

Phillip Tolliday / Maria Palme / Dong-Choon Kim (ed.)

Asia-Pacific between Conflict and Reconciliation

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Edited by
Martin Leiner

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and Dong-Choon Kim

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About the Editors

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About the Authors

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Phillip Tolliday

Introduction to the Present Volume

The essays in this third volume of the Research in Peace and Reconciliation (RIPAR) series were generated by the Summer School at the Friedrich Schiller University in Jena, in 2013 which considered the practices of reconciliation, truth-telling and peace-making in the region of Asia and Australasia.¹ They continue the explorations in the first two volumes, with their emphases on Latin America and Sub-Saharan Africa respectively.² The geopolitical area under consideration is immense and the editors of this volume do not imagine that it is possible to attain anything approaching a comprehensive perspective. On the contrary, our aim has been rather more modest. It has been to provide representative case studies that, by shining a light on one particular situation, may serve to assist the reader to illuminate his or her own particular sphere of interest and research.

My own particular focus of interest is Australia. During my childhood Australians underwent what was called a cultural cringe because they felt disconnected from their British roots. Children studied British and European history; scant attention was paid to Australian history and almost none at all to Asia. Indeed it was not really until the 1970s that successive Australian Governments were able to acknowledge the importance of Asia, and not until Paul Keating's incumbency as Prime Minister in the 1990s that it was publicly proclaimed that Australia was part of Asia. Certainly our parents would still have heard the phrase 'the Far East' as meaning Asia; and that without the slightest trace of irony given Australia's geographical location! In the past two generations the message that Australia is part of Asia, and that our paths and destinies are interwoven is so obvious as to no longer require justification.

Trade is a major reason for the collaboration between Australia and some of her Asian neighbours, as for example, the recent mineral boom in Australia with its direct relationship to China's once seemingly insatiable hunger for iron ore testifies. Of course trade is not confined to mineral resources, though it is one of the larger revenue paths. Trade is also brisk between Australia and

1 The editors wish to thank Petina Venkova, Natalie Niedoba, Joram Tarusarira and Marcel Urban for their editorial assistance and additional research.

2 We would like to thank the Volkswagen Foundation for the funding of the 3rd International Summer School. Furthermore, we like to thank the Evangelical Church in Central Germany (=EKM) and the Evangelical Church Pfalz for their financial support.

Japan, however Government ministers find themselves involved in delicate negotiations with Japan and China as they try to please each but without displeasing the other. For example in 2014 the Australian Government finally achieved a free trade agreement with Japan. This was part of the Australian Prime Minister's mission to North-East Asia. Mark Beeson, a Professor of International Politics at Murdoch University observed that 'The mission's experience in China could be altogether different—not least because of the warmth of its reception in Japan. The seemingly implacable reality in North-East Asia is that economic ties cannot be separated from the geopolitical context in which they are embedded.' Careless speech, albeit well-intended can result in unforeseen and unintended consequences. 'This is why Abbott's remark about Japan being Australia's "best friend" in the region went down so badly in China. The symbolism of Abbott's address to Japan's National Security Council was not lost on China, either. This is simply one example of how Australia, a relatively small player in Asia, can be affected by the geopolitical situation that exists between two of its comparatively distant (geographically speaking) neighbours.

Australia also finds itself involved in peace-keeping work with some of its Asian neighbours, for example, in Papua New Guinea and East Timor. And historically, since the Second World War it has been involved in Malaya and Vietnam. Security information is exchanged between the authorities and this seems to be increasing as Australia collaborates with some of her Asian neighbours in an effort to prevent or at least forewarn about terrorist activity. Bi-lateral discussions are continually taking place regarding the situation of refugees and asylum seekers. These are just some of the ways in which Australia finds itself intentionally involved in Asia as indeed part of Asia.

There was one key feature of the Summer School; namely, that of *difference* that underlies many of these essays and provides the constant accompaniment to reconciliation. The work of Emmanuel Levinas has explored the motif of difference in some depth. Indeed Levinas' own experience of the ways in which difference could be applied in the field of human relationships owed much to his incarceration in a German prisoner of war camp during the Second World War. From him we have learned that difference—whether of culture, religion, ethnicity, nationality, class or gender—is not only inevitable and enduring; it is to be affirmed for the positive value that it brings to human community and for its indispensable role in reconciliation and peace-building.

