

PROOF

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4 Australian Memory and the
5 Apology to the Stolen Generations
6 of Indigenous People
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14 **Introduction: Global Memory and Australia**
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16 The transformation of global politics in the early 1990s marked the end
17 of the 'short twentieth century' (Hobsbawm 1994) and its Cold War cer-
18 tainties. If the collapse of the Soviet Union, end of apartheid in South
19 Africa and fall of Latin America dictators indicated the victorious exten-
20 sion of the international liberal order, the outbreak of genocidal ethnic
21 conflict in Rwanda, Yugoslavia and the Caucasus also heralded the
22 return of integral nationalism. These events marked a new temporality
23 and resultant new type of politics (Olick 2007). Because socialist hopes
24 of a post-nationalist horizon had been dashed, grievances were now
25 framed in terms of ethnic and national histories, which some observers
26 interpreted as a regressive political imaginary of identity politics that
27 divided peoples and occluded the persistence of structural oppression
28 and inequality (Rolph-Trouillot 2000, 171–86; Torpey 2006). In particu-
29 lar, the plethora of official apologies, truth commissions and reparations
30 payments for 'historical injustice' suggested a preoccupation with the
31 past rather than the future.¹ Certainly, there is no doubting the transna-
32 tional extent of apologies by governments, heads of state, professional
33 and commercial groups, religious organizations and spiritual leaders to
34 exploited individuals and abused communities, living and dead (Nobles
35 2008; Torpey 2002; Cunningham 1999, 285–93). Consider the follow-
36 ing sample.

37 In 2001, the Roman Catholic Church and the Polish President Alexander
38 Kwasniewski apologized for the massacre of Jews by Christian Poles in
39 Jedwabne in 1941. Pope John Paul II made numerous apologies for the
40 Church's past imperialist endeavours, such as the Church's historical ridi-
41 culing of African cultural beliefs. In January 2004, at the tomb of a leader

1 of the Herero people in present-day Namibia, the German Ambassador
2 expressed his country's 'profound regrets' for Imperial Germany's role in
3 the massacre and starvation of some 80,000 Herero and Nama people
4 between 1904 and 1907 in what had been German South-West Africa.
5 Belgium apologized to the Congolese people for the 1961 assassination of
6 the country's Prime Minister following the release of its own parliamen-
7 tary commission's finding that Belgium had been 'morally responsible' for
8 his death. In November 1995, the Queen of Great Britain and Northern
9 Ireland signed an apology expressing regret for the seizure of Maori land
10 in New Zealand by the British colonizers in 1863. British Prime Minister
11 Tony Blair dabbled with, but skirted, an apology to the Irish, first in the
12 more remote context of the Great Potato Famine and second with respect
13 to more recent violence. President Bill Clinton expressed regret for US
14 support of African dictators during the Cold War, and in 1993, he signed
15 Public Law 103-50, the Apology Resolution to Native Hawaiians, marking
16 the hundredth anniversary of the overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii.
17 Earlier, President Ronald Reagan signed into law the Civil Liberties Act of
18 1988, declaring that historical injustices ought to be amended, granting
19 a formal apology and authorizing US\$20,000 in compensatory redress to
20 each survivor of America's Second World War programme of mass exclu-
21 sion and detention of Japanese Americans.

22 The transnational violations of slavery gave rise to an appropriately
23 global (though short-lived) apology debate, which took place when a
24 collective, international apology for slavery and the slave trade rose to
25 become one of the key issues and points of contention during the United
26 Nations World Conference on Racism in Durban in 2001. A particularly
27 dramatic apology was the Reconciliation Walk repenting the crusades
28 and more generally the wrongs of Christendom. In this case, there was
29 no representative leader, but rather over 2150 Christians, mostly evan-
30 gelical Protestants, who began their new crusade on Easter Sunday 1996
31 in Cologne, the same city where the Crusades had begun 900 years ear-
32 lier, and retraced the steps of the original Crusades, going from town to
33 town and offering their apology.

