as being fundamentally oriented toward the fulfilment of a historically invariable emotional need for recognition. To see why, we need to follow Foucault and see neoliberalism not just as a set of economic policies but as a logic of government of others and of one's self.[12] What Foucault terms "neoliberal governmentality" relies on a paradoxical view of the subject, *qua homo œconomicus*, as at the same time free and autonomous yet "eminently governable" (Foucault 2008, 270). This is because the subject is conceived as free to maximize their own self-interest without interference yet also as responding rationally to changes in the environment; *homo œconomicus*, therefore, "appears precisely as someone manageable, someone who responds systematically to systematic modifications artificially introduced into the environment" (Foucault 2008, 270). From this point of view, "to govern humans is not to crush their capacity to act, but to utilize it for one's own objectives," in other words, to govern *through*, not *against*, freedom (Rose 1999, 4).

Combining these insights with a Honnethian understanding of recognition, we can see that misrecognition becomes an obstacle to, not an instrument of, effective government. If, following Honneth, we accept that secure relations of recognition constitute the precondition for realizing one's self, then the psychic injury of disrespect seems too to be an impediment to the realization of the dynamic, utility-maximizing "self as enterprise" that neoliberalism envisions. This is not only a question of the normalization and commodification of difference through "organized self-realization" (Honneth 2004); rather, it is to say that the preconditions for living a good life, *qua* secure relations of recognition, are *also* the preconditions for neoliberalism's effective management of individuals.

In this context, negative emotions, trauma, and even expressions of discontent become conceptualized as obstacles to self-realization and thereby also "an impediment to […] full realization of a neoliberal self" (McElhinny 2016, 61). In the extreme case, as Dian Million (2013) shows in her rich genealogy of the concept of "healing" as applied to indigenous communities in Canada, political and economic issues become reconceptualized, in the language of trauma, as health issues and subjected to biopolitical management. Indigenous peoples' political claims to self-determination become conditional on "whether individuals could achieve at a personal level sufficient psychic integrity (healing, identity) to sustain relations at other concentric levels of organization, that is, families, communities, or self-determining governing bodies, that is, 'nations'" (Million 2013, 110). Anne-Marie Reynaud (2017) shows in her anthropological work how this emotional therapy plays out in practice at the "truth-telling" events organized by the Canadian TRC. Survivors of residential schools, at these events, are "urged to remember difficult stories that were sources of great pain, to tell, and *to heal*" (Reynaud 2017, 228–29, emphasis mine). The idea is that through voicing their anger and receiving recognition, participants will overcome this very anger in the interest of reconciliation. Comparing the Canadian TRC to the South African case, Reynaud argues that while "[a]nger may not pose a threat of violence and revenge, […] it tracks feelings of injustice that are incompatible with the idea of working towards a reconciled Canada" (Reynaud 2017, 229).

This depoliticized image of reconciliation not through emotional self-denial but through an apparently self-maximizing process of "healing" should appear suspicious to us in the context of neoliberal governmentality, where "individual autonomy is not an obstacle or limit to social control but one of its central technologies" (McNay 2009, 63). If the neoliberal subject is assumed to respond systematically and rationally to external stimuli, then feelings of rage fueled by past injustices can be seen as "rational" affective reactions to different forms of misrecognition (*qua* denial of bodily integrity, equal respect, or social esteem) and it is assumed that subjects will modify their emotional stance systematically in reaction to changes in the relations of recognition.

We see this logic clearly at work in the booming literature on the psychology of reconciliation and political apologies. In the wake of the transitional justice wave of the 1990s, the psychological mechanisms behind intergroup reconciliation became a hot topic for social psychologists.[13] Yet, the hegemony of positivist methodology within the discipline of psychology meant that critical reflection on the political project of reconciliation was elided in favor of cause–effect thinking. Thus, social psychologists turned precisely to the

[10] I am thinking here of the work of Nancy Fraser (2009) and Boltanski and Chiapello (2005), especially.

[11] As Lightfoot (2015, 35) puts it, for indigenous people in Canada, a "meaningful apology cannot serve to solidify the status quo of a colonial set of power relations in Indigenous–state relationships."

[12] This is not to say that neoliberalism is not, at the bottom, a project of restoring the power of a capitalist class. Foucault's insight, as I see it, is that this project needed, in order to be successful, a grip on subjectivity; it needed a certain "governmentality" linking practices of economic government with the mentality of the "enterprising self" (see McNay 2009).

[13] For a brief overview of the birth and growth of this literature, see the introduction to Nadler, Malloy, and Fisher's (2008) edited volume *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Reconciliation*.