The Hölderlin principle claims that reconciliation happens in the midst of strife. Thus there is no sudden peace that breaks out, as it were, and in the wake of which, reconciliation happens. On the contrary, reconciliation is slowly, hesitantly, and tentatively worked out, with more than a few blind turns and false starts. Thus reconciliation is inevitably connected with human hope, and the theologian Paul Tillich was not wrong when he drew a connection between hope and courage – for nothing disappoints so cruelly as hope, and courage is constantly required to keep hope, and thus reconciliation, alive.

It would be tempting, because so easy, to give up hope in reconciliation. It would be such a seemingly simple and ‘quick fix’ to elide the differences that seem to divide, polarise and lay the seedbed for aggression. But there will not be any Hegelian-like resolution of difference into an ultimate sameness or homogeneity. Instead we must learn to value difference, not to make the other into a carbon copy of oneself, but rather to comport oneself so that the other might exercise an ethical claim upon us in order that our own frame of reference might be enlarged. We must learn to respond to the other with compassion, empathy and civility. But let us not imagine that these journeys of reconciliation end up as tales with happy endings: sometimes they do, but just as often they don’t. On the contrary, we find that such journeys leave, even in their resolution, what Clemens Sedmak refers to as an open epistemic wound that continually provokes and disrupts us. Perhaps this is part of the claim that reconciliation brings in its wake; a disruption, or, as Lily Gardner-Feldman says of history, an irritant.

It is therefore a complex background against which the principles and practices of reconciliation unfold. Not the least of these concerns the meaning we shall give to the word ‘reconciliation.’ In her book, *Germany’s Foreign Policy of Reconciliation: From Enmity to Amity* (2012), Lily Gardner-Feldman notes that unlike English, the German language has two terms for ‘reconciliation,’ *Versöhnung* and *Aussöhnung*, conveying respectively a spiritual/emotional aspect and a practical/material element. These may not be the happiest of adjectives to convey the difference in meaning, however, they do the job of distinguishing between an interior form of transformation and one that is more structural or political and is perhaps amenable to legislative arrangements. In a deeper analysis Gardner-Feldman discusses five discrete models of reconciliation: they are based variously in the multiple disciplines of theology, philosophy, social psychology, law, political science and history. The purpose of mentioning her observations here is to underline the complexity of reconciliation and the dialectic that mediates between the body personal and the body corporate (indeed, the nation states).³ This dialectic is continual and does not have as its final aim the sublation of difference but rather, ‘the development of friendship, trust, empathy and magnanimity’ and thus the preservation of difference.

History is a primary arena in which the journey of reconciliation must unfold. Let us admit from the beginning that history, which is to say, one’s narrative, is value-laden. Indeed it may be laden with values of which we are unaware. History is not simply telling the tale of the past, it is also the presenting of one’s presence to the other in the present and making a claim to

3 Similar distinction of the definition from “reconciliation” are also mentioned by Appleby, RS 2000, *The ambivalence of the sacred: religion, violence, and religion*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham et. Al.; Nadler, A 2008, *The social psychology of intergroup reconciliation*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.

shape the future. In the journey to reconciliation two competing narratives or histories rub awkwardly against each other. The purpose of this awkward coming together is not for one history to overwhelm or submerge the other, nor is it as Gardner-Feldman points out, to equalise or homogenise views when different interpretations of history exist. The reason why we apply an historical lens to situations requiring reconciliation is not to eviscerate difference but to testify to its creative and positive durability and in this process historical analysis is to act as a constructive irritant. Nonetheless, though the stories and histories differ from each other it does not follow, in postmodern fashion, that one story is just as good as any other story. The owning of a necessary complexity in all these situations does not mean that victims cannot be identified; recognition of nuance in our historical narratives does not cancel out our ethical and moral obligation to those who are victims.

