

# Reconciling: A Place for the Heart?

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*Bordieus 'Habitus' invites a concept of space and place that goes beyond the spatial and physical, creating places as culturally, intentionally and habitually situated. My paper explores my personal experiences of 'Reconciliation' and the space or place for reconciliation in my country. I try and use this experience to reflect on the 'interstices' with habitus, place and space. Where is the 'place' for reconciliation in my country?*

*Keywords: Reconciliation, Australia, social justice, indigenous issues, human rights, peace, emotionality.*

Heart: 'the place where intellect, emotion, spirit and will converge in the human self—the heart is the loom on which the threads are tied, the tension is held, the shuttle flies and the fabric is stretched tight'  
*The Courage to Teach*, Parker J. Palmer (1998, 11).

## WHERE I COME FROM...INTO THIS PAPER

From June to December, 1999 I took part in the national consultation process around the Draft Document for Reconciliation as the consultation co-coordinator for Western Australia. The Document attempted to summarize the needs and issues around reconciliation in this country and define a future statement or position from which to continue the work, along with strategies for action and stakeholder commitment. It was designed to reflect the feelings and concerns of people across the community and was based on the work of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation<sup>1</sup> since its inception and an exhaustive although brief consultation process.

Previous to this position I worked in local government attempting to build bridges between black and white Australians in local communities and in government institutions. As part of this experience I worked on an action research project to explore experiences of workers in local government trying to come to terms with the same issues.<sup>2</sup> I was also inspired to explore reconciliation personally as a fifth generation 'white' Australian.

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Over this time of exploration I have heard many stories about reconciling offered by people in their desire to support places of heart in our country. From within my own heart I hear also about the journey I must take which is interwoven with this broader path. Reconciling extends to all peoples as we seek to live together, and it is a different journey according to the personal and national cultures from which it is spoken and lived. I would like to offer the following discussion to explore the issues that have been raised in my mind about reconciling in Australia between indigenous and non-indigenous peoples, from my own perspective. How do I turn from a history/present of violence, destruction and terrible silences, denying voice and humanity to indigenous peoples (and by this to myself)—to a place of healing and restitution? How do I come to terms with our grief as ‘pink’ Australians,<sup>3</sup> our ignorance and our shame as well as my own? Where will this journey take me/us?

This paper is laid out as four landscapes—the inside of my heart and my confusion and the ‘outside’ of theory and commentary. Also there are some frameworks to relate comprehension, emotional engagement and action together and finally, the footnotes, bringing in other thinkers and writers to raise more questions and reflect-in-action on the concepts raised.

## FROM THE INSIDE-FEELING MY WAY AROUND— LOOKING INTO CONFUSION

### *Interpreting*

As I think and write I can see images on a screen inside my head. I feel that words cannot grasp what I mean them to say, interpretation demands so much more than this. In antiquity hermeneutics stood for making that beyond human comprehension (i.e., the spiritual or that knowledge beyond the human) comprehensible (Roberts, 1995). In reconciliation so much is unsayable, unspeakable, uninterpretable, incomprehensible, yet I still feel compelled to speak it out, to keep interpreting my experience although comprehension often does not come.<sup>4</sup>

‘Reconciling’ means so many different things to me that ‘Reconciliation’ no longer does<sup>5</sup>—becoming as it has a term exploited in our country for political ritual. Importantly ‘reconciling’ makes me think of other reconcilers—do I as a ‘white Australian’ see myself as similar in need for reconciling as I seem to be told to perceive that others do—places like South Africa, Bosnia, East Timor—the lands in need of ‘peacebuilding’?<sup>6</sup> What does this mean if I am (or we are) suddenly like ‘them’?<sup>7</sup>

### *Writing and Speaking*

Do I have a right to write about this?<sup>8</sup> I feel uncomfortable writing, feeling the painful irony of racism being written by ‘blacks’, feminism by ‘women’, as the crushed are engaged in writing their survival and resistance<sup>9</sup> into the silence, while perpetrators of silences continue to suppress the sound or worse to deny its legitimacy. Is my

work to stop the 'white' silence? But when can/should a perpetrator write about healing and change? When I say so or when the violated and destroyed say so? How can words take me beyond standing here alone as I am, into rightfully shared dialogue—or take my community beyond mere tolerance?<sup>10</sup> Does the healing process require a respectful time of grace in silence from the white voice? Maybe reconciling *should* be a discussion by those in need of making right and giving back? What keeps my words from colonizing?

Yet I remember that this is not just speaking (and writing) that I am doing but doing these in academe where too often words are not accountable to anyone, nor are they expected to be, beyond attribution or theoretical or practical 'fit'.<sup>11</sup> I am not asked to take responsibility for the possibly dominating, powerful or exclusive nature of my words being spoken into the public arena, nor for their inability to not just challenge but be generative of a process for justice and change in the social arena of which I speak. This privilege of being listened to makes me want to be silent all over again for fear of taking my voice and your capacity to hear it, too lightly, or becoming too easily inured of talk or thinking without action and commitment.

### *Digesting*

I am the past, I am the present and I am the future. I cannot separate them—I am who I have been, and who has been before me makes some of what I am. Yet daily my culture encourages me to live out my life in separation—knowing from action, action from feeling, past from present from future, one from another.<sup>12</sup> I feel immersed at times in a relentless progress, a fetishism for building rather than unbuilding, changing rather than at times leaving alone, knowledge instead of wisdom.<sup>13</sup> Yet we Australians are trying to sift through the scarring and charred embers of our past lives to find something left which we can call home and which is good and nourishing—not taken, or stolen or violated. I often find myself doubting if there will be anything underneath this sifting process I can be proud of, whether we can grow to judge as a nation how to wisely 'unmake' ourselves. Tim Winton, recently speaking on 'Land and Spirituality', called this part of our history the 'chewing' phase.<sup>14</sup> I have adopted this idea as a powerful metaphor for the intimate ingestion process which is my history and ours, it is not something outside of myself, it is not just head knowledge. Instead it actually forms me and becomes me to my very cells. It is knitted into me because I am born here.

