THE TRUTH WHICH WILL SET US ALL FREE: NATIONAL RECONCILIATION, ORAL HISTORY AND THE CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE

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ABSTRACT: The Australian Government, referring to thousands of Aboriginal children allegedly stolen from their parents, responded that "the Commonwealth does not seek to defend or justify past policies and practices, but it does assert that the nature and intent of those events have been misrepresented, and that the treatment of separated Aboriginal children was essentially lawful and benign in intent..."
In 1998 the Chilean government opposed the proposed trial of General Pinochet in Spain, protesting at the grave damage it would cause to the process of democratic transition and national reconciliation. The Government of Chile believes that whatever are the intentions of those promoting the process, this does not help the intended reconciliation – on the contrary, they will deepen for many years the differences which exist between Chileans. Are national reconciliation and oral history compatible?
KEYWORDS: Reconcilation; Memory; State Violence; Australian Aborigines; Chilean Dictatorship.

RESUMO: O governo da Austrália, referindo-se às milhares de crianças aborígines alegadamente roubadas de seus pais, respondeu que "a Comunidade não procura defender ou justificar políticas passadas, mas assegura que a natureza e intenção destes eventos foi mal representada, e que o tratamento de crianças aborígines separadas foi essencialmente legal e benigno em seu intento..."
Em 1998, o governo chileno opôs-se ao julgamento do general Pinochet na Espanha, protestando ao grande dano que isto representava para o processo de transição democrática e reconciliação nacional. O governo do Chile acredita que quaisquer que sejam as intenções dos promotores do julgamento, isto não ajuda para a desejada reconciliação – ao contrário, irá aprofundar por anos as diferenças que existem entre os chilenos. Neste artigo, procura-se responder, a partir dos casos australiano e chileno, se são compatíveis a reconciliação nacional e a história oral.
PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Reconciliação, Memória, Violência Estatal, Aborígines Australianos, Ditadura Chilena.

On a memorial to Aboriginal children in Reconciliation Place, Canberra, are inscribed the words:

> *We urge all Australians to acknowledge the truth of our history to enable us to move forward together on our journey of healing because it is only the truth which will set all free.*

The Australian Government, referring to thousands of Aboriginal children allegedly stolen from their parents, responded that "the Commonwealth does not seek to defend or justify past policies and practices, but it does assert that the nature and intent of those events have been misrepresented, and that the treatment of separated Aboriginal children was essentially lawful and benign in intent".[1]

In 1998 the Chilean government opposed the proposed trial of General Pinochet in Spain, protesting at "the grave damage which the attempt to bring Pinochet to justice causes the process of democratic transition and national reconciliation. The Government of Chile believes that whatever are the intentions of those promoting the process, this does not help either the transition to democratic government and further

national reconciliation [...] on the contrary, they will deepen for many years the differences which exist between Chileans".[2]

My talk concerns the tension between what the people and their governments think should be known about the past, in the name of national reconciliation. They ask: Is the past still obscure? Are parts of it too terrible to relate? Will there ever be agreement on what happened? Is the national politically stable enough for the truth to be revealed? What should be the role of oral history?

Oral history is critical because, in Chile and Australia, a very great deal of what we know about the Pinochet repression and the separated Aboriginal Australian children has emerged through spoken testimony. Yet both the national governments of Chile and Australia have asserted National Reconciliation as a greater public good than the full exploration of the recent past.

Are National Reconciliation and oral history really irreconcilable? Ladies and gentlemen, this will be a difficult journey for us all. I will be presenting some very painful memories drawn from both Chile and Australia which I have to warn you about. I understand if you want to leave now or later in the talk. But in deciding whether to present some of the oral history which I have learned in both countries I've had to remind myself that we simply we would not know this history if so many people had not been brave enough to speak about their experiences. We have to honour their courage. We have to honour their memories. We have to honour the role of oral history in these vital national debates. Critical though I'm going to be of my own government, I won't be taken out and tortured for what I'm going to say. Neither will you, the audience, be photographed for attending, nor arrested outside. Nobody here will have their children removed tomorrow. If we can't speak openly and boldly at this relatively peaceful moment in this most stable of democracies, then we can't do it anywhere.