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variables in the environment, which systematically increase or decrease individuals' willingness to reconcile by affecting their emotional state.[14] Researchers have, for instance, investigated in experimental settings "the effects of expressions of empathy […] and assumed responsibility […] on recipient's willingness for reconciliation" or "the effectiveness of apologies for […] restoring trust between groups" (Nadler and Liviatan 2006, 459; Reinders Folmer et al. 2021, 2). The subject of such experimental research is abstracted entirely from their social and political context; an atomized individual whose emotions are assumed to respond systematically to various stimuli, such as public expressions of empathy, apology, or guilt. Overcoming "the emotional barriers to the end of conflict that emanate from the history of pain and humiliation" (Nadler and Liviatan 2006, 459) does not involve acts of magnanimity or affective self-discipline but simply predictable reactions to external variables.

Such knowledge, however useful it may be in some conflict contexts, renders the anger and animosity of subjects as objects of knowledge and potential management independent of the contents of these emotions. Anger and oppositional emotions, then, are depoliticized as they are no longer political claims to be engaged with but merely "emotional barriers" to be overcome in the name of peaceful coexistence. This is recognizably the logic of the neoliberal *homo œconomicus* transposed to the realm of emotions—thus, I would argue that the politics of reconciliation and contrition, at least as they play out in settler-colonial states today, embody the depoliticizing logic of neoliberalism rather than challenge it.

While I have focused here on the management of the emotions of recipients of apology and reconciliatory gestures, the process of reconciliation of course involves wider processes of biopolitical management of entire populations.[15] As others, like Ahmed (2004, chap. 5) and Gooder and Jacobs (2000), have pointed out, reconciliation in settler-colonial states is also a way of managing the emotional lives of settlers and reconstituting the nation as a morally "good" community: "apology becomes a lifeline through which a legitimate sense of belonging in the nation may be restituted" (Gooder and Jacobs 2000, 229). Reconciliation, thus, is a response not *only* to the anger of those who feel wronged but also to the feelings of guilt and shame that may afflict the rest of the political community, a general process of healing the nation that is haunted by bad feelings (see also Moon 2009). I nevertheless find it crucial to theorize reconciliation as a response to anger in particular, because it is the anger of those who are wronged that creates the need for reconciliation in the first place. Insofar as feelings of guilt or shame arise as a response to the anger or suffering of others, the management of these feelings is also a way of managing the response to the original anger. Thus, it is worth stressing that the biopolitical management of antagonistic emotions does not only function through direct therapeutic interventions for victims (although these are important) but also more generally through the shaping of the affective life of the nation.

One might of course respond to all of this with a somewhat cynical "So what?" If the neoliberal management of individuals in some sense succeeds in helping people overcome negative affect, what underlies my critique of it except for a Schmittian disdain for liberal harmony or a longing for the moment of agonism supposedly constitutive of "the political"? The point is, first and foremost, that regardless of our normative evaluation of the politics of reconciliation, we ought to have a proper understanding of how power functions through gestures such as state apologies and reconciliation—and here the perspective that sees them as radically opposed to rationalized, neoliberal politics simply does not hold up. This understanding of the workings of power, however, cannot but have normative implications too: once we see the way in which the neoliberal management of emotions functions to help reproduce extant power structures, we are forced to ask which alternatives are foreclosed through the politics of reconciliation. The answer to this latter question partly depends on how we understand the normative potential of emotions such as anger: what political potential might we find in these emotions, which is foreclosed when it is treated only as evidence of a psychic injury to be soothed with recognitive acts such as apology? A full answer is beyond the scope of this article, but in the following section I will, at least, suggest a starting point.

An Alternative Approach to Anger

To return again to the theory of recognition, Honneth believes that emotional reactions to experiences of injustice are what both fuels and justifies progressive change. Anger against the social order is a moment that reveals shortcomings in this order insofar as the anger reveals unmet emotional needs, namely the lack of secure recognitive relations. In making misrecognition the monist ground on which to build an emancipatory social theory, however, Honneth remains blind to the ways in which recognitive needs can themselves become the object of depoliticizing management. When political disputes are reconceptualized as being about emotional needs, and these emotional needs are seen as amenable to systematic manipulation, then "conflicts are turned into problems that have to be sorted out by learned expertise" (to borrow some words from Honneth's critic Jacques Rancière 2004, 306).