34 Liberals are optimistic about these trends. Elazar Barkan, for instance,
35 heralds 'the new global trend of restitution for historical injustices' as
36 evidence of a 'neo-Enlightenment' context in which national and ethnic
37 groups are finally granted many of the rights that liberal philosophers
38 ascribed to individuals. Because international public opinion is 'increas-
39 ingly attentive to moral issues', there is 'a potentially new international
40 morality' and a 'new globalism' that could even constitute a 'new inter-
41 national system' (Barkan 2001, 317; Barkan and Karn 2006). Where

1 post-liberals deplore the new memory politics for forgetting economic
2 injustice, liberals think that highlighting past abuses of power pro-
3 motes its responsible use in the present (Gibney and Roxstrom 2001,
4 911–39).

5 Nevertheless, even post-liberal sceptics agree that ‘the international’
6 constitutes the horizon for the many apologies made in the 1990s and
7 2000s. Without the globalization of national political consciousness –
8 acting as if ‘the whole world is watching us’ – there would have been
9 less compulsion to apologize to groups or nations that ‘one’s own’ had
10 oppressed. Correlatively, it was the fact that nations were watching the
11 whole world that created the conditions for apology to spread from
12 one national or regional stage to another. But far from celebrating the
13 renewed rhetoric of human rights and ‘transitional justice’ (Arthur 2009;
14 Teitel 2002) post-liberal critics see this manifestation of globalization as
15 little more than the extension of the North Atlantic (neo)liberal eco-
16 nomic and political order, with the commensurate blindness to struc-
17 tural inequality. The preoccupation with historical injustice encourages
18 a debilitating victim mentality, they argue, setting ethnic and national
19 groups against each other instead of empowering them to band together
20 against the common enemy: transnational capitalism. For instance, the
21 anthropologist Michel Rolph-Trouillot caustically observes:

22
23 Steeped in a language of blood and soil, collectivities are now defined
24 by the wrongs they committed and for which they should apologize,
25 or by the wrongs they suffered and for which they should receive
26 apology. Further, the historical necessity of joining a collectivity of
27 collectivities best known as ‘the international community’ prompts
28 these newly redefined subjects to play out the liberal social contract
29 on a global scale.

30 (Rolph-Trouillot 2000, 183)

31
32 Philosophically questionable as attributing individual liberal rights to
33 large groups may be, the intensely emotional debates about national
34 pasts, which evoke guilt and shame on the one hand and pride and hon-
35 our on the other, indicate that analysis limited to the function of such
36 acts omits their important affective and symbolic dimensions. Trauma,
37 whether experienced personally or transmitted inter-generationally, is
38 not just a cultural construction, and powerful arguments have been
39 advanced about the therapeutic expression of anger and resentment
40 by victims of abuse. If political apologies, truth commissions and other
41 reparatory gestures are enabled by globalization, they are experienced

1 locally by subjects for whom ethnic and/or national belonging and
2 trauma associated with such identities are elemental to their sense of
3 self (Volkan 2003, 217–36; Brudhold 2008).

4 Nowhere has the fractious nature of political apologies been as central
5 to the national drama as in Australia. From the later 1990s, following
6 the official recommendation of the report of the National Inquiry into
7 the Removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from their
8 Families – the ‘Bringing Them Home Report’ of 1997 (HREOC 1997) –
9 significant numbers of Australians began campaigning for their national
10 government to officially apologize to indigenous people for removal
11 policies. In the years immediately following the release of the report,
12 state (for example, provincial) government, churches, police forces and
13 other groups apologized pursuant to its recommendations. The conserv-
14 ative federal (that is, national) government, however, stubbornly refused.
15 Indeed, this refusal became a signifier for its broader repudiation of the
16 view that contemporary politics ought to be conducted in the light of
17 Australia’s troubled past. Only the election of a centre-left Labour gov-
18 ernment in late 2007 saw the new Prime Minister, Kevin Rudd, deliver an
19 apology, his first act in the new parliament, on 13 February 2008. Making
20 front page news around the world, Rudd’s gesture was emulated months
21 later by the Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who apologized
22 to the approximately 150,000 First Nations victims of the country’s
23 boarding school policy of assimilation (Diebel 2008).