As with the previous two volumes in the series the essays are divided into case studies which seek to examine both historical and contemporary situations of reconciliation and conflict (Tolliday, Stevens, Sulistiyanto, Suh, Schoepfel, Tek & Sperfeldt, Lal Fernando and Maung Yin), and chapters that address comparative and global perspectives (Leiner, Weinke, Liangjian, Lefebure and Mimaki).

In his chapter on the politics of indigenous suffering, *Phillip Tolliday* discusses some of the complexities in the plight of Australia's indigenous people. Dispossessed from their land by the arrival of White settlers in the late eighteenth century, they have endured the erosion of much of their culture, and for a large part of the twentieth century the forced removal – for the alleged purpose of assimilation – of many of their interracial children. Rightly shamed by these events successive Australian Governments have resolved to embrace the path toward reconciliation. This paper analyses two of these moments or events in the past decade: the Apology offered by the Federal Government to the Stolen Generations and the Northern Territory Emergency Response into dysfunctional Indigenous communities. In the example of the apology, the paper seeks to analyse its symbolic 'weight' and import. In the second case, the author seeks to demonstrate that the immediate intended good may (a) not be so clear; (b) never be unalloyed; and (c) create unintended long-term systemic problems. Nevertheless, despite the undoubted complexities the process of reconciliation does advance – most readily through personal relationships.

In her paper written in collaboration with Mānuka Henare, Deborah Stevens focusses upon the Treaty of Waitangi in order to situate reconciliation within the twin perspectives of cultural translation and contextual hermeneutics. The paper highlights that which had been long hidden: the Māori version of the treaty, and compares it with the contemporaneous English version. The authors point to the Māori pre-understandings, their metaphysics, and their religious worldview – all so very different from extant European

conceptions. The signing of the Treaty masked but did not dissolve the discordant pre-understandings between the two groups. Thus to take one example: Māori notions of power are about the locus or place of power. They argue that in recognising the sovereignty of Queen Victoria, Māori were simply recognising that Victoria herself was the centre of power under the English system and that she ought to exercise it over her own people, not Māori people. Instead, it was for the hereditary people to exercise their power over the Māori. The paper concludes by observing that within the tension that calls out for reconciliation is the endless struggle—to know, to read with, to understand, to work with, to engage with, others.

In his case study based on historic events in Indonesia, *Priyambudi Sulistiyanto and Sentot Setyasiswanto* take the well-known case of the purges of 1965 that marked the transition to the so-called ‘new order’ and the elimination of the Indonesian Communist Party. The killings also demarcated the rise to power of Soeharto who then began a thirty year presidency. The author notes that Indonesia in the post-Soeharto period has failed to deal with these past human rights abuses and neither has it encouraged the reconciliation process. The chapter describes the events of 1965 in a broad sense so as to encompass not only the contemporaneous victims, together with their families, but also those who today suffer ongoing discrimination as the consequence of those purges. Divided into four sections, the author firstly examines the proposed new law on a Truth and Reconciliation Commission being prepared by the Ministry of Law and Human Rights. The second section looks at the advocacy work of NGOs and the ways in which they have sought to negotiate the reconciliation agenda in order to keep the quest for truth and reconciliation alive. The third section takes seriously the notion that victims may be seen as active agents, who, by telling their stories may inspire and enkindle the truth telling mechanism in Indonesia. A variety of media is employed in order to make this point. The author concludes that these ‘bottom up’ strategies to encourage reconciliation and truth telling are having a positive impact – and this despite the fact that there has been no success in establishing an official path to reconciliation.

Bo-Hyug Suh analyses the dilemma of how North and South Korea may go about seeking reconciliation in the midst of a divided system. The author outlines a summary view of the history of family separation that took place as a consequence of the Korean War. He notes that it was not until 1985 that the first reunions of separated families began to occur and that it was not until 1990 that the reunions were officially affiliated with government policy. This was due to the ending of the Cold War. After 1990 three successful agreements were brokered and adopted, however in 2008 the Lee Myungbak Administration in South Korea adopted a more confrontational stance toward the North. After 2010 tensions escalated because of the nuclear weapons crisis precipitated by North Korea. The paper concludes by noting that one of the most significant challenges to the prospects of reconciliation is to be able to

distinguish security concerns from humanitarian issues. Only by such a parallel approach will it be possible to effect a continuous improvement in relationships between North and South Korea.