The lens of recognition, in this case, at best obscures the real stakes of the struggle and at worst becomes complicit in neoliberalism's biopolitical subjection of individuals to the law of capitalist "development." Honneth's theory, like theories of reconciliation and restorative justice, was meant precisely to give a voice to the experience of anger and discontent and to show that formal incorporation into a procedurally just order is not sufficient to remedy the wrongs of the past (or present). Yet, in the context of neoliberalism's management of emotions, it paradoxically becomes an accomplice of a power that, in a certain sense, silences these emotions. Through the lens of recognition theory, emotional expressions of discontent are, despite their diversity, ultimately reduced to expressions of an underlying psychological need for recognition as a precondition for personal autonomy[16]—thus ignoring the fact that in contemporary societies, power frequently functions not by denying

[14] To be clear, the problem here is not causal thinking per se but the specific kind of cause–effect thinking imported from the experimental natural sciences involving the manipulation of various stimuli in a controlled setting to deduce conclusions about cause and effect (some might wish to term this "instrumental rationality"). An entirely different form of causal thinking is involved when the aim is to understand the actual social and historical causes of mental phenomena: think of Frantz Fanon's sociogenic approach to psychiatric disorders or contemporary work on the "social determinants" of mental health. Thanks to Emily Dyson for raising this point.

[15] I thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.

[16] There is a tension in Honneth's work—which he freely acknowledges—between a social–ontological approach, which sees the need for recognition as an ahistorical anthropological constant, "a need, anchored in human nature," and a more historicized approach where this need is conceptualized as a "historically fuelled feeling that others unjustly fail to recognize certain aspects of who one is." However, no matter "the historical alterability of forms of recognition; it is still a

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subjects fulfilment of psychological needs but through "the maximization of a version of their happiness and fulfilment that they take to be their own, but […] entails a relation to authority in the very moment that it pronounces itself the outcome of free choice" (Miller and Rose 2008, 215).

This, however, does not mean that we need to give up the insight that emotions such as anger are morally significant both for their "motivational impetus" and the "moral insight inherent in these negative emotions" (Honneth 1995, 132, 138). Quite to the contrary, my suggestion is that we ought to take expressions of anger and other emotions seriously as intelligible political claims instead of reducing them to evidence of an unfulfilled need for recognition. While this is not the place to outline in full an alternative approach to the role of negative emotions, I would nevertheless like to make just a few suggestive comments.

An alternative conception of political anger that can help us challenge the depoliticizing management of emotions can be found in the work of many feminist thinkers. Authors such as Audre Lorde, María Lugones (1995), Sara Ahmed (2004, esp. ch. 8), or Marilyn Frye, for instance, have accounts of anger, which explicitly go beyond the idea that anger is a claim for recognition. Take, for instance, Frye's conception of anger as "a claim to domain," which I already cited in the third section.[17] Frye's approach to anger as an assertion that "one is a being whose purposes and activities require and create a web of objects, spaces, attitudes and interests that is worthy of respect" (Frye 1983, 87) seems superficially in accordance with Honneth's view of negative emotions as recognition claims. However, the two accounts ultimately diverge in an interesting way. The difference lies in what we may call the telos attributed to expressions of anger. Honneth grounds his normative social theory in a monist theory of intersubjective recognition as the ultimate normative aim that justifies claims of injustice: "in order to be able to distinguish between the progressive and the reactionary, there has to be a normative standard that, in light of a hypothetical anticipation of an approximate end-state, would make it possible to mark out a developmental direction" (Honneth 1995, 168–69).[18] Thus, expressions of anger ultimately have normative force because, insofar as they are expressions of insufficient recognition, they anticipate a future state of more perfect recognitive relations.

What Frye has to say about anger differs importantly in this regard. She shares with Honneth the idea that anger comes with a claim to respect and that an appropriate response to justified resentment requires the recognition of the plaintiff. Yet, this recognition is not posited as the ultimate aim, or *telos*, of expressions of discontent. Rather, respecting and recognizing the other is only a part of what it means for the accused party to give the anger "uptake"—a term Frye borrows from J. L. Austin's speech act theory. "Being angry at someone is somewhat like a speech act in that it has a certain conventional force whereby it sets people up in a certain sort of orientation to each other; and like a speech act, it cannot 'come off' if it does not get uptake" (Frye 1983, 88). To give uptake to anger—and to respect the claim to domain inherent in it—means to recognize the way it sets up people in a certain antagonistic relation and to respond accordingly, to "take the anger on by directly responding to the claims implicit in it: accepting them or challenging them, accepting or defending [one]self against the implicit charge or accusation" (Frye 1983, 89). Thus, while expressions of anger always contain a claim to recognition of oneself as a person entitled to anger, the claims made by the discontented are not ultimately *reducible* to recognition claims. If Honneth's account of emotional reactions to injustice is teleological, we may term Frye's account "agonistic," since expressions of anger, for her, are not inherently oriented toward ever-expanding recognitive relations but rather toward establishing a certain oppositional relation between parties.

Such an "agonistic" view, however, should not be confused with Nussbaum's understanding of anger as conceptually tied to a wish for revenge and, therefore, to endless cycles of retribution and violence. In fact, Frye's approach suggests that we need to treat every expression of anger as a particular expression in a particular context and give uptake to whatever particular message it conveys—in Sara Ahmed's (2004, 174) words, this involves "*reading* the relation between affect and structure, or between emotion and politics" in any particular instance rather than universalizing negative emotions as expressions of misrecognition. We cannot, then, devise a general, abstract theory of anger that assumes that it *always* has its roots in a wish to either down-rank or achieve the recognition of the other. An appropriate response to anger and indignation is to acknowledge the way it sets up actors in a fundamentally agonistic relation—without assuming that this antagonism is either self-perpetuating or always essentially resolvable through reconciliatory recognition.

Conclusion

In this article, I have explored apologies and other gestures of reconciliation as ways of dealing with antagonistic emotions. Anger and indignation, most people would agree, are destabilizing emotions: when, on a large enough scale, people become enraged against social structures or other social groups, the status quo is threatened—whether we think of this as a threat of violence and destruction or as a promise of oppressive structures being torn down. Antagonistic emotions, therefore, inherently constitute a problem for the reproduction of extant power structures. This problem can be solved in different ways: one is the violent suppression of those who are unruly and angry; another way is to address the unruly emotions themselves. The latter is the way that is generally termed "reconciliation." Reconciliation, as I have argued here, can involve managing and overcoming animosity in different ways: those targeted by ire can make a plea for the indignant to give up their anger out of magnanimity; there may be calls for people to overcome their antagonisms for instrumental political reasons in the interest of building a stable and peaceful community; or, finally, the process of getting rid of one's inner rage can be conceptualized as a therapeutic process of healing the psychic injuries that caused the anger.

It is the latter logic of emotional management, which, I claim, is dominant in contemporary practices and discourses of reconciliation—at least in the context of liberal settler-colonial states. The point I have made is the basically

matter of the invariant dependence of humans on the experience of recognition" (Honneth 2002, 504, 515).

[17] Chakravarti (2014) provides an account of political anger somewhat similar to the one I sketch here, based on the central importance of "listening to anger." Especially her attention to anger's "confrontational" dimension makes it fit well with my concerns in this article. Overall, Chakravarti's is an imaginative and highly illuminating theory and it is certainly much more comprehensive and well developed than the few remarks that I make here; however, I am skeptical of her distinction between the "cognitive–evaluative" and the "confrontational" dimensions of anger, which is why I prefer to start from Frye's account of anger here. Frye's notion of uptake precisely highlights that the confrontational (or "agonistic") function of anger is *not* distinct from its communicative or evaluative functions.

[18] For a critique of this teleological element in Honneth's thinking, see McNay (2021).

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Foucauldian one that satisfaction of emotional needs, here the need for recognition, is not something that happens outside of power but rather that power can work through the creation and fulfilment of emotional needs (see Foucault 1978). The idea that oppositional emotions constitute not a problem to be solved by politics, but by scientific expertise—that we can study systematically "the emotional barriers to the end of conflict" or "the effects of expressions of empathy [on] willingness for reconciliation" (Nadler and Liviatan 2006, 459)—depoliticizes these emotions and takes away agency from those expressing them.

This does *not* mean that those victims of injustice who desire official apologies from the state or even "closure" are simply docile bodies or accomplices of power, nor is it to say that apologies and reconciliatory gestures are always, or even mostly, successful in defanging anger and indignation. Indeed, when states try to draw a line under the past through gestures such as apology, it frequently backfires, and activists often successfully resignify and repoliticize the official language of contrition. Yet, it is important to understand the ways in which power can work through the emotional management of reconciliatory gestures. This also does not mean that reconciliation or apologies for past injustices are always bad—it is simply to highlight that it is always *political* and where a political project tries to hide behind the neutral language of science and expertise, there are special grounds for suspicion.

My main point has been to argue against a dominant narrative in the public and academic discourse on reconciliation, which conceptualizes it as a therapeutic process designed to "heal" the emotional wounds of victims rather than a political project. In making this argument, I have tried to show the shortcomings of using the concept of recognition to ground normative theories of reconciliation and normative social theory more generally. By positing an ahistorical psychic need for recognition as the driver of social struggles and full intersubjective recognition as the *telos* of social progress, the lens of recognition obscures how these emotional needs can themselves become an object of depoliticizing management. While this has been, on the whole, a critical article, I have tried to suggest at least a starting point for a more fruitful way of conceptualizing the negative emotions provoked by injustices. Taking anger and other antagonistic emotions seriously has to mean taking seriously the specific political claims made by angry voices, and it has to mean accepting the fact that anger sets up an antagonistic relation between parties. The way we chose to resolve the antagonism—through apology and reconciliation or through continued adversarial struggle and sometimes even violence—is always a political question.

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