24 From the first, Rudd’s announcement of an official apology provoked
25 controversy. Some indigenous leaders campaigned for reparations to be
26 included, and when they were not, indigenous academics and activ-
27 ists abroad said the government had engaged in ‘cheap reconciliation’
28 (Corntassel and Holder 2008, 465–89). In an unlikely coalition, conserva-
29 tive commentators shared this hostility to perceived ‘glib compassion’ and
30 feared that an apology would be ‘abject’ (Albrechtsen 2008). Indeed,
31 consistent with the long-standing arguments of the previous gov-
32 ernment, many Australians continued to feel that they were being
33 found collectively guilty for the acts of past generations. These acts were
34 well-intentioned, if misguided, they claimed, and they resented the
35 implication that they were ‘irredeemably racist, sexist, and xenophobic’
36 (Henderson 2008). Then there was confusion about what an apology
37 actually meant, while philosophers wondered whether it made sense to
38 apologize for deeds that, if not committed, could mean that the current
39 generation may not exist (Le Couteur 2001, 146–58; Thompson 2000,
40 470–5).² Leftist critics, for their part, were disappointed that the Prime
41 Minister did not mention that the ‘Bringing Them Home’ report judged

1 the removal policies to be genocidal, nor that he failed to apologize for
2 colonial occupation as a whole. And they were suspicious of the accom-
3 panying 'reconciliation' rhetoric which suggested that indigenous trauma
4 had now been tidily addressed in a healed and conflict-free nation (Barta
5 2008, 201–14; Attwood 2008, 217–38).

6 It is true that the apology omitted frontier violence, that it offered an
7 opportunity for settler Australians to feel morally upstanding ('a warm
8 inner glow' was the common phrase), that it was not coupled with
9 reparations and that it was couched in the charged language of 'national
10 healing' and a 'reconciled' future. But the striking fact is that many
11 indigenous Australians welcomed it nonetheless. If the addressees of the
12 apology accepted it as a meaningful, effective and not merely ideological
13 act, then scholarly analysis needs to explain how and why it could be
14 an exemplar of 'political action' (Arendt 1958) rather than pontificating
15 about supposed shortcomings deduced from theoretical postulates. That
16 is our aim in this chapter. We proceed in four steps: first, we provide
17 a brief history of the apology in Australia; secondly, we survey the reac-
18 tion of indigenous people; thirdly, we analyse its post-liberal critique;
19 and lastly we turn to our own argument about its efficacy.

21 The apology

22
23 Indigenous disquiet and activism in the 1980s and early 1990s about
24 the forced removal of children culminated in a demand for a national
25 inquiry into a practice and policy which, despite its persistence right
26 into the late 1960s, was virtually unknown beyond indigenous commu-
27 nities and certainly unacknowledged in any official sense. The federal
28 (then centre-left Labour) government initiated such an inquiry in 1995,
29 to be conducted by the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunity
30 Commission. In a slightly earlier development, in 1991, the same federal
31 government had established the 'Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation'
32 (CAR) to commence a formal process of reconciliation between indig-
33 enous and non-indigenous Australians, an alternative to a treaty, the
34 latter having been advocated by many indigenous groups but regarded
35 as politically unviable by the government. The Council's mission was to
36 promote its goal – 'A united Australia which respects this land of ours;
37 values the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage; and provides
38 justice and equity for all' – within ten years by educating non-indigen-
39 Australian about indigenous issues (CAR).

40 In 1997, the Commission tabled its nearly 700-page long report,
41 'Bringing Them Home', which recommended, *inter alia*, that all Australian

1 parliaments and other responsible agents tender formal apologies to
2 indigenous Australians and that a national 'Sorry Day' be established.³ It
3 also recommended that all Australian parliaments, as well as police forces
4 and the churches and other non-governmental organizations that played
5 a role in removal, officially acknowledge responsibility of their predeces-
6 sors, and that they negotiate an appropriate form of words for public
7 apologies to indigenous individuals, families and communities (HREOC,
8 Recommendations 5a, 5b and 6). These recommendations sparked the
9 formation of a 'National Sorry Day Committee', which organized the first
10 'Sorry Day' ceremony in 1998.

11 Henceforth, 'saying sorry' became a national obsession, but also one
12 entangled in the broader discourse of reconciliation. The apology was,
13 for example, a central plank of the 'Corroboree 2000' conference of the
14 CAR, when approximately one million Australians marched in state
15 capitals across the country with banners saying 'sorry'. 'Sorry Books',
16 open for any Australian to sign, circulated the country. People could
17 also register their names on the apology website, which in early 2004
18 contained about 250,000 names. 'Seas of Hands', made up of coloured
19 hands that individuals planted to mark both apology and the desire to
20 'reconcile' sprang up across the country from Bondi Beach to Uluru and
21 the lawns of Parliament House.