Let's begin by exploring one of the most radical of Chile's universities in 1973 what has been remembered, or celebrated or mourned. The Universidad Técnica de Santiago de Chile is a little akin to the University of Technology of Sydney in which we are gathering, but with a greater emphasis on engineering and construction and metallurgy. It is known today as the University of Santiago of Chile. It was at this university,

through its radical politics and association with workers' movements, that students and staff paid the most terrible price in the first days of the coup of Augusto Pinochet, 11 September 1973. It was on this campus that sixty two students and staff were killed or disappeared during the sixteen years of military dictatorship, mostly in the first few months. Their alleged crimes were their long-standing involvement in the programs of the government of the socialist President Salvador Allende. Our explorations into mourning and memory here will be, in their way, a microcosm of the exploration of the nation. We should bear in mind that the memorials within the university have been erected with the sanction of the university but not, so far as I am aware, on the university's initiative.

Will we find, I wonder, memorials to people or to events? Or to sites where events took place? Pinochet's rule ended in 1989 so we should be alert to evidence of when the memorials were first created? Just after the fall of the dictatorship, or much later? Who created them? Will there by any significant sites within the university which carry no memorials. Why not? Have any memorials been defaced? And by whom?

We are standing at the main entrance to the university. The first plaque stands in memory of the victims, students and staff who suffered – disappeared or executed – under the military repression. The date is 1996, seven years after Pinochet stepped down following a national plebiscite. But is only since 2003, sixteen years after the end of Pinochet, that students and staff began the tradition to process from here to each of the memorials we're going to visit.

Nearby is a second memorial plaque. It is dated later:

To the victims of our university community
Who fell at the beginning of the coup détat
11 September 1973
May it never happen again in Chile
Politically Exonerated Academics of the University de
Santiago De Chile
September 2003

Note the dedication by those who were 'politically exonerated', which refers, I believe, to those academics who, after 1989, were allowed to have their jobs back because of their opposition to the military

regime. The tension's already rising. Already it's clear that this is no ordinary memorial garden. The plaque was written as late as 2003. Why not earlier?

Let us continue our wanderings through the campus. The earliest memorial, and dedicated public space, is to Victor Jara, friend of the overthrown President Allende, international singer. The memorial and the Plaza, are dated 1991.

Plaza
Victor Jara
Assassinated 14 9 1973
For the right to live in peace
Students and Staff Association
September 1991

This was one of the first memorials, probably because of the international scandal of his arrest, torture and murder. The memorials to individual students came much later.

Room
In memory of
Gregorio Mimica Argote
14 September 2000

There's a terrible story about Argote which I'll come to later.

Michelle Peña Room
Thirtieth Anniversary of her disappearance
September 2003

Her memorial in the University crèche was also only erected three years ago. Michelle was 27, eight months pregnant, a militant socialist, disappeared – presumed dead – a week after her arrest. The fate of her baby has never been discovered.[3]

The tension's continuing to rise reminding us that to erect a memorial to the executed or the disappeared is not only a political but a decidedly courageous act.

The last plaque to notice is inscribed on a granite rock,

To Mario Martinez.
Santiago, August 1989

Mario died in the last year of the dictatorship. The inscription reminds us that the regime of terror ended only sixteen years ago. Not even a generation has passed yet. The perpetrators and the victims pass each other in the streets daily. National reconciliation to these events will not come easily. The differences in the date of the plaques send a tremor through the fragility of the Chilean post-dictatorial condition – if we can call it post-dictatorial at all. Information is still being extracted inch by painful inch, some from official records, but mostly from oral testimony about what happened on the campus during seventeen years of savage repression. Who can be certain the terror will not come again?

While some people are prepared to speak to foreign historians like myself, throughout the country an outsider like myself finds ignorance, denials, nervousness, a reluctance to discuss even what has been publicly admitted. No one can be certain, however high their current position in the investigation, or the government, that the instigators of some future coup will not remember their words or writings condemning Pinochet, or approving the coup, or endorsing the torture, or even calling for the end of the conspiracy of silence inside and outside the university.

For no memorial plaque to tell the visitor that it was from the central administration building from which Allende was to announce a plebiscite on the morning of the coup, nor that the façade was once peppered with bullet holes. Nor is there a sign that from the main entrance that passage led downstairs to what in 1973 was the cafeteria into which most of those who were taken to the National Stadium were herded the night before their arrest. Nearby was the traditional radical meeting place of the students, known as Greek theatre. In the later 1970s the authorities filled it with water to prevent gatherings. In 2000 the area was drained to restore it to its former state. But the artwork dedicated to Victor Jara and the University Chancellor Kirkberg, was defaced. It has since been restored. By whom? My guide nervously replied "By the Old Guard".