### *Defining*

I could offer some definitions of reconciliation but I want to move past what I think into how I feel. How I feel is that reconciling is an experience—an experience of self-deconstruction, prizing myself open to ask "who do I think I am?" "Who are *we*?" It challenges me to embrace difficult notions like the narrowness of terms like empowerment or justice to generate a strong circumference around the battle for survival and recognition, the human cost, the pain, the sudden stark small miracles

and the silence that I have felt and been a part of. The people I know, the feelings I feel, many times don't belong in these words. So I become afraid to speak—black, white, indigenous, non-indigenous, oppressed, oppressors, identity, difference—this is not me, this is not us, we are richer and deeper. There are so many words that limit me but there are those that don't—like loving, spirit, hope, faith, trust, truths, failure, pain, confusion. Are these the languages of reconciliation? I do not want to be 'other' nor do I want to place people there, far away. I am different not 'difference', I have an identity but it is not 'identity', I am personal not just social or political. Where and when am I allowed to speak in words of healing, emotion and expression instead of description or argument?

I have sought at times to define reconciliation by working on 'problems'. I have hoped that by doing these things I can somehow immerse myself in what reconciling holds and make peace with my white conscience. But instead reconciliation has challenged me to walk in my own shoes and not those of others, to dump the idea of 'problems', 'fixing it' or purging my sins. It has challenged me to know about being white, about being privileged, about being woman, about being the daughter of a violent community. It has taught me to move past 'otherness', embracing 'self', living my life in such a way not so as to include—as if I should drag others onto my ground—but instead to co-exist,<sup>15</sup> to richly co-experience. A new world view has opened up inside my own experience, behind my own eyes. Now I put forward a fragile hand not knowing what will happen, not based on self-assurance, but extended in hope that there is another there to meet it.<sup>16</sup> I have found that I am a reconciliation project—*my* family, *my* peacemaking, *my* forgiveness for myself and others.

I know that there is a long distance between separation and diverse unity, a distance filled with hurts, fears, timidity, self-protection. So I have to face grace<sup>17</sup> head on, the grace of forgiveness by another, the grace of forgiveness I must extend towards myself, the pain of not being able in one lifetime to overcome the defenses put in place over many generations. I reconcile and do not know if or when or why this grace will come. I see the courage of those around me as they make spectacular gifts of generosity, when all they have is pain and when no more emotion is left, yet they still offer up togetherness, going far beyond where my words or actions can struggle. When people change in a moment, the blink of an eye, to a whole other life path just from hearing a story or touching a hand. How can I describe this to you? Asking people to merely trust a process, to slowly let go when every other voice inside is saying vulnerability will bring more pain.

### *Contradicting*

There are so many contradictory fragments in the broken mirror of reconciliation reflecting back on each other—the need to engage in healing broken relationships so that justice can emerge, while at the same time seeking justice (restorative, social, psychological)<sup>18</sup> through political and social processes currently alienated from a foundation of relationship; the need to confront an understanding of reciprocal

sovereignty while conceding to reparation; the need to resolve ambivalence to open negotiation whilst facing the healing act of acknowledgment in apology; the need to restore while looking back, yet walking forward together; the need to move to forgiveness and trusting the process when anger and resentment could open up risks of more pain, more rejection; the need to acknowledge the loss on both sides and facing the confusion of how to deal respectfully with this concept. I am left wondering so many things—like what is the role of ‘politics’ in our civic life in the face of this human transformation?<sup>19</sup> What does reconciling make of not just my life but that of our communities and our nation? How can we live with contradictions which seem to make some bizarre kind of sense of the healing process?

## FROM THE OUTSIDE—OTHER VOICES ON RECONCILING

### *In Australia*

In my travels I have heard many West Australians views of reconciliation or of reconciling in our country.<sup>20</sup> They speak of concerns with social justice (through improved living conditions, access to employment, health and well-being for indigenous people in Australia), and the development of a culture, climate or attitude of reconciling personally, locally and politically. People speak of a need for personal and community healing on both sides of the artificial fence between us because of trauma of the past and present. There is an emphasis on a shift in legal frameworks to generate a base position for indigenous peoples and for black-white relations, which has statutory power to lead where popular opinion or structural processes fail. There is also an emphasis on rights which coincides with a recognition of status and a protocol of respect for the place of indigenous Australians. There is a sense that the lives of our ancestors, as well as the different imperatives that drive us as people must be recognized in present relationships, particularly with a view to active anti-colonialism for the future. Underpinning these expressions of reconciliation is a concern that these actions must be a human response made from a position of awareness and acknowledgment of our shared history and out of respect for the need to make amends. It is strongly felt that if indigenous perspectives are understood they will be respected and that reconciling must be about awareness raising and ‘humanizing’ our relations. Reconciling is felt to be the task of all of us but that healing and togetherness will not happen unless we confront painful truth.