In a fascinating chapter *Ann-Sophie Schoepfel* examines the triangulated relationship between Indochina, France and Japan in the context of decolonisation. Following the French capitulation to Germany in 1940 Indochina retained its French sovereignty by dint of the fact that the Governor-General of French Indochina represented the collaborationist Vichy regime in France. Consequently, when they arrived Japanese troops enjoyed freedom of passage throughout Indochina and the French were viewed by them as allies. However, when De Gaulle's government was installed in Paris in October 1944 it became apparent that the French presence in Indochina would be responsible to the Free French and thus at enmity with Japan. In March 1945 the Japanese gave the French an ultimatum to disarm, which they refused. This led to widespread massacres from March until the war ended in August 1945. It was at this point that the Viet Minh, led by Ho Chi Minh, urged the people to revolt against their colonial masters and not pay their taxes. It was against this volatile background that the French wished to assure the international community that they were still able to administer Indochina. The second part of the paper outlines the role of the French in the war crimes trials against the Japanese. Here they sought to argue that they, no less than the people of Indochina had been the victims of the Japanese. But as the author points out, that will depend on whether one believes the war between France and Japan started in 1940 or 1945. The paper concludes by affirming that the Japanese played a significant role in influencing the decolonialising discourse in Indochina.

The case study co-authored by *Farrah Tek and Christoph Sperfeldt* addresses the task of examining the case of survivors of sexual and gender-based crimes, with a focus on forced marriage, under the regime known as 'Democratic Kampuchea.' This initiative, of forced marriages, perpetrated by the Khmer Rouge was a deliberate strategy aimed at an extensive transformation of the Cambodian society. In the aftermath of the regime the paper examines both judicial and non-judicial approaches to justice and truth telling. Although the judicial approach was criticised for sometimes failing to take sexual and gender-based crimes seriously, it nevertheless proved to be true that when defendants were indicted, the indictment alone contributed to ending the silence surrounding these crimes. Non-judicial approaches through NGOs have implemented restorative projects for survivors of violence without any direct link to the judicial process. This leads the authors to conclude that the two forms of justice and truth telling are compatible with each other and not mutually exclusive.

In this somewhat longer chapter *Jude Lal Fernando* considers the conflict in Sri Lanka. The author's guiding assumption is that Sri Lanka is in a post-war situation rather than one that is post-conflict. That is to say, it is a state of war

by other means. The government has ensured that the Sinhala polity has been strengthened against its Tamil counterpart. Fernando argues that it is important to consider the conditions under which regime change is effected. For example, the regime change in Sri Lanka in 2001 created some political space for the transformation of the state, whereas the transitions that took place after 2009 and most recently in early 2015 function as a reinforcement of exclusionary democracy. After a comprehensive survey and analysis of the roots of polarisation and the move from a Tamil demand for inclusion to the demand for a *de facto* state, the author concludes that the root cause of the conflict in Sri Lanka may be found in the unitary state structure and its associated Sinhala Buddhist ideology. A peace, of sorts, has been achieved, but it is a victor's peace. It is far even from the negative peace that was achieved in 2002. Reconciliation is much more than the absence of conflict, but in order to achieve it we must understand the conditions and processes that underpin the historical dynamics of state formation.

In this case study on Myanmar *Maung Maung Yin* steers readers through the problems of reconciliation and the prospects of success. Myanmar is a very diverse country with 135 ethnic groups and 35 main languages. The richness of pluralism and diversity is, in fact, the richness of the country. Nevertheless, since the beginning of colonial rule in 1886 and the successive military regimes since Independence – with a brief interval of parliamentary democracy – the country's natural pluralism has coexisted in tension with successive authoritarian regimes. This background has led to a culture of war, retaliation and violence in various forms. Maung Yin provides the example of the government's attempt to construct a mega-dam in the state of Kachin. The project, in collaboration with China became a flashpoint for community anger, especially among those who had not been consulted about its construction. But surprisingly, in this case, the Minister of Industry responded by listening to the people and announcing a stop to the dam. This is one example of a powerfully symbolic project where an initial government strategy has, at least for the present, been diverted from its original course, thus giving a sense of hope that the voice of the people might yet be heard in Myanmar.

