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**(For a full text of this report, see CASCA French site)**

## **Preliminary Report of Research Results (Summary)**

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### **Between Ethics and Politics: Apologies from the States. The case of the Unangan (Aleuts) of Alaska.**

#### **Problem/Issue**

My research centers on the apologies addressed officially by some governments to a nation (often a part of their own nation), victims in the past of a crime against humanity, problem largely debated by Ricoeur (2000) and Derrida (2000). Through the case of the Unangan, who, during the second world war, were deported and interned in camps in southwest Alaska, where they lived for three years in a state of material and extreme psychological destitution (10% of the population died during this dramatic episode), and who obtained in 1988, from the American Congress, an official apology accompanied with financial compensation (Civil Liberties Act), my main objective is to analyze the impacts of this gesture on a given community: can we really forgive the unforgivable? Where is the boundary between rights and ethics? If the large scene of repentance practiced today by the States can have a character of authenticity, are we then living a turning point in history?

I have gathered, during a five month stay in Alaska, around fifty interviews with four generations of Unangans urbanized in Anchorage. My main initial theory was the following: this official apology cannot be subject to the same conditions than those governing the interpersonal apology (gratuitousness, spontaneity, unconditional, humility, generosity) but must at least answer to three essential functions (Tavuchis, 1991): publicly admit the facts, accept and determine the responsibilities, and commit to “never this again”.

Here are the main elements that I brought back from my research:

First, the concerned people effectively have an answer to give to this apology, contrary to what we could assume from the official speech. Otherwise, from the general opinion, this political gesture is considered as a first positive step towards reconciliation, but cannot be accepted unless under certain conditions: that this apology be really visible and audible, passed on first to the main interested people; that the official speech state clearly all the truth, consistent with historical facts; that it be accompanied by a rewriting of the official History, which will be passed on in the schools and the general public; that it correspond to a commitment not to resume the same crimes; that a time and a place be instituted to complete the memoirs of this tragedy; finally that the government take its responsibilities by making real efforts so that the affected communities get out of the social and economic dependency towards power.

Briefly, if this movement seems to correspond more to a new consciousness of the native people regarding the violation of their most fundamental rights than to a new wind of morality blowing on the democracies, yet we should not conclude that it is one way, because there is also, behind the institutions, people who can be endowed with a real moral sense, without whom the

apologies would never be pronounced. Otherwise, we can advance without much prejudice that the more the institutional apology has the characteristics of an interpersonal apology, the more credible it is and likely to be accepted.

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