To grapple with these deep issues is not just a political nor relational endeavor but a human, emotional and psychological one. Graham Little (1999), in exploring ‘Public Emotions’, takes note of the psychologized nature of Australian (and other European) communities. He feels we are familiar with the emotional self in intellectual terms but unable to learn an emotional literacy as a nation to deal with issues such as stolen generations, and the legacies of a violent history. Dalziell (1999) explores the deep rooted nature of shame in the Australian psyche, both in the

indigenous and non-indigenous experience, expressed through autobiography. She describes the need to challenge the secretive nature of our shame (*we* are wrong)—bringing it into the open—and to also embrace guilt (*that* is wrong) as a way of confronting the apparent impasse in reconciling. But making meaning of national and personal emotions can become yet another appropriated device (Wilfram-Cox, 1999). Developing a culture of national emotion is a dangerous game if politics and morality cannot be brought into careful cohesion, if we do not have places for each and an articulated relationship between them (Gaita, 1999). Habel (1999) defines true and false reconciliation, true reconciliation requires that we mend broken relationships and also seek justice, but many times we have only done one at the expense of the other. He demands a critical process of examination of assumed values (the nature of truth, of truth telling, justice and identity) and that we undertake healing through forgiveness and suffering. Habel accents the need to work beyond ‘the confines of political and legal practice’ which have led to superficial and inflexible outcomes.<sup>21</sup>

### *In the International Context*

Consider also that Australia is sadly not alone in our experiences of colonialism, violence, separation and genocide. Not only do we share this history (present?) with others but we are also every day witnessing global destruction of human cultures and communities (let alone environments) by powerful interests on the basis of race, religion, wealth or other often superficial categories. No longer do we have world wars but instead we are a world at war. Reconciling in international terms is increasingly related to a growing agenda for protection of universal human rights (Smith, 1999). This process faces many of the same dilemmas as the personal journey—such as a need to personalize the conflict and those caught in it, in order to ensure focus of ‘peacekeeping’ or later reconciling is founded fundamentally on a care for each other and not on political maneuvering.<sup>22</sup> Reconciling is also a complex balance between broad social and institutional reform, personal restitution, healing and protection as well as political and economic redefinition to address personal and national legacies of injustice.<sup>23</sup>

Such complexity is reflected in experiences of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) which its supporters say brought a deep sense of psychological settlement for many families and committed the nation to exposing its shame in order to liberate the future (Miering, 1999; Tutu, 1999). However critics felt that the TRC was never allowed to grasp the issues of acknowledgment of suffering through meaningful reparation or the restoration of land. Instead, while it offered a critical step for the building of a new nation on honesty and the concept of grace, it sometimes muzzled the voice of the unrepentant. It effectively marginalized those who, particularly within the ANC movement, felt they had been on the side of justice because of the horrors of apartheid (‘sinning against apartheid was a blessed thing to do’, Asmal, 2000). Schreiter (1992) makes further comment that acknowledgment of the past and reconciling must be an open conversation about the ‘quality of relationships’ we now seek with each other. It makes some sense that these

transactions can then slowly generate languages<sup>24</sup> and an emotional fluency<sup>25</sup> with which to express and develop these themes and commitments at a national and international level. Again we face the challenge of blending legal, moral, political and personal dialogues into practical languages for change or what I see as an embodied reconciling—taking these things into our very cells as well as out into the civic arena.

## WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

Reflecting back on this commentary it is clear that the substance of local and international commentary are not unproblematic. For example the issue of acknowledgment and respect<sup>26</sup> for all voices as a starting point for shared ground and mutual learning is a popular notion (Throgmorton, 2000; Forester, 1999; Dhanda, 1994), particularly in the transaction or negotiation of political concerns in the public arena. However, when applied to the process of acknowledging violence in the context of reconciling, or as Forrester (1999) terms it, in the context of deep value difference (speaking about Jewish experiences in the Nazi era)—acknowledgment and respect in the public arena become difficult topics. How can we embrace the unrepentant and divisive voice? How do we acknowledge that all have suffered through division and violence when some feel that sorry must come before forgiveness or acknowledgment? How do we work with these apparent paradoxes? Particularly for indigenous Australians when we ask them to be open to the risk of listening to another white voice, say one which does not acknowledge the history of dispossession, to begin a healing dialogue—taking on trust that this time it will lead to healing rather than pain? Does acknowledging voices and stories of the unrepentant and divisive mean giving power or authority to them to the detriment of healing for those violated? Does it mean that hearing these voices is as much as condoning them, once more valuing them more than the need for healing of the crushed and broken, privileging one before another? Yet can we afford to muffle them when we are asking for truth? Can we really handle the whole truth or just the repentant truth? Do we have to trust the unrepentant and provide respect for those who do not respect us in order to move to a place of healing for ourselves and our communities?

It seems in some of the South African commentary at least, that the lack of acknowledgment of some voices in the process—specifically the unrepentant—has threatened its effectiveness as a tool of healing and justice in the eyes of the community. Meiring highlights the problem quoting from Ariel Dorfman's drama *Death and the Maiden*—"How are we to keep the past alive without becoming its prisoners? How are we to forget it without being in danger of repeating it in the future"? (Meiring, 1999:47). He reflects also on the reticence of the Afrikaners in the community to take part in the repentance and amnesty process under the TRC. Many Afrikaners reported that they felt they were given too few options on the public

stage to appear only as repenters or confessors. A comparative in the Australian context around 'Sorry Day' has excited those who feel they must be given more options on the public stage of catharsis than simply as sorry-sayers. Similarly many indigenous people want to be allowed not to move to forgiveness and healing, to be allowed a voice as the unforgiving and angry. A further paradox appears when reviewing the stories of those who have come to the public stage to tell their stories (both in the case of the TRC and in the case of my own experiences in Western Australia) as the 'unrepentant'. Once given the space to tell their tale from their own chosen perspective, then this becomes the point of shift—having been acknowledged as they are, the story-teller is able to open up their own acknowledgment and shift to a different place.<sup>27</sup>