Turning now to the comparative and global studies we begin with the two papers that formed the key note addresses for the Summer school. In his paper *Martin Leiner* addresses the issue of whether the notion of reconciliation is specifically Western or whether it can be translated into an Eastern idiom. However, the author is also attuned to the fact that translation always changes meaning and in this case it yields a new and fresh concept of reconciliation. The major section of the essay seeks to explore how reconciliation may be translated into traditional Asian concepts. Areas for convergence include a desire to come to terms with the past; a mutual acknowledgement of truth telling; the importance of memorialising the past and the role of empathy, just to name a selection. The author discusses the issue of personal identity through time, observing that a *sine qua non* of the western model of

reconciliation is that victims and perpetrators remain identical even decades after the atrocities. Such an assumption dovetails neatly with a desire for trials long after the events. This contrasts with East Asian and particularly Buddhist thinking that tends to deconstruct the identity of both the victim and the perpetrator. Leiner notes that this deconstruction detaches one from the past and in that detachment is to be found the East Asian equivalent to what the West has understood as forgiveness. Similar but different, is the conclusion reached by the author. By emphasising harmony, detachment and passivity, the East Asian perspective sheds new light on what we have traditionally understood by reconciliation and enriches its meaning.

If the eliding of difference through the processes of assimilation, compulsory inter-marriage and, in extreme circumstances, of genocide, creates the conflict, despair and hatred that mark the need for reconciliation and the normalising of relationships between people, what is it that may help to ameliorate this situation? In the second keynote address reproduced here in slightly expanded form, *Annette Weinke* assesses the impact of the Nuremberg Trials on the concepts and practices of reconciliation in post-war Germany. She points to the emergence of 'new style' international criminal courts that arose in the 1990s and that have adopted categories from the 'hybrid Nuremberg human rights law.' The near universality of the application of many of these principles in situations requiring reconciliation has led some in Germany to adopt a 'self-congratulatory tone' and to imagine it as their 'patented invention.' However, in a penetrating analysis the author demonstrates that the reception of Nuremberg and the subsequent trials immediately following the IMT was anything but smooth. She refers to the way in which the churches sought to develop a 'grammar of exculpation' by which to critique Nuremberg. Thus a discourse of reconciliation—in this case, specifically Christian—was pressed into service in order to reject the Nuremberg trials. Yet, in the longer term, the reception of Nuremberg was one of both rejection and appropriation, with the latter gradually becoming ascendant. The author notes that in time the war crimes trials held in the 1960s and 1970s—this time under the principles of a domestic penal code—stimulated approval and the beginning of the normalising of relationships with Poland and Israel. From this she draws the conclusion, vindicating her observation regarding the complexity that underlies any attempt to assess the impact of the Nuremberg Trials on the concepts and practices of reconciliation, as she notes that 'when we tackle the issue of self-transformation from within and transformation from without, we are always dealing with complicated entanglements and transfer processes.'

In her essay *Liu Liangjian* addresses the issue of a world political order in a Glocal Age. She argues for a version of justice that transcends the presuppositions of the modern atomic and national individual; presuppositions that form the fundament of the nation state. She uses the doctrine of *datong* (Great Unity) to argue for a 'nature-human community' that exercises

zhengyi – a form of justice that emphasises the importance and the universality of innate moral affections. Her conclusion is that in order to bring about reconciliation, which she interprets as grand harmony, it is necessary to move beyond the confines of the nation state, for the nation state is innately competitive and cannot therefore be the ultimate telos of reconciliation.

Leo Lefebure commences his chapter by noting that the well-known Buddhist precept against violence needs to be nuanced by the acknowledgement that Buddhism contains within its history actions of violence and even justifications of violence in the name of Buddhism. Citing the work of Christopher Ives, he notes that when the choices have narrowed between a desire for institutional security or a total rejection of violence, the first has generally won out over the second. The twentieth century has witnessed the difficulties posed for Buddhism when it is situated in the midst of strife and violence. The author outlines the thought and practice of two principal figures: Thich Nhat Hanh in Vietnam and Nikkyo Niwano in Japan. In both cases, the political situations in which they found themselves immersed meant that they became prophetic and thus to large extent discordant voices in their communities. Yet in the case of Niwano he has left an enduring mark on interreligious dialogue and his work led him to help organise the first Conference on Peace and Religion held in 1969.