The conspiracy of silence becomes more sinister. In 1991 Professor Francisco Javier Gil Llambías, very courageously chaired a committee report in 1991 on what exactly happened at the university in those

first days, and later.[4] He was one of the very first to defy the silence and he did so without official university sanction. Today neither the university bookshop nor the university library know anything of his book. It appears on no catalogue. Llambías is willing to give one to human rights activists from overseas from his dwindling stock of remaining spare copies he carries with him in his briefcase. If he leaves them in his office, they disappear.

There is no plaque on the campus to record the site, quite near the Greek Theatre, where several students clambered into the underground aquifer tunnels to escape the military: and the tunnels were sealed. They died in there. Their bodies remain un-signposted – but not forgotten – somewhere under the campus. Worst of all of the diabolical un-signposted sites was the metallurgy workshop. A man working there recounted that during the night of the eleventh a number of students took shelter here rather than the cafeteria to make Molotov cocktails. The military burst in. In that corner, he explained, the explosives were being made. A table in the middle was covered in the underclothing, shoes and clothes of female students who had been tortured and raped and some killed. For months afterwards one wall of an adjoining room was covered by bullet holes, and the blood of executed students and staff Gregorio Argote, whose memorial plaque is attached to a room of a building not far away, killed here several days later and his body was thrown into the workshop furnace. The witness said the story had not appeared in the professor Llambías's report. Why not? Nobody had asked him – until now.[5]

Beyond the university hovers the trembling memory of terror, or is it the terror of memory? On my first visit to Chile in 2003, a waiter at the hotel began to tell me, without my asking him, of how very recently an unmarked mass grave had been discovered at the Municipal cemetery. Later in the day I received some quite explicit instructions from another man of where to find the site. At the Municipal Cemetery, the trees and the buildings were exactly as described, but without plaque nor even discernable earthworks. Was this the site? No, no, the cemetery authorities knew nothing. The following year, visiting this time the main Catholic Cemetery in the centre of Santiago, I was taken to the site where the Catholic authorities had, in the early years of the coup, heroically allowed the secret burial of students in marked graves rather than the

alternative of being tipped into a common pit. Of these burials and state-sponsored exhumations in the mid 1990s, the cemetery authorities also knew, rather aggressively, nothing. Meanwhile the City Museum describes the Allende years in terms of strikes, food shortages and unemployment. The story of the coup itself is no more than a paragraph, a photograph of the Presidential Palace La Moneda on fire, and a fragment of a pair of spectacles which may have been Allende's. There is nothing at all on the Pinochet years. The exhibition stops on 11 September 1973: thirty-three years ago. It has not changed in the last three years.

The information in the breathtaking wall of remembrance itself has become a little equivocal. Its theme is "Exigimos Verdad y Justicia. Donde Están?" (We demand Truth and Justice. Where Are They?). But the imposing list of several thousand names of the wall representing the executed and the disappeared whose bodies or graves have been identified, has been under extensive review for several years. A man identifying himself as a member of the Communist Party said that the erased names, the *borrados*, belonged to "the enemy's camp" and should never have been inscribed on it. Evidently some of those whose names are on the wall should not have been there because they had changed sides, or joined the struggle too late or... I don't know why. It's extremely difficult to find out why the revisions are taking place, or who ordered them, or what will be the result.

So is oral history uncovering the truth? The Catholic group, the Fundación Documentación y Archivo de la Vicaría de la Solidaridad are very actively working to research and publicise the very large collection, mainly of oral history, which it already holds. Television programs and magazine articles and reports of exhumations, again principally based on oral evidence, are uncovering the story, grain by grain. Other groups, like the la Agrupación de Familiares de Detenidos Desaparecidos y de Familiares de Ejecutados Politicos, the Group of Families of the Detained- Disappeared and Families of the Politically Executed – limit their researches into what happened to their own loved ones. Their national reconciliation depends more on the laying to rest of those remains, rather than seeking justice for the crimes committed. But the current national political position is that there should be no explicit denunciation – and still less, no state-sponsored prosecution – of the perpetrators. There is to be

no Chilean Truth and Justice Commission. Ignorance among people under forty is everywhere apparent. President Bachelet says that this must remain a matter for the courts.[6] One of her first declarations after election in January 2006 was to reassure the political right that it had nothing to fear.