Exploring the enduring context of human relationships in terms of forgiveness, acknowledgment and reconciling touches a deeper nerve in the Australian psyche, for which we have few words. I feel that it moves us towards the metaphysical to explore the process of renewal of spirit in our 'pink' culture that is so intimately linked with our reconciliation journey. However, as a largely secular nation we are restricted in our abilities and our languages to articulate these desires to re-connect to our sacredness as people (such as my awkwardness with the word 'grace' when speaking of the inexplicable yet human event at the heart of reconciling when two people meet and cross borders they can never go back on). This forces both personal and social tribulation as we seek to learn from, but not appropriate, other languages and traditions of the sacred in order to articulate our own re-cognition. I am drawn to the spiritual strength of the indigenous peoples of our country and yet I hold back from my own sacred journey for fear of appropriating another unknowingly, in the last frontier of colonial aggression. So our national self-image is divided and ambivalent. We feel naked as at once our mainstream community is labeled as capitalistic liberal conservatives yet we strive to find a sacred core to our communal life; a core that can have personal meaning and can also liberate us as communities as we bring it into the realm of social process.<sup>28</sup>

The final paradox is that these tensions are the creative crucible for our reconnection, they must not be derailed by seeking 'solutions' yet they cannot remain unresolved. Counseling to hold the tensions as a re-generative nexus rather than following a natural instinct to resolve tension or to label tension as failure—particularly around embodied and personal experiences such as sacredness, deep value recognition and emotionality—is difficult ground to hold.

## FRAMEWORKS: I, WE, THEY— BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER

### *Dimensions of Healing*

How do we personally, locally, federally, globally start to draw together all of these experiences into methodologies for change? Do we look to negotiation?<sup>29</sup>



treaties?<sup>30</sup> reparation and autonomy?<sup>31</sup> Or do we speak of personal healing leading to national and international transformation?<sup>32</sup> Or about truth, amnesty, forgiveness and grace as we come to terms with our humanity?<sup>33</sup>

From my experience none of these dimensions can be ignored. Yet how can all of this make sense to where I am, to where we are in our Australian experience? A framework would have to work across so many levels to:

- meaningfully synthesize all of these voices and experiences without dominating them or confusing them;
- spell out the context—a context of deep disease—that can connect to where people are at without crushing their hope or re-igniting a sense of powerlessness;
- communicate not just the necessity, but the process for individuals to engage at the deepest level, so that reconciling is not a conversation but indeed a life's journey;
- acknowledge and respect all comers and their stories including the unrepentant in a way which does not perpetuate the pain.

In Western Australia—through Tim Muirhead, co-director of Australians for Reconciliation—some local frameworks and techniques have been developed from our experiences of supporting human spirits within our communities in the reconciliation process. These frameworks hope to begin this dialogue about definitions in relation to reconciling but also attempt to clarify the context in which we work so that individuals and institutions are encouraged to respond. While they speak of ‘the indigenous experience’ as well as our own this is not meant as a universal truth but merely as a ‘reflection’ of what we have seen and heard.

### *The Journey of Well-being*

The first framework, the Journey of Well-Being, speaks of the life experience of indigenous peoples before colonial invasion in its general cycles of peaks and troughs (according to seasons, resources, etc. much like communities across the world in these times), then the impact of colonization and dispossession. Dispossession in this country for aboriginal and Islander peoples being the legalized crushing of communities through the taking of children, the taking of land, the denial of cultural life, language and tradition and the crushing of spirit. Dispossession has resulted in indigenous communities in high unemployment, high offending levels and even higher arrest and imprisonment rates, high mortality, appalling health, high rates of family dysfunction, high rates of substance abuse, anger, bitterness and mistrust.<sup>34</sup> In short—injustice, trauma and conflict through generations has created lasting wounds. Dispossession in the white community has meant a legacy of shame, of fear and denial which has leached our communities of our spiritual and personal energy and a sense of connectedness to many of those around us. We have been forced by our shame to collude in constructing ourselves as powerful and others as powerless

and to re-generate divisions between ourselves and ‘others’ to ensure the submerged past can continually be put at a distance from us.

### *Spirit, Justice, Relationship*

The second framework fits with the first. Reconciling in this context means working across spirit (through healing on both sides), justice (for example legislation, government service provision and affirmative action) and relationship (through interpersonal justice, confession, release, forgiveness). This process is one of encountering each other, meeting face to face and listening to hurts and pains and healing stories from both sides. It is about expressing truth, love, courage, wisdom and vision. Individuals and groups face a change of heart and healing through building relationships, moving ultimately outwards to our communities and institutions.<sup>35</sup> Both sides are able to reclaim that taken from them and liberate their identities in all their complexities as a resource for the future.

### *Principles of Action*

The third framework is based also from experience which makes it increasingly evident that the fuel for reconciliation in this setting comes from:

- Communication—between those separated and conflicting;
- Awareness—from both sides, of the legacies of dispossession for all parties;
- Acknowledgment—of the history and reality of oppression and its effects, accepting responsibility and empathy on both sides for the resulting situation;
- Reparation—taking responsibility for putting back or making right.

These four human acts are not a consecutive process through which to move, although this is frequently the case, but are movements continuously played out until healing has occurred and often well beyond as a sign of respect and remembrance (for example Anzac Day and now National Sorry Day).

However, too often these terms have been perverted through narrow interpretation in the public arena. For example the focus has often been on reparation—in terms of the repatriation of physical resources to indigenous communities from white institutions as an act of compensation—to the exclusion of the transformative power of sharing hurt, healing and history (Williams, 1999; Bowden and Bunbury, 1990; HREOC, 1997). This view not only disempowers those not in institutions and in control of making such decisions to feel they are able to take on reparation, it also disempowers indigenous peoples from being able to consider themselves as also fundamental to the process of reparation rather than just passive recipients. Similarly we speak often of the hurts and wounds of one side to the exclusion of the other—e.g., black need for physical resources or white need to justify the past—building up animosities and a gruesome competition as to who deserves most respect.