The final essay in the collection is written by *Seiko Mimaki* in which she seeks to address a range of issues that are designed to normalise Japan's relationships with her Asian neighbours, in particular China and South Korea. She begins by noting that the Abe government has put more effort into strengthening its ties with European countries – and here we might include the United States – than it has with its Asian neighbours. Yet if Japan is to be seen as a 'normal' country, it seems that regional reconciliation is an essential precondition. Japan's neighbours become anxious whenever they hear that the path to Japanese normalisation may involve a military presence in international peacekeeping. Indeed this has been on the agenda, yet unresolved, since the first Gulf War in 1991. The author points out that despite the fact that the U.S. has never apologised for dropping atomic bombs on Japan, nevertheless the move by the Obama Administration toward a 'world without nuclear weapons,' is one that was well received by Japan. Since 1995 there has been growing rapprochement between the two countries. A sign of this ease between nations was evidenced in the fact that Abe became the first Japanese Prime Minister to give an address to the Joint Session of the U.S. Congress in April, 2015. However, the memory of Japan's aggression toward her neighbours, China and South Korea in particular, has not been ameliorated by her better relationship with the U.S. The flashpoint in this case has been the contested discourse about the Comfort Women who were forced into sexual slavery during the war. The author concludes that this issue is one of universal human rights and that the Japanese experience must be judged from that context and perspective.

The editors hope that the essays in this volume may stimulate further interest and research in the area of reconciliation, truth telling and peace building in the Asia region. We take this opportunity to thank all the participants of the Summer School, the JCRS and last but not least, the authors, some of whom were not present at the Summer School, but nevertheless kindly offered to contribute to this volume. Thank you!

Phillip Tolliday

Between a Rock and a Hard Place

The Politics of Indigenous Suffering in Australia

Introduction

The expression 'between a rock and a hard place' suggests that one finds oneself situated between two equally unpalatable and intractable alternatives. The cultural and political landscape of Aboriginal Australia is made up of a coincidence of opposites. On the one side are to be found those who advocate for indigenous self-determination, albeit with assistance from State and Federal Government funding. On the other side are some who are opposed to what they see as the huge amounts of Government funding directed toward indigenous communities and associated support programs. These latter argue that such funding produces a welfare mentality and often serves to exacerbate social problems in indigenous communities. This, then, is one seemingly intractable discussion about Aboriginal Australia.

A further coincidence of opposites may be found when we consider the so-called 'history wars.' On the one side stand scholars like Colin Tatz (Verso 2003) who claim that White Australia has a genocidal past in relation to the way we have treated Indigenous Australians. While from a diametrically opposed perspective Kevin Windschuttle (Macleay 1996) has claimed that the accounts of the massacres of Aboriginals in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries are much exaggerated and that most deaths happened as the result of disease. What now seems to be clear is that in the settlement of Australia there was a high level of conflict and violence that has been largely ignored (Reynolds 2013).

During the past two decades films have been screened that have sought to deal with issues concerning Australia's indigenous peoples and these films have outlined a similar tale of complexity. In 1997 a film entitled *The Castle* recounted a humorous story of a white working class family living in a modest suburban house situated unfavorably on the edge of the Melbourne Airport. The film is about what happens when the Government steps in to acquire their property, indeed their home, by compulsory acquisition. The trials and travails of this working-class family are laid out to public scrutiny as they fight one hopeless court battle after another with the seemingly inevitable prospect of defeat. They are told that they cannot possibly win because the Government authority 'makes the rules. It owns the game!' Improbably a retired QC takes up their cause pro bono and it is decided by the High Court that the

Government authority has acted in contravention of no less than the Constitution of the Commonwealth of Australia. The subtext behind this film was the issue of Aboriginal land rights: a story played out in the courts in the judgements in favour of indigenous people under the now well-known names of Mabo (1992) and Wik (1996). It is significant that even at the late stage of 1997 the issue of indigenous land rights had to be masked, as it were, beneath a non-indigenous veneer in order to be capable of evoking the requisite feeling of empathy.