22 The reasons for such popular empathy lay in the nature of the 'Bringing
23 Them Home' report. Here was a story of children (many of whom were
24 the contemporaries of the politically active public), who had committed
25 no crime other than being born to an Aboriginal mother, but who had
26 suffered horrors anyone could relate to in a very personal way. Perhaps
27 even more staggering was the national silence that had accompanied the
28 practice. Against this national silence, the Commission compiled exten-
29 sive evidence of the history, drawn from written and oral submissions
30 from government departments, non-governmental agencies, expert wit-
31 nesses and, most importantly, hundreds of Aboriginal people who had
32 themselves been removed or had been directly affected by removal.⁴
33 Indeed, what lent the report its particular power was the way in which
34 this text, the official report of the Australian Commonwealth, built its
35 vision of history and its policy arguments from the first-person testimo-
36 nies of Aboriginal people. Each section was suffused with the voices of
37 Aboriginal people telling the very stories that had been excluded from
38 the official history of the Australian nation and, above all, telling them
39 with their own voices – the voices that had not qualified as legitimate
40 subjects (as distinct from objects) of history. Their memories became
41 our history and, critically, part of the history of the nation.

1 After 'Bringing Them Home' called for an apology, saying sorry and
2 performing repentance became a national motif. Apologies proliferated
3 across the social, geographical and political landscape. First, there were
4 apologies from groups directly nominated in the recommendations. All
5 Australian parliaments (with the notable absence of the Commonwealth,
6 right until 2008) tendered official apologies staged as part of dramatic,
7 performative sequences held in their ceremonial chambers.⁵ Chief mag-
8 istrates apologized and apologies were tendered on behalf of state police
9 forces, as well as on behalf of a range of governmental agencies. The offi-
10 cial organs of a number of churches apologized, specifically those that
11 were directly involved in the process of removal, but also some with no
12 direct historical role.⁶ Apologies also went well beyond the formal rec-
13 ommendations, issuing from a plethora of groups not specifically men-
14 tioned, but which nevertheless felt called to the discourse. Some drew
15 an explicit connection between their role and the practice of removal.⁷
16 But others, with no apparent connection with removal, such as trade
17 unions, civic clubs and associations, schools and parents' and citizens'
18 associations, also saw fit to tender formal apologies.

19 Against this cacophony of repentant voices, Prime Minister John
20 Howard's explicit long-term refusal to apologize resounded in its silence.
21 His main objection was that it was wrong for contemporary Australians
22 to apologize for something for which they were not personally respon-
23 sible, but he also defended the policy as well-intentioned and even
24 occasionally highly successful, albeit perhaps (in retrospect) mistaken.
25 He was willing to express his sadness for the suffering of individuals, but
26 only in an entirely personal and not a representative capacity. When,
27 at the launch of the report at the National Reconciliation Convention
28 in May 1997, Howard offered a carefully circumscribed expression
29 of personal sorrow, members of the audience rose and turned their
30 backs – a strong mark of contempt and refusal to recognize or respect
31 his authority.⁸

32 Howard was certainly not alone and his stance attracted support from
33 a significant number of Australians.⁹ Its unintended effect, however, was
34 to raise the stakes of the debate. Many of the groups that had apologized
35 now turned their public statements to calls for the Prime Minister to
36 apologize. If the apology movement had had some intrinsic half-life,
37 Howard's silence – or more accurately the particular form of words he
38 was willing to enunciate,¹⁰ and his deployment of the issue as a rally-
39 ing point for his version of Australian identity, politics and history –
40 ensured that the issue would remain on the public agenda. And so
41 it did, right until the change of government ten years later, where it

1 became the staging for the new Prime Minister to announce a change
2 in Australia's political culture.