The power of the Australian ‘people’s movement’<sup>36</sup> for reconciliation comes from their growing capacity to move beyond the pathology<sup>ed</sup> nature of these words into an empowering practice of them as they seek to re-appropriate these terms into the lives of individuals and local communities. For example instead of *just* a flow of physical resources from white to black communities we can see reparation as repatriation of resources of all kinds in the spirit of ‘repairing the damage’ in both cultures. Reparation is then liberated to be something we can all achieve and is truly relational and emancipatory. For example, restoring self-esteem and dignity to both black and white communities by reaching out to each other in friendship and hope; or, the exchange of emotional resources and personal encouragement enriching those depleted in a spirit of reconnection on both sides. Also the distinction is a critical one between a dispassionate dispensing of ‘compensation’ and a connected process of reparation which is distinctly not just repaying materially but repairing damage—a qualitative distinction that can only be fostered from a place of recognition and acknowledgment of history at the heart level.

Similarly, communication goes beyond telling each other our needs to listening to each others lives, as they are. Awareness moves past understanding cultural habits and respecting differing viewpoints to forging a connection with our common humanity and a solidarity that comes from standing beside each other in our healing. Acknowledgment is not just the saying of sorry or of forgiveness but a profound understanding of the social realities that we live in as being sculpted by all of our pasts, all of our actions together. Such an understanding does not excuse the relentless denial of physical and other resources to indigenous communities at the political level nor reject the possibility of accepting only compensation. But it also empowers all of us to take part in repairing the damage and reconciling through healing—*at the same time*—and to undertake these acts in a ‘heartful’ way wherever we are.

### *What Does This Mean in Terms of Rebuilding?*

The task of rebuilding for indigenous peoples in this context is one of working a way out of this ‘pit of despair’ and hopefully pulling others out with them. We have heard the tragedy and pain of this process as people fall back, and the despair of those that manage to climb out watching about them as others die or do not make it. There is pain in the misconception by others that the bottom of this pit is in fact what aboriginality is about, not as the result of 200 years of oppression.<sup>37</sup> The joy is in the great success of survival and in looking back to see how far community and individual energy, and the strength of the ancestors, has taken those survivors. Once the pit is recognized the work can begin. When we can see that all of us are intertwined in this pit we all share the struggle, though our journeys, roles and realities be completely different.

In my own terms, my role in this context means retracting the hand of help, the hand of welfare, the hand of judgment and extending instead the hand of acknowledgment without expectation. I do this because, as Tim frequently reminds me, I am

not guilty for the past unless I turn away from it. Co-existence means waiting in case I need to respond in solidarity as indigenous communities manage their own affairs, invent their own healing, undergo their own work within themselves. It means working with the white community to move towards a place of awareness and acknowledgment so that institutional, personal, political and systemic shifts become responses to the healing and awareness process within ourselves. I wait, work, listen, build friendships and sensitivities and do not let dangerous exclusive silences continue. There are times in co-existence where we must work alone and times where we must work together, there are times to own our whiteness and times to join beyond color. Learning judgment and deep listening to discern which time is upon us are skills that must form the foundation of my relationships. I also need to express and give validity to my own pain when my 'humanitarian conscience' holds me back into the role of giver or more dangerously healer rather than 'receiver' or 'healed/healing'.

Finally the 'Graph of Well-being' in our ongoing discussions, has become a metaphor for the journey reconciliation asks people like me, and in fact a nation, to take. Working in reconciliation is about transforming and reconfiguring my life and my relationships with others. Communicating about reconciliation and encouraging others along this path is not about developing 'community education' strategies but placing in the way transformative experiences which engage all our levels of 'knowing'—emotionally, spiritually, ethically, humanly. Confronting injustice 'in the flesh' human to human through telling of personal stories, has proved over and over the single most significant act which can help us to begin the journey of healing. But asking for such risks to be taken for many is too great a cost and part of that journey may have to be embracing those unwilling to pay the price and take the risk.

### *Some Questions*

Such a reconciliation process leaves many questions (as it should), not least of which those generated by our recent experiences relating to the political denial of the impact of the Stolen Generations (the removal of indigenous children from their families through government policy) on indigenous peoples in our country. Where is the sincerity of relationship building and trust at the local level if acknowledgment of the depth and breadth of that struggle is contradicted in the civic arena? And how can reconciliation come as a response to awareness and acknowledgment of our shared past if those that do this work of touching hearts are confounded in building the relationships from which this action must come because of this national insincerity? There remains only a fragile balance between hope for national affirmation and action, and trust built outside tangibles and instead on spiritual healing through building relationships at the local and personal level. For no matter how far we would like to distance the human process of reconciling from the political posturing around 'Reconciliation' the two are inevitably and painfully intertwined. Will local relationships be enough to sustain us in reconciling while our

government is against us? How much can we believe that the local reconciling process will ultimately nurture a national shift? Can a process that asks so much of us personally through such an intangible thing as a shift in consciousness and personal energy communicate itself to a broader cynical public, effectively enough to continue to grow and create generative dialogues? Can we embrace those who do not want to take the risk of embodied reconciling?

## CONCLUSIONS: WHERE IS A PLACE FOR THE HEART?

During my travels, and even more recently, it has become very clear to me that there are so few times and places in which we come together at the community, personal or national level to talk about these things, to enrich ourselves and our spirits and to reaffirm the personal and national importance of our skills in living together. The work of the reconciliation movement in Australia to create these moments where we can generate languages and histories that are truly shared from the shards of our history together, have been precious fragments of opportunity in our public life as a nation and I would hope that these continue. These moments have also engendered hope that power for healing really is in our hands, every one of us, and that for those looking on at the local level as relationships are being wrought, that this vague relational shift is in fact the beginning of something new. Our inner landscapes do forge our outer landscapes. Our local experience is that deep reconciling is growing and feeding on discouragement and resistance in the political arena, and that by embracing those unable to take risks past their fear and pain, forms a crucible for transformation. We face the threats of a hostile government with the hope that local initiative and individual relationships will be strong enough to move forward change across our nation and create an unbroken commitment to healing. We do this work embedded in a culture which often undermines the values on which this process is based. But we do so with hopeful hearts and in the knowledge that across our country, slowly but surely, we are meeting together and the tide of history<sup>38</sup> is turning. We also know that we are not alone. Around the world, while conflict and violence are a devastating reality for many, we are at the same time forging thinking and being for peace and reconciling and places of heart in communities very different but much like our own.

## NOTES

1. The Council is a selected Committee to Federal Parliament, reporting through the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. The Council was established with an Act of Parliament in 1991 in response to the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody (HREOC, 1991). The Council's task was to report on eight key issues areas including the development of a 'peoples movement' for reconciliation and a National Document.

2. Williams (1998) discusses a 'way of working' in cross-cultural contexts to promote community development and building relationships.

3. Tim Winton speaking on 'Land and Spirituality' on 4 April 2000 for Coalition of Peoples coined this term and I have repeated it to find safer descriptive ground between monolithics of 'white' and 'black'.

4. My hope in this paper has been to work from my confusion as a starting point, to use it as a reflexive tool as it has been the only real touchstone for me in thinking, feeling and acting in reconciliation. Is confusion preliminary to interpretation or is this too evolutionary, anticipating a reasoned progression from messy to rational? What is my confusion? Deleuze (1988) refers, in critiquing Foucault, to these strange spaces before and behind meaning which Foucault's concepts of genealogy try to grasp. Gadamer's (1987) historicity refers to the conditions for meaning as infected by prejudice or fore-meaning. Habitus (Gatens, 1996) expands into this concept by describing a sense of ritual and tradition as preconscious frames/methods within which interpretation occurs. Is this my confusion? Is this what reflexivity really means—bringing the 'insensible' into meaning and interpretation, into my conscious self as an intuitive habitus for thinking and being? Can reflexivity include the uninterpreted as well as that which makes sense? Some of my understanding of reflexivity is that interpretation and incomprehensibility ask me to move beyond human comprehension or rationality and use other faculties for sense-making—in reconciling I call on all of this confusion and work from there as it seems the only safe place to start.

5. Laclau (1994) speaks of 'empty signifiers' where terms once invested with social meaning are stripped and made didactic, open to contextual manipulation. In the same way 'reconciliation' is not emptied but subtly remodelled and turned in on itself, like 'sustainability' before it. The present government has entered into a politically loaded process of remodelling the meaning of reconciliation at the policy level (see the National Sorry Day Committee's report to the Senate Inquiry on Stolen Generations (April 2000); also Jull, 2000.)

6. The term peace-building is defined by Heininger (1994) as a shift from traditional practice of 'peacekeeping' towards creating a culture of peace through building towards peaceful communities. This blends with my understanding of peace as Brock-Utne (1985) describes it, not just as an absence of conflict but as an absences of oppression in all its forms, i.e., intra- and inter-personal violence as well as structural violence. Whitmer (1999) takes the concept of peace further in *The Violence Mythos* seeing subsumption of one into another, the process of making something 'other', 'the same', as violence.

7. Mahlulo in FAIRA (1998) *Bringing Australia Together* discusses comparisons with South Africa and the Queensland Government. Suter in the same volume tackles Australia's record in the global evolution towards human rights in areas like East Timor. Both critique the proximity of Australia's internal politics to that elsewhere and our inability to politically articulate these discussions at home or to learn or listen to our international experiences. Ironically Australia considers itself as a cred-

ible 'peacebuilding' force in the UN legitimately engaged in decision making around 'sovereignty and intervention' (Daniel and Hayes, 1995) between nation states. Yet we are not prepared to suffer the intervention of others (for example recent international criticism through the United Nations with regard to mandatory sentencing, racially discriminatory land laws, weak environmental protection at Jabiluka, inadequacy of human rights protection in relation to aboriginal deaths in custody and indigenous health, etc.) in a related way on domestic issues.

8. Fiona Williams (1993) speaks of her struggle in assuming the right to write and the confidence that her voice counts. The right to write in academic arenas is often automatically assumed. In reconciling my feeling is that my writing and speaking must also be accountable to the process of social change about which I speak. Discussion of accountability follows below.

9. Young and Sheurich (1997) points out the need for racists to write racism or men to write patriarchy so that the silence is broken by those that have perpetrated it. Being Whitefella (Graham, 1994) tries to shift the burden of 'silence breaking' to whitefellas in Australia as a voice for reconciliation. Is there a way past colonization in this role for the white voice?

10. Zanghi (1998) discusses 'human rights and tolerance' exposing the Western philosophical culture in the arena of human rights as promotion of toleration which resists the humanizing process of mutual respect. Gaita (1999) confirms this view of cultural philosophy in Australia, advocating a need to define land, reparation, etc., as essentially moral/political arguments not political or racial ones, cultivating a national culture of 'common humanity' (some problematic reasoning here but this is a useful portion of his argument). Jim Ife recently also spoke (personal communication with Community Aid Abroad Workshop, 2000) of the need for development workers to resist the colonialist stance in their work by questioning whether mutual respect is the motivation of their work.

11. See Yeatman, 1994 and Humphries and Truman, 1994.

12. By questioning the boundaries and borders between claims to knowledge (who makes them and why), the separation of action from knowing, experience from research, the division of the mind, body and emotions as perpetuating oppressive power systems (Fonow and Cook, 1991; Lennon and Whitford, 1994; Stanley and Wise, 1993) feminist social theory and epistemology have painted white, western, middle-class culture as a belief and knowledge system based in categorizing, marginalizing and breaking apart to protect patriarchal hegemony. Western culture as currently divisive of human connection is also featured as a social theory in communitarian literature, proposing the modern age as one of isolation and breakdown between values, individuals and society (e.g., Etzioni, 1993). (NB I recognize the term 'culture' is not unproblematic nor monolithic. I sense culture in this context as an 'attitude' or value orientation.)

13. Jason (1997) discusses contemporary American and Western cultures as historically destined towards our current culture of economic security, disconnection and materialism. Inglehart (1998) predicts the next large scale global movement of

social values, already being experienced, as a shift from materialist cultural values towards postmaterialist values of self-expression and re-connection.

14. Personal communication made in seminar for Coalition of Peoples 2000 seminar series entitled 'Land and Spirituality'.

15. Starke (1986) discusses peaceful co-existence, in the international sense, as a term describing a relationship that is borne or still rests on fundamental antagonisms. He suggests instead peaceful co-operation as a more useful understanding of adaptation of relationships after violence. In contrast Dolby (2000), in discussing Hage's book on multiculturalism in Australia *White Nation* (1998)—sees that co-existence at least implies a step beyond tolerance. Tolerance in multicultural Australia implies a anglo-centric view of Australian leadership being 'white' and ethnic others being allowed to come along with the white nation or to be used as 'marionettes' to generate a sense of 'multiculturalism' to avoid discussion of racism. Rowse (2000) contrasts co-existence in terms of land title where co-existence of titles and of people on the land was based on an uneasy argument between colonial land hunger and humanitarian welfare which denied rights but insisted on welfare support—what Rowse refers to as the 'rations' relationship. He relates that land claiming and co-existence are still dictated within this nineteenth century 'humanitarian' conception and that reconciliation politically as a result has still also not grasped who is reconciling with whom over what. I write co-existence because I feel it is important not to pretend that conflict is over but that peace and co-existence is a continuous negotiation between people from different points of expectation. This process must be recognized as a struggle, one that must be informed by our antagonistic history so that we do not slip into a casual tolerance nor forget that rights—and not politics or relationships alone—are a core rationale of our reconciling.

16. Extending a hand relates for me a very physical sense of a battle between doing so as an act of charitable 'righteousness' or as a hesitant act of compassion for myself and others. I suggest this act in the spirit of trepidation—coming from a place in the emotional journey between guilt and hope and in the painful desire to have my sorry accepted but to not be sure it will happen or that in fact sorry can ever be enough.

17. I have struggled to describe the healing I have seen which is beyond description—I grasp at the word grace here to paint the idea of the 'beyond-self' reserves from which this healing springs. What brings a people hardened and broken by 200 years of destruction to a place of forgiveness or of healing? What brings people who have not experienced or understood the plight of these others to a place of healing and life change within an instant, in the touch of a hand or by hearing a story told from a real person? Palmer grapples with this concept naming it the need to draw on the 'grace of great things' as we slide between relativism and objective forms of knowing, saying, "Will we abandon the arrogance that claims either to know the world perfectly (objective knowledge. sic) or to invent the world at will (relative or phenomenological knowledge)? Will we acknowledge the independent reality of great things and their power to work on our lives?" (Palmer, 1998:106–110). I



cannot abolish the need as a secular individual to talk about the sacred (the numinous energy at the heart of reality, Otto, 1958) in my experience and yet cannot escape the difficulty of description using words borrowed from religious tradition. This awaits another paper on the languages of reconciling methinks.

18. Justice as restoration (Galaway and Hudson, 1996), as a psychological settlement (Morriso, 1997) and as social enrichment through moral attentiveness to resolving fairness and reparation (Gaita, 1999; Mackay, 1999).

19. The concept here of transformation is of becoming 'more fully' of itself or metamorphosis; a shift from one form of energy to another (Little, 1993). Transformation in reconciliation is about re-ordering that existing within us, making us more fully who we are to be, shifting our energies from denial or shame towards healing and co-existence. My sense of the mainstream political argumentation in Australia around reconciling is that it has never wanted to encounter or be informed by the human and transformative process of healing which is the embodied experience of reconciling in our country. I feel that until it does, we will never be really grasping the fullness of the process of reconciling within our institutional or political life. Little (1999), explored more fully later, argues the need to draw together our morality and our politics, our emotional humanity with our civic life. I would argue further that true to Gatens' (1996) and Grosz's (1994) call to embodiment, that reconciling calls for an 'embodied politics' in our civic life.

20. Some of this information is recorded in Williams (1999), the consultancy report from the Draft Document meetings process.

21. Not only is the law a restrictive process for seeking justice in Australian terms it is also unable to. Behrendt (2000) discusses Australian legal frameworks as blind to affirmative action and the needs of minority groups by historical design. Quoting George Williams's *Human Rights under the Australian Constitution* "the framers of the Australian constitution intended to create a framework that would discriminate on the basis of race...Aborigines were a dying race" (Behrendt, 2000:25). In *Kruger v. Commonwealth* (1997)—case brought by five members of the Stolen Generation against the Commonwealth requesting reparation for separation from their families—Justice Dawson stated that "the plain matter of the fact is that the common law has never required as a necessary outcome the equal or non-discriminatory, operation of laws" (Behrendt, 2000:25). Kajlich (2000) suggests instead a process of accords which can bring together political, moral, legal and cultural concerns. Indigenous leader Patrick Dodson (1999) also advocates the use of a negotiation framework, discussed further below.

22. The process of peacekeeping in many national 'hot spots' in the last decade have seen the coalescence of international forces working together through the auspices of groups such as the United Nations or in aid situations (Heininger, 1994). International politicization of the 'peace keeping zones' has in some cases forced a de-humanization of the conflict as the focus begins to be aimed towards goals of increasing political legitimacy beyond human rights or care for others in the global community. Damrosch and Farer (1993) discuss the need for international instruments

encouraging 'a paradigm legitimate intervention' to restrict the more manipulative political intervention, particularly urgent because of the increase in sub-global institutions playing a role in 'peace enforcement'. Wesley (1997) feels that dominant voices in forums such as the United Nations readily misinterpret ethnic conflict as the ideological conflicts undertaken in Western theaters of war earlier in the century and undertake peacekeeping on this political footing.

23. Meiring (1999) describes core principles taken from sixteen similar commissions across Africa and South America which underpinned the South African TRC. The TRC sought to ensure a balance of representatives but also of agendas. Bozzoli states the ANC established the TRC to develop "a culture of human rights in our country, so that suffering and injustices of the past never occur again" (Bozzoli, 2000:11). The focus is not social justice (implying structural change effecting societal shifts towards equity) but human rights—protecting both personal and individual rights whilst also engendering societal and structural change.

24. Becker (1991) presents the idea of 'linguaging', presenting language not as a process of symbols or as a communicative system but as a generative process of creativity, bringing concepts and actions into being.

25. A central concern for me in reconciling is the need to extend interpretive experience and knowledge through to the many different 'ways of knowing' open to us such as emotional fluency (Little, 1999), spiritual connection (Peck, 1993; Palmer, 1998) intuitive sense (Way, 1995), etc.

26. I see here acknowledgment as a precursor to respect; acknowledgment not requiring understanding or relationship but leading to the development of relationship through which respect, a deeper sense of acceptance, can be fostered.

27. Gaita (1999) draws out these issues further.

28. Much like Bellah's reports of an American culture in the 1960s seeking for materialism on the one hand and for deeper meaning on the other. Embracing and holding such tensions is a refined skill and not one accorded much honor in contemporary mainstream political or social processes that would paint such tensions as contradictory or in need of resolution rather than as a creative force.

29. Jull (1999) uses the example of Nunavut, an indigenous homeland in Alaska signed over to indigenous peoples as a result of 35 years of negotiating as a contrast for the process of negotiating self-determination in Australia. He encapsulates the current issues facing the new nation 'to devise the best possible systems and programs for Nunavut conditions' rather than just equivalent status of nationhood. Jull (2000) describes the process as cross-argumentation that eventually sustained outcomes despite seeming setbacks along the negotiating path.

30. Previous Chair of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, Patrick Dodson, has initiated treaty discussions around Native Title with key stakeholders, bypassing the government, through the Bennelong Foundation to the tune of 20 billion dollars for the signing over of native title rights. Delivering the Vincent Lingiari lecture in August 1999, Mr. Dodson also spelled out a framework for negotiation which could

provide a baseline for discussion between indigenous peoples and the Australian government. A summit held in September 1999 between ATSIC officials and 40 indigenous leaders considered this proposal and have undertaken to consult with indigenous people about such a position.

31. Coombs (1994) discusses processes of indigenous assertion of autonomy and reparation in Australia as the platform for negotiation and reconciliation. This has been a process undertaken by indigenous people within both systems of governance, inside and outside government (e.g., the Eva Valley Statement on the Mabo decision).

32. Michael Henderson (1994; 1996) documents processes of personal transformation and the dynamics of communication in conflict as seeds for reconciling across diverse global contexts. Forgiveness, sorry, trust and truth have formed critical platforms for these transformations.

33. The TRC process was underpinned by the reality of the formation of a new nation. In order to not repeat the crimes of the past the new nation could not be built on suppression of the truth or acts of retribution and sanctioned violence. Archbishop Desmond Tutu's insistence on amnesty and grace interpreted through his Christian theology were central to the psychology of the commission (Tutu, 1999). Buddhist experiences of reconciling in the Chinese/Tibet situation highlight the power of truth for peace and reconciling (Cutler and Lama, 1998).

34. MRCIABDC Report (HREOC, 1991) documents all of these processes of dispossession. In Western Australia the 1905 Act legalized indigenous dispossession through the actions of social and other services of the state. Institutional violence therefore has particular meaning and history for Western Australia.

35. Learning Circles and Local Reconciliation Groups across our nation are playing a central role in this healing or "spirit, relationships and justice" approach. The Council's work through these group mechanisms has nurtured a "peoples movement" involving thousands of Australian people in local action and relationship building.

36. A term coined by Faith Bandler, Aboriginal Activist, when speaking of the 1967 referendum as a 'peoples movement even governments could not stop'—National Reconciliation Conference 1997.

37. Personal communication with Joylene Koolmatree in relation to working with spiritual and psychological healing from trauma and post-traumatic stress within indigenous communities—related by Tim Muirhead.

38. I am referencing here the most recent Yorta land claims case in Victoria (the 19th request for restoration of their land rights by the indigenous owners). The claimants case was rejected in the words of Chief Justice Olney because 'the tide of history' (Alford, 1999:79) was against the aboriginal claimants being able to demonstrate their right to and continuous connection with the land. The claimants rightly continue to decry this formula for repossession of land rights by the dispossessed on the basis of their ability to prove that their dispossession was not complete or effective. Effectively forcing them to either defend the truth of the past or to resign themselves to it (see Alford; also Rose, 1996).

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