By 2002 the makers of the film *Rabbit Proof Fence* had discerned that the Australian public was now ready to view films about indigenous history and suffering without any gloss. This particular film, based on the 1931 story of three aboriginal girls being taken from their mother, forcibly re-located to a mission home, and from there making their escape by following the 'rabbit fence,' was no longer masking its message beneath a white veneer. The film was uncompromising and even chilling. It played to large audiences who, for the most part, were disturbed by what they saw. The history of what came to be called *The Stolen Generations* and the tragedy of people dispossessed from their homes made for uncomfortable viewing, but it also raised the question of whether indigenous people were correctly perceived if understood only as victims. Could the landscape of indigenous Australia be understood totally from the perspective of their having been (and indeed continuing to be) victims?

In 2012 the multi-part series *Redfern Now*, screened on ABC Television painted a much more complex and indeed nuanced picture. Set in the inner Sydney suburb of Redfern, the series sought to give viewers a window into the lives of six different Aboriginal families. No longer was the emphasis on a status of unrelieved victimhood, nor was there any inclination to hark back to the tradition of the so-called 'noble savage.' Instead, the indigenous families in the series come across to the viewer as urban, working class and with lives that are sometimes more and sometimes less integrated. In summary, they are portrayed not as other, but as just like us.

Complexity and contradiction continue to be developed in film and recent docu-drama. In 2012 a documentary entitled *The Croker Island Exodus* delved into the lives of several elderly aboriginal women who had been removed from their families and taken to a Methodist mission on Croker Island off the northern coast of Australia. With the supposed imminent threat of Japanese invasion in 1942 the missionary sisters were instructed to take their young charges on a dangerous journey overland until their eventual destination in Sydney. The film is a combination of their remembered love for the mission and the missionaries, as well as lament for their removal from family and culture. It points to the deep ambivalence that often undergirds the experience of being removed from one's culture and it introduces nuances and complexities not evident, for example, in *Rabbit Proof Fence* just a decade earlier. However, most recently, in 2014 the journalist John Pilger made a

documentary entitled *Utopia*. The documentary depicts Third-World living conditions in some aboriginal communities and recounts the long history of dispossession. The film has been criticized for its lack of objectivity and lack of balance. Here no deference is paid toward nuance and complexity.

These are just some of the contemporary examples that can be provided in order to show how contested is the cultural and political landscape in matters concerning indigenous issues in modern Australia. In this paper I seek to focus upon two main issues that inform considerations about reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous people in Australia. The first of these is the apology from the Federal Government given by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in February 2008. This was an event that had been long awaited and in which many Australians vested much promise for the future. The second issue to which I want to draw the reader's attention is the Northern Territory Emergency Response, more commonly known as the Intervention.

An Act of Decency Whose Time Has Come

In 2008 the then Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd made an official apology on behalf of the Commonwealth Government of Australia to the indigenous people and in particular —and this is significant— to the members of the Stolen Generations. It is important to note several points about the apology from the outset. Firstly, although the previous Prime Minister, John Howard had expressed his 'personal and profound regret,' he had not said, 'Sorry,' nor had he apologized on behalf of the Federal Parliament. Despite repeated calls for him to do so, he steadfastly refused. Many people believed that the national apology was long overdue and were grateful that Kevin Rudd was going to deliver it. However, it would have been interesting and instructive to have conducted a poll on the day prior to national apology, asking just how many people knew that all of the States and Territories within the Commonwealth of Australia had *already* made their official apologies and most of them prior to the centenary of Federation in 2001. The Apology was lengthy, running to eight pages, but the essence of it may be captured from the first page, which I will quote.

I move that today we honour the Indigenous peoples of this land, the oldest continuing cultures in human history. We reflect on their past mistreatment. We reflect in particular on the mistreatment of those who were Stolen Generations—this blemished chapter in our nation's history. The time has now come for the nation to turn a new page in Australia's history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence to the future. We apologise for the laws and policies of successive Parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal