

Scaling Memory: Reparation Displacement and the Case of BC

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In British Columbia, people tend to view history as something that happened last weekend.... Happily, it doesn't matter here who your ancestors were or who did what to whom 300 years ago.

Lisa Hobbs Birnie (1996)

Racist injustices have played a central role in shaping British Columbia; it could hardly be otherwise in a white-dominated settler society built on an ongoing history of Indigenous dispossession and 75 initial years of official racism against Asians. Yet despite the spread of an “age of apology” (Gibney et al., 2008), characterized in many locales by a growing introspection over patterns of historic injustice, considerations of reparation still seem marginal in BC, an anomaly to which this article responds.

Charting the contours of an amnesiac culture of memory, the following pages argue that BC's aloofness from the age of apology reflects a phenomenon I call “reparation displacement.” While some recalcitrant communities resist calls to repair injustice by denying responsibility or claiming no injustice has occurred, reparation displacement works more subtly, redirecting understandings of responsibility instead. In the BC case, reparation displacement is intertwined with the politics of federalism; issues of racist injustice in BC have been conceived almost exclusively—not only by officials but often by redress activists themselves—as matters of federal rather than provincial shame. While more informed debates about Canadian belonging have followed federal apologies for wrongs inflicted on various groups, including Japanese Canadians, Chinese Canadians and Indigenous peoples (James, 2006: 243–45), BC is a different

Acknowledgments: The author would like to thank Caroline Andrew, Alan Cairns, Avigail Eisenberg, Steve Dupré, Chris Kukucha, Daniel Woods, and the two CJPS reviewers for helpful comments on earlier drafts. Thanks also to the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada for funding support and to Thane Bonar, Dave Newberry, Sarah Nykolaishen and Mark Willson for research assistance.

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Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique
42:2 (June/juin 2009) 363–386 doi:10.1017/S0008423909090374

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and/et la Société québécoise de science politique

case. Responsibilities of memory tend systematically to be channelled away from the provincial political community and towards its Canadian federal counterpart instead.

The concept of responsibility lies at the heart of numerous long-running philosophical controversies about right conduct among living individuals (Matravers, 2007). Unsurprisingly, the notion is no less contested in the more novel contemporary debates over intergenerational justice involving collectivities (see Thompson, 2002; Waldron, 2002). It is thus important to clarify at the outset what is meant by the term. When arguing that BC *was responsible* for historical injustice I am using the standard definition that moral philosophers use (Eshleman, 2008). That is, I mean to say that the province caused some wrongful course of action to be undertaken and that it deserves moral blame for this role. As will be seen, in some instances BC caused injustices directly, while in others it led or persuaded Ottawa to act wrongly; in these latter cases I suggest BC shares causal responsibility and moral blameworthiness with the Canadian state. In the course of these discussions, another aspect of responsibility will be important: *jurisdictional responsibility* in the legal-constitutional sense.

Of course in many debates about reparation the truly pressing question of responsibility arises only after charges of causation and blame have been made. People ask: but what are our *contemporary responsibilities* in relation to these injustices? While relying on philosopher Janna Thompson's view of political communities as intergenerational enterprises whose nature entails inherited benefits and burdens (2002), I leave open the requirements of responsibility in this reparative and contemporary sense; I do not map out a detailed view of what constitutes appropriate reparation in BC. Instead, sharing cultural theorist Elazar Barkan's understanding of reparation as a quintessentially political and place-specific task requiring dialogue and negotiation (2000: 308–12), the following pages treat BC's reparative responsibilities as a matter of collective struggle and not as legal calculi to be determined from above. I do nevertheless suggest that BC ought, far more energetically and sincerely than it has done, to begin learning about and publicly acknowledging its past wrongs. This means *taking responsibility* as an intergenerational moral community, one prepared to own up to wrongdoing in the knowledge that doing so may lend support to reparation claims in the present.

Reparation displacement involves complex dynamics of redirection revolving around three aspects of responsibility outlined above: causation, moral blameworthiness, and contemporary reparative obligation. Thus, reparation displacement occurs when questions of cause, blame, and obligation are shunted away, more or less systematically, from a community that ought properly to be asked them.

Abstract. Although many historical injustices in Canada have BC roots, the ensuing debates have tended to frame redress as a federal responsibility. The article analyzes this dynamic and calls it “reparation displacement.” Reparation displacement saves the recalcitrant community or group from fighting aggressively to avoid its unpleasant past, shunting questions of cause, blame, and obligation away instead. Reparation displacement receives special attention here as an obstacle hindering BC’s reconciliation with First Nations. The article also links the emphasis in “post-positivist” policy studies on civic deliberation to the focus in the reparations literature on historical acknowledgment. It suggests further that reparation displacement requires further research from scholars of federalism and multilevel governance.

Résumé. La Colombie-Britannique est le site de plusieurs injustices commises dans l’histoire du Canada. Pourtant, les débats qui s’ensuivent tendent à concevoir la question de la réparation comme relevant de la responsabilité du gouvernement fédéral. Cet article examine cette dynamique et y réfère en tant qu’elle témoigne d’un «déplacement de la réparation». Un tel déplacement permet à la communauté ou au groupe récalcitrant d’éviter d’affronter les aspects malheureux de son histoire. Il fait dévier les questions de cause, de blâme et d’obligation hors des responsabilités de la communauté concernée. Une attention spéciale est dédiée ici à ce phénomène parce qu’il constitue un obstacle entravant le processus de réconciliation entre la Colombie-Britannique et les Premières Nations. Enfin, cet article établit un rapport entre l’emphase que mettent les études «post-positivistes» de politiques sur la délibération civique et l’importance accordée à la reconnaissance historique dans la littérature portant sur les enjeux de réparation. Il suggère, en outre, que ce phénomène de déplacement devrait faire l’objet de recherches approfondies dans les domaines d’étude du fédéralisme et de la gouvernance multipalier.

By focusing on the origins and modalities of reparation displacement in BC, this article hopes that some vexing provincial pathologies might be better understood. Most crucial as an obstacle harming the prospects for new relationships with Indigenous peoples, displacement also helps shape ethnocultural relations in the province generally. Indeed, a key premise of my argument is that grasping memory politics in BC requires considering questions of historical injustice in relation to both First Nations and racialized minorities, a more panoramic approach than customary, given the traditional Canadian separation between “multiculturalism” and “Aboriginal rights.”

Two broader ambitions also inform the article. First, I trace some of the forces driving reparation displacement not simply to establish the case but also to highlight a problem unnoticed in the relevant literatures. As will be seen, several factors promoting reparation displacement in BC are typical in federations and are thus to be expected in other multilevel governance contexts. These factors include the opacity of blame assignment in situations of overlapping or shared jurisdiction; the tendency of many racialized groups to focus on national, rather than subunit, inclusion; and the prevailing leading role of federal as opposed to subunit governments in citizenship development. Taken collectively, these features have considerable potential to redirect responsibility from jurisdictions that have committed historical injustices. Reparation displacement thus deserves more scrutiny at a time when governance responsibilities are increasingly shared and diffused.

The article's other main theoretical contribution follows from its concluding case study of BC's "New Relationship" policy, a historic but largely failed attempt to pursue reconciliation with First Nations. I attribute much of this failure to the policy's inattention to historical understanding and dialogue, an inattention which I trace in turn to reparation displacement. This analysis supports the emphasis in postpositivist policy studies on the broader civic discursive conditions in which policymaking and implementation take place (Fischer, 2006). Indeed, I suggest that officials and scholars interested in these questions of discourse and deliberation might engage more with the reparations literature, which shows how acts of apology and acknowledgment can promote policy-relevant dialogues in contexts shaped adversely by injustice.

The remainder of the article proceeds as follows. It begins with a brief survey of displacement followed by a more fine-grained account of historical injustices in BC. I then return to examine reparation displacement in more depth, focusing on the conceptions of responsibility structuring BC's contemporary engagement with historical wrongs against ethnocultural minorities and Indigenous peoples, respectively. Finally, the concluding case study of the New Relationship illustrates the impact of reparation displacement on responsibility-taking and policymaking in BC today.

Racism: The BC Case

The displaced character of past injustices in BC is suggested by the following observation: several wrongs framed as Canadian redress issues have a significant BC dimension that tends to go unaddressed. Three injustices stand out in particular: the Second World War internment of over 20,000 Japanese Canadians, all of them BC residents; the 1885–1923 "Chinese head tax" and 1923–1947 "Chinese exclusion" policies, which reflected specific BC considerations; and the 1914 Komagata Maru incident, in which 376 predominantly Sikh migrants were confined for two months aboard ship in Vancouver's Burrard Inlet and then returned to India, where the British colonial regime killed 18 passengers, hanged 20 for insurrection, and subjected dozens more to imprisonment or transportation (Johnston, 1979: 104–06, 114).

Despite their origins as responses to racism in BC, these episodes have been framed almost exclusively as Canadian injustices carrying correspondingly federal-level duties of repair. Japanese-Canadian activists in the 1980s described the internment as "a black mark upon the Canadian tradition of justice and fair play" (National Association of Japanese Canadians, 1984: 1); the more recent Chinese-Canadian redress campaign called the head tax an affront to "Canada's ... commitment to tol-

erance” (Chinese Canadian National Council, 2008). Delivered in 1988 and 2006, respectively, federal redress packages for the internment and head tax accept this vision of responsibility. Indo-Canadian leaders seem to have achieved a similar result; at the time of writing, Ottawa appeared to have responded positively to community demands for an apology to give the Komagata Maru voyagers “their just due in the history of Canada” (Komagata Maru Heritage Foundation, 2008). What these cases have often lacked is any similar political focus on engaging the BC political community.

A specific focus on BC’s injustices against First Nations is more common (Woolford, 2005). The difference reflects Indigenous efforts to rebuild a land base in a jurisdiction with virtually no historic treaties, and in which over 92 per cent of the relevant land mass is under the “ownership” of the provincial Crown. Yet despite the focus on historical wrongs stemming from Victoria’s control over land, BC’s reparative responsibilities to Indigenous peoples have come to prominence only recently. Historically, BC First Nations, as in other provinces, preferred to engage the federal government, citing the importance of nation-to-nation relations and, to a lesser extent, Ottawa’s constitutional obligations to Native peoples (Cairns, 2005: 27, 30–31). In any event, for the first hundred years of BC’s history no provincial interlocutor was available; until the 1980s, successive governments in Victoria refused all engagement with Aboriginal claims (Tennant, 1990: 215–16).

Of course Canada’s role must be addressed. When it comes to racism in BC, the Canadian government has committed great wrongs. Acting on the basis of its wartime emergency powers, its responsibility for foreign affairs, its authority over aliens and naturalization, and its superior jurisdiction in taxation and immigration, it interned the Japanese Canadians, imposed the head tax and mistreated the passengers of the Komagata Maru. Furthermore, Ottawa used its jurisdiction over “Indians and lands reserved for Indians” to implement the residential schools policy, which had a devastating impact in BC (Haig-Brown, 1988). Ottawa also continued BC’s pre-Confederation policies of refusing to sign treaties and consigning Indigenous peoples to some of the smallest reserves in the country (Harris, 2002: 71).

The point, then, is not that Canada is without blame or that national-level reparation is inappropriate. It is rather that ignoring the provincial role can obscure some of the most important patterns of historic responsibility and benefit at work. In the Indigenous case, for example, many of Ottawa’s unjust decisions originated as managerial responses to settler obstinacy in BC. The racist terra nullius doctrine, which claimed BC as effectively “unoccupied” at time of contact; the concomitant refusal to sign treaties; the insistence on miniscule reserves; these items of BC faith shaped national action precisely because federal policymakers deferred

to white BC feeling on Indigenous issues. As Cole Harris explains in his account of the BC reserve system, “a [federal] government that veered towards Native rights would lose seats in [BC]. There was also a complex Dominion–provincial relationship to maintain” (2002: 193). By 1880, the matter was settled: “Title and ... Native government would be ignored, reserves would be small and Ottawa would pay the bills” (Harris, 2002: xxix).

Once established, the pattern of federal capitulation to BC settler interests continued. In 1920, for example, Ottawa heeded complaints by transferring thousands of acres of valuable reserve land to the province, even suspending the Indian Act provision requiring Indigenous consent for alterations to reserve lands (Tennant, 1990: 100). And when a Judicial Committee of the Privy Council (JCPC) decision cast doubt on the failure to recognize Native title, Ottawa responded to BC concerns by making it illegal for First Nations to raise or spend money for the purpose of pursuing a land claim. Effective from 1927 to 1951, the anti-claim legislation kept the land question off the JCPC docket and virtually silenced BC Indigenous mobilization for three decades (Tennant, 1990:111–12).

Canada’s high-profile episodes of anti-Asian racism reflect a similar relationship between racist objectives in BC and an attendant federal concern to appease. The interplay between these two factors offers a vantage point on Canadian federal–provincial relations that merits consideration here. The story begins with BC’s initial attempts to legislate independently on issues related to Asian immigration. Between 1884 and 1904, the provincial assembly passed at least 22 laws seeking variously to ban immigration from Asia, to severely curtail the numbers of Asian arrivals, or to prevent Asian residents already present from engaging (or at least from prospering) in various fields of employment and enterprise (Walker, 1997: 71). Many of these laws were struck down by the courts for infringing on Ottawa’s superior immigration powers and authority over direct taxation. Some maverick justices even found legislative racism contrary to the rule of law (McLaren, 2005). Still other provincial measures, including an 1884 Asian immigration ban and several attempts to restrict immigration with language requirements, were disallowed by Ottawa or reserved by the lieutenant-governor (Roy, 1989: 54, 105).

Ottawa’s obstructive actions were not motivated by a principled focus on human rights. In the case of Japan, that country’s status as an emergent power and British ally made anti-Japanese legislation objectionable to Canadian officials (Roy, 2003: 82–85). In the Chinese instance, federal advisors worried about legitimating the punitive treatment of British subjects in China, whose position was a focus of early twentieth-century imperial concern (Roy, 2003: 72–74, 101). Large employers favouring

continued flows of racialized labour were also influential (Roy, 2003: 97; Cho, 2002: 64–65).

The federal interference made BC's thwarted racist aspirations a prominent theme of provincial complaint. Commentators denounced the use of reservation and disallowance as evidence of the East's indifference to BC's unique circumstances. Trade unions and labour councils took up the cause. Organizations such as the Anti-Chinese Association, Anti-Chinese League, Anti-Chinese Union, Anti-Mongolian Association and Asiatic Exclusion League were formed. Newspapers warned of bloodshed if Ottawa continued to block anti-Asian measures. By the early 1880s, historian Patricia Roy reports, "The drastic idea of the people 'governing directly' or of taking harsh action against the Chinese was definitely in the air" (1989: 60). Mob attacks on Vancouver's Chinatown in 1887 and on Japantown and Chinatown in 1907 gave credence to the fear. Meanwhile, legislators in Victoria fed the controversy by passing legislation certain to be reserved or disallowed; they "enjoyed provincial rights fights" (109).

Ottawa responded with damage control attempts to pacify white BC while simultaneously upholding Imperial and corporate interests. For example, the Laurier government negotiated a bilateral treaty limiting the numbers of Japanese entering Canada, which avoided the affront of naming Japanese as undesirable immigrants in law (Roy, 1989: 185). Chinese sensibilities were of somewhat lesser concern. After completing the Canadian Pacific Railway, Ottawa struck the 1885 Royal Commission on Chinese Immigration, which recommended the head tax as a compromise way of slowing Chinese migration without eliminating the cheap labour favoured by many employers (Cho, 2002: 70). The head tax was implemented in 1885 at the rate of \$50 per person; continued BC complaints led Ottawa to raise it to \$100 in 1900, to raise it again to \$500 in 1903 and finally to implement an outright ban on Chinese immigration from 1923 to 1947.

Deference to racist sentiment in BC also influenced Ottawa's approach to the Komagata Maru. Immigration officials refused to let the passengers disembark and even denied them food and water, fearing that any "wobbling on the issue" would only fuel complaints that "Easterners ... did not understand what was going on" (Johnston, 1979: 50). The same concerns influenced the Japanese–Canadian internment. Although the RCMP believed the internment unwarranted, Prime Minister King worried about the wartime climate of anti-Japanese panic in BC. Paying particular heed to BC's lead cabinet representative, the notorious racist Ian Mackenzie, King settled on internment as the best solution for what he called the "acrimony and bitterness" threatening Canada's war effort on the Pacific coast (quoted in Miki, 2004: 40). Literary critic and internment expert Roy Miki's judgment seems apt: "[the internment] had less to do with military security ... and more to do with fos-

tering national unity” (40). Like the Komagata Maru, head tax and exclusion responses, it constituted a conspicuous exercise of authority aimed at minimizing West Coast alienation and disorder by demonstrating Ottawa’s responsiveness to racist anxieties in BC.

Ottawa also curried economic favour with assistance for the white supremacist cause. With total head-tax revenues of approximately \$23 million (roughly \$1 billion in current dollars), the decision to share with Victoria, first, one-quarter, and, after 1902, one-half of the gross proceeds constituted significant largesse. Federal officials performed a similar service by auctioning the property of interned Japanese Canadians at fire-sale prices. Measured conservatively at \$48 million in 1948 dollars, the real estate, businesses and fishing boats of a community numbering some 20,000 people provided a considerable financial boost for many Lower Mainland whites in the postwar era (Miki, 2004: 238). Of course, Ottawa’s post-Confederation role in maintaining non-Native control over Indigenous lands represents an immeasurably greater case of federal aid in the service of white domination in BC.

While Ottawa crafted appeasement responses for a frontier society whose provincial-autonomy sentiments and white-power aspirations were fused, the province found much success in legislating racism on its own. For instance, the typical time lag between the passage of the relevant provincial law and the subsequent corresponding ruling of ultra vires or act of reservation or disallowance meant that even ultimately failed measures were in force for considerable periods of time (Backhouse, 1999b: chap. 5, n.4). In still other cases, discriminatory provincial legislation was either upheld in the courts after being challenged by anti-racism campaigners on federalism grounds or left to stand unopposed.¹ The province’s most notable courtroom victory, awarded by the JCPC in *Tomey Homma* (Walker, 1997: 76), settled both the matter at issue—BC’s disfranchisement of Japanese Canadians (1895–1949)—and established a judicial shield for similar BC legislation targeting Aboriginal peoples (1872–1947), Chinese Canadians (1872–1947) and Indo-Canadians (1907–1947). Disfranchisement had further effects: it barred members of designated groups from holding provincial or municipal office or employment, voting in municipal elections, serving on juries, entering the fields of law, pharmacy, or policing, and holding liquor licenses. In still other cases, BC banned the employment of Asians in mining and forestry and on provincial public works, prevented Asian-owned businesses from employing “white” women or girls (a law not rescinded until 1968), and harassed Asian business owners with myriad discriminatory licensing, regulation and taxation schemes (Backhouse, 1999a: 171–72; Roy, 1989: 209–10).

The cumulative impact of these measures is astounding. Confined to the margins of the economy, stigmatized as subhuman and systemati-

cally barred from the normal democratic channels of self-defence, persons of Asian and Aboriginal descent in BC were denied—categorically, methodically, and viciously—the most basic human rights to equality and dignity.

In summary, therefore, BC's decades-long crusade for a "white man's province" (Roy, 1989) demands notice as a crucial factor shaping the long-run distribution of power on Canada's Pacific coast. Concerned about the frontier province's burgeoning "politics of resentment" (Resnick, 2000), Ottawa certainly aided in the endeavour. But contemporary understandings reverse this ordering of causal responsibility and moral blame almost completely. Particularly where internment and head-tax reparation are concerned, an exclusive federal-level focus obscures the pre-eminent driving force of BC racism and the significant material benefits that white British Columbians and their governments derived from the federal policies—to say nothing of the province's own legislative racism. The partial exception of Aboriginal land claims, which are now making historical injustices an important focus in contemporary BC politics, will be discussed shortly. Here I want to pursue the more general point: when it comes to questions of causation, blame, and reparation, responsibility for past wrongs in BC has in many respects been displaced to the federal level.

Displacement: Injustices against Ethnocultural Minorities

Reparation displacement flows in the first instance from the political choices of redress movements; ethnocultural-minority campaigns, in particular, bypass the province almost invariably. I have found just two clear instances of non-Indigenous groups directly targeting BC for past racist injustices: a 1989 Indo-Canadian request to establish a Komagata Maru memorial (the province erected a small plaque in Vancouver in 1990 and the issue briefly resurfaced in 2008²) and a 2000 petition calling on Victoria to provide head-tax redress. The rarity of such claims is further underscored by noting the sponsor of the head-tax petition: an out-of-province organization called the Edmonton Head Tax and Exclusion Act Redress Committee.³

What drives the apparent activist indifference to historical memory in BC? The failed *Mack* head-tax lawsuit (Dyzenhaus and Moran, 2005) suggests the importance of federalism. Although nearly half of the head-tax funds went to Victoria, the *Mack* suit for recovery named only the federal attorney-general as respondent; elementary legal requirements left the claimants little choice but to pursue the government that actually imposed the tax. This point underlines the blurring of governance responsibilities intrinsic to contemporary federalism. Furnishing multi-

ple sovereignty-sharing targets carrying varying degrees of political authority, openness, and visibility, federalism can shield the primary champions and main beneficiaries of injustice behind a surface preoccupation with the technically culpable. This emphasis on federalism as a force of mystification recalls the left-wing complaints about corporate power, welfare state regulation, and reactionary provincial administrations during the Great Depression (Mallory, 1954).

Yet many redress-seekers themselves prefer the federal-level focus as a matter of considered choice. For instance, I have interviewed Chinese–Canadian leaders who, despite their expert familiarity with anti-Asian racism in BC, argue that redress is a citizenship question best addressed federally (Chung, 2004; Jung, 2005; Kang, 2004). Similarly, Black activists in the United States frame reparation for slavery and Jim Crow as a “national political responsibility” (Torpey, 2006: 108) and not as the duty of the white special South. In these cases, visions of citizenship lead redress campaigners to downplay subunit reparation, and perhaps even to reject it as a hindrance to the more capacious assignments of responsibility they seek. Strategic considerations of political impact may also be in play, with activists shunning subunits as minor-league entities inferior in political visibility and resources.

In the Canadian context, the postwar forays of successive federal governments in “multicultural nationalism” (Kernerman, 2005) have also helped to stimulate a federal-level focus. Politically, Ottawa’s reliance on multiculturalism as a badge of Canadian distinction (Abu-Laban and Gabriel, 2002) has furnished an obvious target for groups victimized by blatant contradictions of the message; institutionally, the multiculturalism bureaucracy has provided a familiar route for non-Indigenous claims (Miki, 2004: 317).

A preoccupation with surface legislative responsibility aggravated by the complex institutional setting of federalism; the citizenship orientations and choices of activists; Ottawa’s own policy pathways and incentive structures—all combine to channel reparative demands away from the provincial level. The resulting dynamic is one of reparation displacement: a vacuum of provincial memory and responsibility flowing from the prevailing exclusive focus on the senior level of government and wider Canadian political community with which BC shares sovereignty and space.

Displacement differs from the forms of denial sometimes seen in polities that refuse unwelcome encounters with problematic pasts. For example, whereas both the Turkish policy of denying the 1915 Armenian genocide and Japan’s episodic expressions of defiance over that country’s wartime atrocities have elicited widespread concern (Torpey, 2007), the BC setting engenders a different response. Social movements frame the injustices as federal injustices, and their redress campaigns diffuse citizen-

level responsibilities of atonement across the whole Canadian society. The result is that BC often seems to escape potential controversies of historical reckoning while simultaneously avoiding the notoriety of the obvious recalcitrant denier. The following discussion explores this dynamic in more depth by focusing on the conceptions of causal responsibility, moral blame, and reparative duty expressed by BC governments and legislators in recent years.

BC's Memory Culture: Ethnocultural Minorities

Discussions about past wrongs yield insight into a community's memory culture, the constellation of reflexes shaping hegemonic views about the appropriate uses of the past (Carrier: 2006). To this end, a search of BC's *Hansard* was conducted, looking for references to the following words between 1970–2005 inclusive: Japanese; Chinese; Komagata Maru; redress; restitution; compensation; apology; acknowledgment; commemoration; reparation. The search revealed the following themes: from the two right-wing parties, Social Credit and its provincial Liberal successor, evidence of a strong aversion to even the most anodyne forms of acknowledgment; from the left-leaning New Democrats, a tendency to raise past wrongs for partisan ends; and, from legislators of all stripes, a refusal to treat reparation as anything other than a federal responsibility, the approach Kathryn Harrison calls "passing the buck" (1996).

Right-wing aversion to historical acknowledgment is highlighted by the failure of the *Hansard* search to find more than a single direct reference to the Japanese–Canadian internment from Social Credit or Liberal members during the 35-year period concerned.⁴ The tenacity of this aversion can also be discerned in the Social Credit government's May 1984 response to NDP MLAs seeking comment on then Prime Minister Trudeau's stance against internment reparation. No cabinet minister would speak, while Premier Bill Bennett would only say—cryptically, given Trudeau's early 1980s status as the *bête noire* of Western Canadian conservatives—that he knew the prime minister would "do the right thing" (Bennett, 1984: 4190). Bennett managed to complete the discussion without mentioning the internment.

Hostility to acknowledgment and passing the buck both surfaced in 1989, when Indo-Canadian organizations wrote Social Credit Premier William Vander Zalm requesting assistance for a monument commemorating the Komagata Maru incident. Vander Zalm first ignored the request, leaving the relevant minister to respond in the press: "This is an issue which historically concerns only the government of Canada" (see Sihota, 1989: 7458). When NDP MLA Moe Sihota pursued Vander Zalm in the legislature, the premier attacked his legislature's first ever Indo-Canadian

member: "You're using your position, your heritage and this assembly abusively" (Vander Zalm, 1989: 7456). An ensuing controversy over Vander Zalm's remarks shamed the province into contributing \$3000 towards a Vancouver plaque recognizing the Komagata Maru event. However, the plaque's awkward origins appear to have vitiated its reparative potential, stoking cynicism instead (Kieran, 1990: 5; Griffin, 1990: B2).

For their part, Vander Zalm's NDP opponents, in opposition and later in government, proved equally averse to exploring provincial responsibility, in either the historical or contemporary sense. In part this lack of interest reflected the NDP's intensely partisan approach. For instance, although NDP MLAs cited the internment as a cautionary example when the Social Credit government gutted human-rights enforcement in the 1980s, their real preoccupation was trumpeting the anti-internment pedigree of their predecessor, the Co-operative Commonwealth Federation: "We have a long history, as a party, of fighting for human rights, a history that goes back through the days of the CCF to the time the party was actually formed" (Stupich, 1984: 4391). The chest-thumping could assume bizarre proportions, as in 1992 when then NDP cabinet minister Dennis Streifel claimed that "The CCF adamantly opposed the callous treatment of Indo-Canadians in the Komagata Maru incident [and] strongly opposed the imposition of the head tax on Chinese Canadians" (1992: 1732). Of course the CCF had done nothing of the sort: the party did not exist until 1933. In any case, Streifel's claim ignored not only the BC trade-union movement's pre-Second World War opposition to Asian immigration but that of many BC socialists as well. Roy characterizes the stance as follows: "The workers of the world had a common cause, but they should stay home to fight it" (1989: 214).

With a new NDP government committed politically to human rights, the federal head tax redress campaign of the 1990s elicited expressions of sympathy unseen in the Socred years. Yet these discussions were also dominated by a knee-jerk reliance on passing the buck. No provincial commemorative initiatives were proposed, no acts of provincial acknowledgment were recommended, and there was certainly no suggestion that Victoria ought to do anything about the head-tax monies that had found their way into the provincial treasury. Instead, a May 1992 motion from then-backbench NDP MLA Ujjal Dosanjh received unanimous support: it called "on the Government of Canada to expeditiously provide a reasonable redress for the injustice of the Chinese head tax" (Dosanjh, 1992: 1738). MLAs agreed with Dosanjh that it "only enhances our dignity to ask the federal government to do what's right and what's just and not delay it even one day more" (1740). The scene was repeated a year later, with Dosanjh rising to "regret to inform the House ... that the prime minister and the Government of Canada have not dealt with that issue," and the legislature voting dutifully to "send that message again to Ottawa"

(1993: 6287). Throughout, NDP members paraded their party's policy of disavowing provincial responsibility; they refused conspicuously to "find fault with those pioneers who built this province" (Dosanjh, 1992: 1739) or to "linger on the faults of our early politicians or pioneers" (Hammell, 1992: 1747). Needless to say, the spectacle of one legislature piously urging a second to atone for having earlier acceded to the demands of the first was an irony that escaped comment.⁵

Notions of Contemporary Responsibility: Indigenous Peoples

Injustices against Indigenous peoples were excluded from the *Hansard* analysis; the land-claim debates alone demand a full-length study. Thus, instead of attempting to distil pertinent aspects of the memory culture from political rhetoric and debate, the following section surveys some key developments in Crown–Aboriginal relations in BC, focusing on the notions of contemporary responsibility reflected in the province's legal engagement with Indigenous land claims.

The provincial Crown arguments in the landmark BC cases on Aboriginal title demonstrate the enduring sway of Victoria's traditional stance on Aboriginal issues generally. Rejecting treaties and land claims settlements, and thus avoiding the path followed, however disingenuously and inconsistently, elsewhere in Canada, the traditional stance was simple. Paul Tennant describes it as follows: "There is no problem and if there is a problem it is a federal responsibility" (1996: 45).

Long after its formal political abandonment, the position identified by Tennant shaped BC's approach in the legal arena. For example, BC reacted to the landmark *Calder* suit on Aboriginal title by passing the buck, claiming that Dominion jurisdiction over "Indians and lands reserved for Indians" meant that the province had been named improperly as a defendant in the case (British Columbia Supreme Court, 1969). With this argument dismissed, BC focused during *Calder's* ascent up the appeals hierarchy on defending terra nullius; challenging the common-law assumption that Aboriginal title survives in the absence of treaties or explicit extinguishment, the province rejected the very existence of Aboriginal peoples as historic self-governing societies (Russell, 2005: 273). Following the Supreme Court's 1973 dismissal of terra nullius in *Calder* and an ensuing decade of intensifying Indigenous struggle, in 1991 the province finally accepted the principle of negotiating Native claims (Tennant, 1996: 59). Yet Victoria clung to the traditional line in the courts. For example, in *Delgamuukw*, in which the Gitksan and Wet'suwet'en nations argued that their Aboriginal title survived from historic occupancy, the province insisted that title had been erased by BC's entry into Confederation and subsequent acts of the Crown (de Costa, 2003: 176). In 1997, the Cana-

dian Supreme Court rejected this “implicit extinguishment” doctrine and upheld the existence of Aboriginal title, although it left unaddressed the specifics of the Gitksan and Wet’suwet’en claim.

Glen Clark’s controversial NDP government inaugurated the post-*Delgamuukw* era with the 2000 Nisga’a deal, BC’s first modern-day treaty. However, the incoming Liberals quickly restored the status quo. Leader Gordon Campbell, who had led a failed legal challenge to the treaty while in opposition, called a referendum on Aboriginal rights after taking office in 2001; sociologist Andrew Woolford calls it “an exercise in populist politics [aimed at] giving the BC Liberals a rigid bottom-line position on controversial issues” (2005: 110).

Concerned that logging and mining activities were devaluing their claims to title, Native plaintiffs challenged the province’s presumed right to approve resource development on traditional Aboriginal lands. BC responded in *Haida v. British Columbia* (Supreme Court of Canada, 2004a) by insisting that the relevant First Nation would have to prove its title claim in court before any encumbrance on provincial prerogatives could be found. BC also argued that, even if duties of accommodation were assigned without a finding of title, those duties should rest with Ottawa alone. This position was simultaneously a claim to provincial autonomy and a denial of contemporary responsibility. Victoria argued that, because the Canadian constitution guarantees BC’s jurisdiction over provincial lands and natural resources while giving Ottawa authority for Indian affairs, to impinge on provincial resource decisions on behalf of Native interests would “undermine the balance of federalism” (qtd in *Haida Nation v. British Columbia*, 2004: para. 58). The Court ruled for the Haida, adding in *Taku River Tlingit v. British Columbia* (Supreme Court of Canada, 2004b: para. 32) that BC must undertake meaningful consultation resulting in a “responsive” level of accommodation before instituting development measures that might adversely affect Aboriginal title.

It is useful to situate the province’s failed legal approach in the context of postwar decolonization. After the Second World War, mobilization against colonial rule began to erode the core practices and doctrines of classic Western imperialism. The result was not decolonization tout court but “informal imperialism,” the continued hegemony of capitalist and Western imperatives via the background operation of a world system of asymmetrical power exploited relentlessly by its beneficiaries (Tully, 2007). Although the precise modalities of classic versus informal imperialism in BC are complex, the exceptional nature of BC’s post-*Calder* battle against Aboriginal title is clear. While the Canadian constitutional order responded to Indigenous mobilization by recognizing a limited but significant set of Aboriginal rights—thus sounding the death knell of classic Canadian imperialism—BC fought anachronistically to maintain the

unfettered settler sovereignty and resource control of the formal imperialism era.

BC resisted the retreat from classic imperialism by brandishing the position it had brought to Confederation in 1871: “There is no problem and if there is a problem it is a federal responsibility.” More than some lingering anachronism or “try anything” legal stratagem, this approach reflected an overriding attachment to a particular path of action and a corresponding vision of Canadian federalism. The path of action has been resource-based province-building via the unimpeded exploitation of Native lands; the corresponding vision of Canadian federalism reflexively shrugs off the resultant Indigenous dispossession as the business of a different community and government.

Swayed by Aboriginal activism and the more diffuse intellectual impact of the worldwide decolonization movement (Cairns, 2003: 69), the Canadian Supreme Court has rejected this path of action and its corresponding federalism vision; BC is now legally compelled to negotiate accommodation in resource development and to recognize the underlying reality of Aboriginal title. However, adapting constructively to the new climate has proved exceedingly difficult in BC. As I argue in the article’s next and penultimate section, which examines the province’s New Relationship policy, reparation displacement has proved a powerful obstacle to reconciliation with First Nations.

The New Relationship Policy

After winning re-election in May 2005, the provincial Liberal government declared a sudden end to its forays in reactionary populism, announcing a New Relationship policy (British Columbia, 2008) based on the following historic pledges:

- to consult First Nations in land-use decisions
- to raise Aboriginal living standards and improve health and education outcomes
- to help revitalize Indigenous languages
- to incorporate First Nation “laws, knowledge and values” in resource management
- to recognize Native title, including its economic component
- to develop government-to-government relationships, premised on the recognition that Aboriginal title is unextinguished and constitutionally protected.

Thus, the policy exhibits two major thrusts. The first accepts that BC First Nations are political communities with continuing land, economic,

and self-government rights; the second targets Indigenous health, education, and living standards.

While a comprehensive analysis is beyond the scope of this paper, the New Relationship policy shares key deficiencies with the broader provincial treaty process. At the time of writing, a treaty process involving 58 First Nations, lasting 17 years and costing well over \$500 million had produced only two final agreements (Schouls, 2008).⁶ While critics (for example, Blackburn, 2005; de Costa, 2003; Penikett, 2006) of BC's approach to treaty-making abound, Woolford's (2005; also see Ratner et al., 2003) analysis seems particularly astute. Writing before the New Relationship, Woolford stresses two interrelated failures: the inability of the treaty process to earn Indigenous trust and its refusal to engage the provincial society. Both owe much to BC's unwillingness to confront the past.

As Woolford explains, the province has fuelled Aboriginal distrust in treaty negotiations by refusing even to hear about, let alone repudiate, its prior misconduct. Insisting on "pragmatic negotiations," provincial negotiators deem "stories of hardship and suffering ... inappropriate and extraneous" (2005: 121, 118). At the same time, Victoria has created an explanatory vacuum by failing publicly to explain why treaties are necessary. Dubious as an approach to reconciliation, this anti-historical stance can even intensify racism. As Woolford argues, a refusal to publicize "the injustices that are at the root of treaty making compounds the image that treaties are 'government handouts' afforded to special interest groups" (183).

This same aversion to the politics of memory has permeated the New Relationship: a revealing continuity, given its stated rejection of the failed approaches of the past. Most notably, the announcements and publicity materials accompanying the policy say virtually nothing about the past relationships that make a new one advisable. Certainly, the 2003 Throne Speech stated "regret" for "mistakes that were made" and for "tragic experiences visited upon First Nations through years of paternalistic policies" (British Columbia Legislative Assembly, 2003). The 2005 Throne Speech acknowledged dismal Aboriginal living standards as "measures of our collective failure"; it also admitted that "the path to prosperity does not lie in the denial of aboriginal rights or in the discredited approaches of the past" (British Columbia Legislative Assembly, 2005). Similar allusions include Premier Campbell's declaration that "First Nations and Aboriginal communities in Canada have been failed" (British Columbia, 2005a) and then-Minister of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation Tom Christensen's almost identical statement that "we have failed Aboriginal people" (British Columbia 2005b).

These utterances share three deficiencies. First, they sidestep issues of causal responsibility and moral blame by refusing to say, "Sorry" or

“We apologize,” offering a more ambiguous “regret” instead. Second, they employ a distancing syntax that effects a similar veiling of causation and blame. For example, the policy and its related pronouncements speak passively of “mistakes that were made” and “tragic experiences visited upon,” but do not say “We committed the following wrongs.”⁷ Third, and more generally, the relevant New Relationship statements make no reference to any specific act of historic injustice at all. Refusing to name, repudiate, and thus to accept causal responsibility and moral blame for the wrongs of the past, the policy has failed appropriately to seek reconciliation with First Nations.

The problem is not simply the absence of genuine political apologies. BC has also avoided alternative and perhaps less controversial ways of taking responsibility for its wrongs. For example, although the notion of promoting historical awareness cropped up during the early months of the New Relationship, the goal seems to have been abandoned. An initial Service Plan Update indicated that the policy would involve “acknowledging our past history,” including “reconciliation activities ... to increase public awareness and understanding” (British Columbia Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation, 2005). Minister Christensen also promised a “shift of the cultural reality of the province so the contributions of First Nations are fully recognized and valued” (British Columbia, 2005b).

Three years later, however, no such initiatives seemed to have been undertaken. Indeed, neither of the two concrete historical awareness programs mooted in the early days of the policy appeared to have survived the initial announcement. In 2006, the Aboriginal Relations Ministry publicized an “Honouring Our Past” program to reintroduce Indigenous place names around the province. No subsequent information was offered; at the time of writing, the address of the original web announcement navigated back to the main page of the ministry. Furthermore, the 2006 Honouring Our Past statement was itself a re-announcement of a 2004 promise, which at the time of writing had an internet non-presence consisting of two inoperative links.⁸ A similar fate seems to have befallen the Telling First Nations Stories program, a joint initiative announced by the Union of British Columbia Indian Chiefs (2006). Described as a plan in partnership with Victoria to “promote awareness of the New Relationship and the significance of First Nations’ contributions to BC,” no provincial government communication has to my knowledge ever mentioned the project.

By the time of writing, any enthusiasm surrounding the New Relationship had vanished. In February 2008, Indigenous leaders ended their historic entente with the Campbell government, citing the province’s refusal to recognize Native title in legislation and its unwillingness to accept appropriate partnership terms for resource development (Hume,

2008: S1). Of course, Victoria's disinclination to surrender sovereignty and resources has marred the treaty process from inception (Blackburn, 2005; de Costa, 2003). While the New Relationship's failure suggests that this pattern is very much in place, the preceding discussion suggests an additional obstacle to reconciliation, which an understandable focus on the obvious may serve to obscure.

This obstacle is BC's aversion to even the sort of modest gestures of responsibility-taking that sometimes get dismissed as "merely symbolic." Although the policy promised transformative changes, such as government-to-government relationships and resource co-management, the New Relationship also avoided measures whose short-run threat to traditional patterns of conduct was by comparison minimal. To better appreciate the point, consider sociologist John Torpey's schematization of the overall field of reparation practices (2003: 6–7). In Torpey's rendering, so-called transitional justice measures (purging wrongdoers and remaking state institutions) and practices of material reparation (returning land or paying compensation) stand out for their capacity to exert immediate impacts on governance. Conversely, gestures of political apology (admitting wrong was done) are comparatively diffuse. More diffuse still is what Torpey, referencing Habermas's notion of communicative ethics, calls "communicative history": discursive efforts to "search for a past about which all ... participants can agree" (7).

Thus, the New Relationship offers a puzzling combination of professed support for politico-economic transformation with a simultaneous avoidance of political apology and communicative history. Of course the puzzle dissolves if we understand the policy as a cynical attempt to distract and co-opt opponents, the better to stonewall at the treaty tables and pass the buck in the courts. It may nevertheless be helpful to regard the New Relationship as a case of policy failure, one illuminable by Frank Fischer's postpositivist emphasis on the civic deliberative conditions in which policy making and implementation take place (2006, 209–19). In this view, policies emerging from technocratic processes often fail because they are uninformed by participant perspectives. While the mainstream literature on policy communities has come to appreciate a version of this point (Pal, 2006: 263), postpositivists go further; they urge policymakers and policy scholars to confront patterns of unequal civic communication that serve to exclude oppressed groups.

The New Relationship's capitulation to an amnesiac memory culture suggests the relevance of the postpositivist view. As many reparations scholars argue, building relationships in circumstances of historic injustice requires preliminary dialogues from which may emerge provisionally shared understandings of the past. At its broadest level the very notion of reparation signals "interaction between perpetrator and victim ... political negotiation that enables the rewriting of memory and histor-

ical identity in ways that both can share” (Barkan, 2000: xvii). The point, then, is that initial enterprises of apology and communicative history can be important catalysts for processes that go on to produce more significant results; Konrad Adenauer’s 1951 apology to Jews is perhaps history’s most famous example (Barkan, 2000: 8–24). Conversely, psychologist Brandon Hamber argues that South Africa’s democratic transition, despite various instances of material compensation, has sometimes lacked legitimacy for Blacks because corporations and other major beneficiary groups have offered no “sense of genuine remorse and acknowledgment” (2007: 271). Thus, an emphasis on apology and engagement would seem appropriate in BC, where provincial amnesia compounds Indigenous distrust; where societal support for reparation requires enhanced historical understanding; and where the prevailing memory culture tilts the deliberative field against victims of the “white man’s province” agenda.

Conclusion

This article has focused on one community’s aversion to historical acknowledgment and understanding. The phenomenon encompasses BC’s history of injustice against Indigenous peoples and ethnocultural minorities, and continues even when reconciliation is the officially declared objective. I have suggested that its roots lie in a memory culture shaped by something scholars have hitherto failed to discuss; I call the problem reparation displacement.

Nested not only within a formal division of powers but also an informal division of memory, BC is unaccustomed to seeing its amnesia challenged. Social movements have tended to frame historical injustices as federal injustices, and federal acts of reparation have operated as *de facto* schemes of moral equalization spreading historical debts across the whole pan-Canadian society. Thus, reparation displacement in BC reflects an underlying pattern of governance resting on conceptions of responsibility reinforced constantly by other state actors, by civil society, and by social movements.

Because political change requires political challenge, antiracist movements bear some responsibility for confronting reparation displacement in BC. Yet as Iris Marion Young’s “social connection” model of reparation suggests, a special burden belongs with those who have both benefited from injustice and are favourably situated to ameliorate its effects (2004); in the case at hand, therefore, we are speaking of the materially comfortable members of the dominant white majority, and, particularly in the case of injustices against Indigenous peoples, of the major resource and land development corporations. However, a still greater measure of responsibility rests with the provincial state: the intergenerationally per-

sisting representative of the whole BC community; the entity directly responsible for so many of the injustices discussed; and the actor best placed to initiate the responsibility-taking on which processes of reparation and reconciliation depend.

A view of reparation displacement as a BC peculiarity may seem to find support in the literature on BC political culture. A frontier society's indifference to the past (Resnick, 2000); a resource-dependent periphery's tendency to blame external forces for its problems (Black, 1996); a working-class settler fragment's antiauthoritarian populism (Wiseman, 2007: 250–55); these quintessential, and of course to some extent stereotypical, BC characteristics are not the likely wellsprings of self-blaming introspection. Yet reparation displacement seems a possibility in other jurisdictions as well. For example, a search of the Canadian Newsstand and Lexus Nexus databases, employing the terms “apology,” “historical wrong,” “past wrong,” “historical injustice” and “past injustice,” covering 1984–2005 inclusive, indicated only two clear instances of apology by Canadian provincial governments to groups for past acts of racism or colonialism, both of which occurred in Newfoundland (Baker, 2006; Yuany, 2005). This absence of provincial apology is more striking when one realizes that the majority of legislated racism in Canada has taken place at the provincial and municipal levels (Backhouse, 1999a; Walker, 1997) and that municipal policy making itself requires the constitutional sufferance of the province. Thus, reparation displacement in other provinces deserves further investigation.

Indeed, this article's findings suggest that reparation displacement may be a problem of federalism and multilevel governance generally. The complexity of blame assignment in situations of blurred authority, the pathways created by nation-state level activities in citizenship development and the tendency of antiracist campaigners to avoid issues of sub-unit inclusion all suggest reparation displacement as a question of broader resonance. The issue is this: wherever they take place, contemporary processes of rescaling and devolution may be assigning governance roles that amnesiac memory cultures are ill-suited to sensitively handle.

Notes

- 1 Unless otherwise noted, the examples in this paragraph are taken from Walker (1997: 89–90).
- 2 See note 5 below.
- 3 Though there is no indication that the petition ever made it to Victoria, See Edmonton Head Tax and Exclusion Act Redress Committee (2008).
- 4 Liberal MLA Clifford Serwa mentioned the injustice acknowledging a Japanese-Canadian heritage festival in Mission. See Serwa (1992: 1732).
- 5 At the time of writing, the BC legislature had just decided to “follow Ottawa's lead” (“BC to offer” [2008]) with a motion apologizing for the Komagata Maru incident.

The apology and ensuing debate confirm this section's emphasis on passing the buck: the apology made no mention of BC actions or attitudes but instead regretted the passengers being "denied entry *by* Canada" (my emphasis), while mentions of Canadian injustices outnumbered BC references by a count of nine to six (see British Columbia Legislative Assembly, 2008).

- 6 The figure on costs is from Penikett (2006: 3).
- 7 Interestingly, the only statement to use the active voice—"we have failed Aboriginal people" (Government of British Columbia, 2005b)—conveys a paternalism at odds with Indigenous self-determination agendas.
- 8 See British Columbia Ministry of Aboriginal Relations and Reconciliation (2006) and British Columbia Treaty Negotiations Office (2004).

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