The Chilean government certainly accepts that terrible things happened that should not be allowed to occur again. The massive *Report of the National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture 2005* summarised interviews with thousands of victims, described methods of torture, recommended compensation and named 27.153 victims of torture. The prospect of national reconciliation breaks not on finding out what happened, that's pretty well known now by those who want to know, but on discovering the identity of all the perpetrators, high and low, and whether they should be brought to justice.

Is national reconciliation possible through oral history? While the danger from the right remains, finding a 'shared truth' through oral history that everyone embraces is scarcely possible. Even the magisterial, 775 page, *Report* concedes that "Many believed, consciously or unconsciously, that a conspiracy of silence about torture extended itself slowly over the country, with the passing of years, that the torture had not been so massive."[7] It's not surprising. Very few of the *victimarios*, the perpetrators, have been interviewed, very few have come forward. Many evidently hold to their oath of allegiance to Pinochet and the current Chief of the Army has not seen fit to release them.

The Report of Commission continues:

> "[T]his report constitutes an experience without precedence in the world, to re-construct, 31 years later – a complete picture of the tremendous subjection in which our country lived and thus to find ways to create the conditions to reconstruct our collective memory. It represents an act to dignify the victims and the commitment to heal the wounds in the national soul. The report is an expression of the moral fortitude of Chile which needed to look with more maturity at the depth of the abyss in which it once fell [...]. The maturity of Chile requires the knowledge of that part of the truth which still remained hidden from the eyes of many people".[8]

Note the specific avoidance of issues of justice here: the wider agenda of national reconciliation sets aside the question of general retributive justice as too damaging and threatening too 'the national soul'. There is no sense at the highest government level that reconciliation must come about through knowing everything.

Maybe this is as far as Chile can go at present. Government thinking stresses reconciliation through unity, "re-encuentro", coming together, rather than reconciliation, and one based more on a partial national amnesia than national amnesty. The tensions of the 1970s, unlike South Africa and to a lesser extent Spain have not yet by any means been resolved. But what will happen when the time comes, perhaps in another generation, that Chileans – the children of the victims *and* of the perpetrators, both – want to understand the dark side of the moon as well the side bathed in the light of searching enquiry. Will there be the oral history to provide that essential information?[9]

I don't propose to criticise the Chilean government. I wasn't there. I'm not a Chilean. I don't have to stand the consequences of getting it wrong. I'm more critical of our own government in a state of denial over Aboriginal history in a country which has never been threatened with political instability. But what I am totally committed to is the necessity for oral historians to go about their business of acquiring and handing on the past to present and to the future. I know what happened at the university because these terrible events were explained to me by people who lived through them.

The writers of the memorial plaques knew what to write because of the oral testimony which emerged especially after 2000. I was taken on a guided tour of the campus. Limitations remain even in 2006. My principal guide had never visited the metallurgy workshop since those heart-stopping events took place. He did not know that a workman who worked there on the day that the military shot the door in and killed the occupants was still employed at the same location.

National Reconciliation is also a national goal of the Australian Government, but it follows a different track.

In 1990 the then Labor government created a Council of Aboriginal Reconciliation to report in the year 2000, with a Blueprint for the Future, a peace settlement between Indigenous and non Indigenous

Australians. The council was made up of thirty people, with equal numbers of Aborigines and non-Aborigines. At the end of its term, in 2000, the Council presented what its Blueprint, which included these words:

> "(1) We, the peoples of Australia, of many origins as we are, make a commitment to go on together in a spirit of reconciliation [...].
> (3) We recognise this land and its waters were settled as colonies without treaty or consent. [...]
> (6) Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves. [...]
> (8) As we walk the journey of healing, one part of the nation apologises and expresses its sorrow and sincere regret for the injustices of the past, so the other part accepts the apologies and forgives.[10]

If you know anything, or can guess anything, about the history of Indigenous people in your own countries, you may think that this document was pretty inoffensive. In truth the Council had great difficulty in getting Indigenous communities to accept these proposals, they seemed so mild. But they did in the end get Indigenous agreement, and presented their Blueprint to the government for ratification. The new conservative government categorically rejected it.

This is not to say the government did nothing. In 1997 it established a fund of 59 million dollars to create, among other purposes, an Aboriginal history archive so that children who were removed, now adults, could begin to retrace their histories, and if they wished, return to their lost families. These were the part-Aboriginal children removed from their parents for pretty well the whole of Australian history until 1970 and adopted or placed in institutions, or adopted, for the principal purpose of putting an end to their Aboriginality. These children have become known as the Stolen Generations

The issue of the stolen generations has been one of the most difficult moral issues in the past decade to non Aboriginal Australians to

resolve. We ask: Why didn't we know about it? Or perhaps – Did we know about it? What should we have done about it? What should we do about it now? Should we feel guilty? What actually happened to the children? Were the motives of the child removers honourable? Did they think they were doing the right thing? Were some of them kidnappers? What should we think?

Let's note some critical dissimilarities between Chile and Australia as well as the more obvious similarities. The danger of political instability here is entirely absent. A second difference is this. The Australian government remains in rock hard denial of the Stolen Generations history. It asserts that oral historians, and others, have grossly exaggerated the numbers of removed Aboriginal children, and the harm done to them and the malevolence of the policy which allowed them to be separated. But let me assure you, as a historian who has worked among the stolen generations for many years, that the numbers were not exaggerated, that acute trauma was visited on the children, and the policies were collectively speaking, quite malevolent.[11]

Interestingly, the Australian government set aside a million dollars for an oral history project of the removed children, the stolen generations to be carried out by the National Library of Australia. Believing, correctly, that not enough of the officials responsible for the removal had been consulted so far, it insisted that every variety of person involved in the history, stolen children (now grown up), their parents, police, missionaries, reserve managers and welfare officers – should be interviewed.

Another initiative in 2001, following the rejection of the Blueprint for the Future, was a sculpture garden, or alley, a new precinct of the National Triangle in Canberra, to be called Reconciliation Place. There are now 12 of such sculptures in place, each devoted to a prominent historical theme or an Indigenous individual. I have to say that as a historian of Indigenous Australia I'm not very proud of them. The reason is the denial of our government that there is very much to apologise for in its historical race relations, and that even if there were, it is better to put the past behind us and concentrate on the future. Not many of the sculptures refer to actual historical events. Most of them, especially the newer ones, are full of laudable but a-historical phrases such as:

If we want to break away from the colonial past and begin anew
Then we have to walk together – hand in hand and side by side
As a truly reconciled nation
Gatjil Djerrkura OAM, 2004

Some of the newer sculptures have no words at all, only engravings. And yet, amongst the first six sculptures to be erected, the government required that a Childrens' memorial be constructed.

Before we come to the strangeness of this request, let's consider the historical experience of the children. I've tried to think of a single passage of oral history which encapsulates the plight of the institutionalised children, to give you an idea of the strength of the savage testimony which has descended upon non Aboriginal society since the early 1980s. My point, of course, is not to compare the suffering of Chilean or Aboriginal people, but to note the tension between oral history and each government's blueprint for the future, following each of these great tragedies.

Here, then, is a brief except from an interview I carried out with a woman in 1983. She's talking about the time when she was about eleven and institutionalised. It is an urgent, traumatised, headlong recounting of what she saw done to another girl in the same institution. It's not the Via Grimaldi torture station, it was only the Cootamundra Aboriginal Girls Training Home. Yet we're listening, in its own way, to a terror psychologically unresolved after fifty years. The effects of both the sights and experiences, like those of torture, last a lifetime. This is what she recalled:

> "I've seen one Aboriginal girl flogged in that place and she could not walk may God help me but she could not walk and after they had finished flogging her with a strap they would put her to bed and I never saw that Aboriginal girl again and she was only in there for a week and she was as black as black could be, a full blooded Aboriginal girl and they used to call her Katie. And she got a hiding because she was screaming and she wanted to go home to her mother. And we asked her when she come in there

> how they got her in there and she told us that they took her out of her buggy and they took her away from her mother away from the buggy and she said my father was in the bush because she said he was too frightened to come out because she said the policeman was after her father. But she screamed for two days crying to go home but they flogged her in the room and she was in the bed like up in the dormitory like we were and she had marks on that girl's legs that were unbelievable I never ever seen that girl after that wherever she went to I don't know. However they got her out of bed to a hospital and covered it up I don't know but her leg was marked and some blood was coming out of the bruise on her leg."

How have the stolen generations, released in part from their trauma by two decades of telling their stories to Enquiries, in public speeches and to oral historians, resolved their memories? What would they want to put on their public monuments?

The children in the Colebrook Home in Adelaide, South Australia established their own memorial garden in the grounds of what was once their institution. The visitor, entering, is confronted by the majestic invocation:

> *Let everyone who comes to this place know*
> *they are on Aboriginal land*
> *the site of what was once Colebrook*
> *Training Home where,*
> *between 1943 and 1972,*
> *some 350 Aboriginal children lived,*
> *isolated from their families and the beloved*
> *land of their ancestors.*

An inmate of the Home remembers, on another plaque

> *And every morning as the sun came up the whole family would wail. They did that for 32 years until they saw me again. Who can imagine what a mother went through? But you have to learn to forgive.*

Another inmate writes:

We are the stolen children who were taken away
torn from our mother's breasts.
What can a child do?
Where can a child turn?
Where is the guiding hand
A child is meant to have?'
Hearts break, tears fall, fear cried out
from the wretched hands and arms of a mother
and child separated

and then shifts to sharing the emotions with the observer, becoming a participant:

Feel the pain, touch the ache, caress the tears.

I can't think of any more powerful words drawn from oral history anywhere in Australia. And these words of the Colebrook Girls – let us be clear – have no place at all on the Stolen Generations monument we're about to examine.

The children's monument at Reconciliation Place, Canberra, stands rather forlornly on the western end of the line of sculptures. On one side of the monument the word for "children" is spelled out in a score of different Aboriginal languages. On the other are printed five photographs. Four of the five show children either playing happily in a traditional setting, or being raised, apparently equally happily, in an institution. A fanciful inference might be drawn that institutional care merely substituted one set of happy childhood years for another. Only the reproduction on the far right indicates any tension between the two – a newspaper 1940s advertisement asking for volunteers to look after an Aboriginal foster child. No explanation is provided for any. Identifying captions are placed rather obscurely by the viewer's feet.

Where is that passionate, searing testimony which we've just heard from the Colebrook Memorial Garden? Absent. Or of the nightmare, whole-of-life trauma, visited on Katie the full blood Aboriginal girl – or her 11 year old observer? Absent. Where is the whole enormous public controversy of removal into childhood misery and for many, a lifetime

of psychological suffering: absent. Nor does this memorial yield the slightest indication, like the other sculptures in Reconciliation Place, that Aboriginal people have anything to mourn at all. In this respect, I have to say, the Chilean government, is far ahead of my own. 'Reconciliation' does not, for the current Australian government, include the admission of past wrongs, nor invitations for forgiveness. Let us not suppose that the children's memorial at Reconciliation Place represents anything but a gross manipulation of a dreadful period in our history which ceased only at about the time of the Chilean coup. At the children's memorial there is simply no history presented.

However, I'm delighted to be able to explain that there is another children's' memorial in Reconciliation Place, standing next to the one that is so insulting to their memory and the experiences. Yes, there are two memorials in reconciliation Place, each commemorating the same theme, one, to children, a-historical and denying, the other, to the Stolen Generations, historic and affirming. This is how it happened.

All the Reconciliation Place memorials were designed by a committee presided over by the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet. Hence its name "Reconciliation Place" rather than what should have been commissioned – "A Memorial to the History of Aboriginal People since 1788". While the preliminary designs of the Children's memorial were submitted for public discussion, spokespeople for the Stolen Generations organisations very angrily charged that they had been insufficiently consulted and that the planned memorial was an insult to their historical experiences. To cut a long story short, the government planners eventually gave way and those who had the experience of being separated were allowed to design their own monument one inspired by oral history and the belief that national reconciliation demands historical understanding.

So now a single example exists of the "What Might Have Been" of Reconciliation Place of a more sympathetic or understanding government. On one side a fountain plays down and along apertures in the wall. On the obverse a huge iron sheet, already intentionally rusted, is perforated with round holes through which flowers and messages are thrust. On the iron are inscribed sixteen fragments of stolen generations' testimony such as:

> *We had been playing... then the air filled with screams because the police came and mother tried to hide their children... Six of us were put on an old truck and taken to Oodnadatta.*

At Reconciliation Place, Canberra, the separated children write about themselves

> *Many of these children experienced overwhelming grief and the loss of childhood and innocence, family and family relationships, identity, language and culture, country and spirituality.*

Stepping through a photo-electric beam the visitor initiates what has become the anthem of removed Aboriginal children. One of Australia's finest contemporary vocalists, Archie Roach describes how he and his siblings were seized from their home in Framlingham, Victoria. The song ends in a blazing climax describing his return, many years later, to his family, land and people.[12]

The voice of the memorial – a little sterner than the Colebrook collective voice, echoes the Reconciliation Council's invocation:

> "We the separated children of Australia would urge you to look through our eyes and walk in our footsteps, in order to understand our pain. We acknowledge all Australians to acknowledge the truth of our history to enable us to move forward together on our journey of healing because it is only the truth which will set all free."

The national government responds,

> "Emotional reaction to heart-wrenching stories is understandable, but it is impossible to evaluate by contemporary standards decisions that were taken in the past".[13]

Is national Reconciliation compatible with oral history? The Chilean government, with much violence in its past and much fear for its

future, answers a tentative yes. The Australian government, holding a different kind of violence – but a violence nonetheless – in its past, and with nothing to fear for its future answers, in Reconciliation Place a resounding: no. They are incompatible.

My own view? If I were the Commissioner for National Reconciliation in Chile, I would want to listen very carefully to all the arguments for and against. I'd be considering the stability of the country, the likelihood of getting a consensus, I'd be considering what m the nation's citizens would want to hear today, and in five years, and in the next generation, and in a hundred years. If I were holding the same position in Australia, I would insist that all the oral, archival and documentary evidence be presented. Probably we never would reach a national consensus, but we would come close to it. We have absolutely no excuse for not undertaking one.

One thing is certain. If we oral historians don't continue to investigate and record and archive and transcribe and publish the darkest corners of our nations' histories, then when the consensus is taken made to reveal all, or some, or just a bit, of what happened, then we won't be able to do it. What is denied cannot be reconciled.

Memories remain. Love resides by the sea, in the air and in the mountains. And hatred lingers at sites of very great wickedness. Any attempt at a historically based national reconciliation without a historical archive which we – we oral historians – have made, and are making, and will make – will be no more than lies, confusion, misunderstanding and silences. However painful it may be for us, it was worse for them. Let's bear their messages from the past and give them to the future. The future can decide how to use them. For it is only the truth which will set us all free.

Notas

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[1] Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee, "Enquiry into the Stolen Generation", Federal Government Submission, Senator the Hon. John Herron, Executive Summary.

[2] Quoted in Ernesto EKAIZER, *Yo Augusto.* Buenos Aires, 2003, p. 604.

[3] Information on students is contained in a staff association pamphlet, 11 September 2004, *They are part of our university history they are present in our memory.*

[4] Francisco Javier Gil Llambías, (jefe del comité) *Informe de la Comisión de Reconciliación Universitaria*, Undiversidad de Santiago de Chile, 1991.

[5] The story is also contained in the university pamphlet. Probably Professor Llambías was not aware of the details. A great deal of information about the deaths of the disappeared has emerged only since 2000.

[6] Online Newshour: Extended Interview: Chile's President-Elect, January 25 2006, www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/latin_america/jan-june06/Chile-ext_1-25.html (7 June 2006).

[7] Ministerio del Interior de Chile, *Informe de la Comisión Nacional sobre Prisión, Política y Tortura,* 2005, p. 5.

[8] Ibid., p. 5

[9] Such a reconciliation occurred at the site of the\in famous Myall Creek massacre in NSW in 1838. Because of the publicity and evidence produced at the trial of the murderers, enough was known of the event to enable both the descendants of the victims and of the perpetrators to walk side by side to the unveiling of a monument to the massacre, in 2000. Unfortunately, it has not been possible to do this often in Australia, due to the inadequacy of Enquiries into other killings, and the deliberate concealment of details – including the names of the perpetrators.

[10] The Council presented its two reconciliation documents to national leaders and the Australian people at Corroboree 2000. They are the *Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation* and the *Roadmap for Reconciliation.* This Appendix contains the *Declaration* and the four national strategies from the *Roadmap.*

[11] The NSW government published the author's essay *The Stolen Generations* in 1981. He was a co-founder of Stolen Generations Link Up (NSW) Aboriginal Corporation, and remains the Public Officer of that organisation.

[12] Archie Roach, *Took the children away,* from the album *Charcoal Lane*, Mushroom Records.

[13] Senate Legal and Constitutional References Committee, op. cit.