3 In 2007, after 11 years, the Howard-led conservative government was
4 defeated by Labour, with a national apology explicitly at the top of its
5 political agenda. Indeed, in a remarkably powerful piece of political
6 performance, on 13 February 2008, at 9 a.m. sharp, as the first piece of
7 business of the new parliament, and in the presence of members of the
8 stolen generation and their families, the new Prime Minister tendered
9 a formal apology. Four former Prime Ministers from both sides of the
10 political divide were present, the most recent only in the form of the
11 new Prime Minister's pointed reference to the 'stony, stubborn and deaf-
12 ening silence' of the nation's parliament for more than a decade. That
13 morning, silence took on a different form as the members and guests
14 inside, the thousands of people watching giant screens on the lawns
15 outside, the tens of thousands gathered in city squares and the 1.3 mil-
16 lion watching as every television station in the country simulcast the
17 apology were transfixed by Rudd's words.

18 The apology itself was a masterful piece of political rhetoric and broadly
19 acknowledged as such (CoA2). It began with a statement of respect for
20 Australia's indigenous peoples, briefly moved through reflection on the
21 blemished aspect of Australia's history and then paused to declare that
22 we had come to a pause in history, the time to right the wrongs. Rudd
23 then enunciated five apologies: for the laws and policies of successive
24 governments and parliaments that had inflicted profound grief, suffering
25 and loss on fellow Australians; for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres
26 Strait Islander children from their families, communities and country; for
27 the pain, suffering and hurt of the stolen generations, their descendants
28 and their families left behind; for the breaking up of families and com-
29 munities; and for the indignity and degradation thus inflicted on a proud
30 people and culture. He then requested that the apology be received in the
31 spirit in which it had been given, and made seven statements about the
32 future: that this moment opens a new page of the future; that by virtue
33 of acknowledging the past, we might lay claim to a future that embraces
34 all Australians; a future where the injustices of the past must never hap-
35 pen again; a future where we harness the determination of all Australians
36 (indigenous and non-indigenous together) to close the socio-economic
37 gap; a future of new solutions to enduring problems; a future based
38 on mutual respect, resolve and responsibility; and, finally, a future of
39 genuine equality.

40 Following the formal apology, Rudd meticulously described the his-
41 tory of removal, the abuses inflicted, his own encounter with people's

1 resultant suffering and the reasons why it was critical for the nation
2 to apologize. Occupying both the symbolic body of the representative
3 of the nation and the very human body of a man profoundly affected
4 by shame and sadness for the suffering of particular human beings, his
5 speech navigated the complex personal and political character of the
6 apology. His address closed with a call to the nation to bring the two
7 centuries of Australia's racially divided history to a close, and to enter the
8 future with new eyes and new forms of mutual recognition. He invited
9 all Australians, indigenous and non-indigenous, government and oppo-
10 sition, State and Commonwealth, first peoples, the first white arrivals
11 and the most recently arrived Australians to turn the page and begin to
12 write a new history. There was a palpable sense that a new future had
13 been laid out in front of the entire nation.

14 The aspirational national unity was of course imperfect. After much
15 internal struggle, the former party of government, now the opposition,
16 resolved that it would support the apology, but continuous with its ambiv-
17 alence, the speech that Brendan Nelson (the Leader of the Opposition)
18 gave immediately following Rudd's was peppered with qualifications,
19 including references to the often 'well-intentioned' nature of the policy
20 (CoA3). Consistent with a decade's battles over history, Nelson went
21 to great pains to ensure that for every acknowledgement of the wrongs
22 experienced by indigenous peoples, there was a parallel narrative about
23 the struggle of the non-indigenous peoples who 'settled' the nation. Like
24 Rudd, he called for an act of imagination whereby we place ourselves in
25 the shoes of others, but his concern was to ensure sympathetic imagin-
26 ings of those who might be perpetrators. What he saw as balance, how-
27 ever, others experienced as insult; gatherings of people watching the
28 performance turned their backs on the screens or turned the sound off
29 altogether. The opposition's speech raised the ire of many people who
30 resented its meanness on a day that seemed to be about unqualified
31 recognition, but in a relatively short time it fell back to the status of an
32 annoyance, like an irritating fly on a perfect day.

33 Those who might have thought that after years of feet-dragging the
34 moment, when it came, would mean little could not have been more
35 wrong. Many people who had expressed cynicism about the apology,
36 even those who were not sympathetic to the new government, found
37 themselves profoundly involved and affected. Over the following days
38 and weeks, the press, radio talk-back and face-to-face conversations were
39 full of deeply emotional responses by Australians to the words 'I say sorry'
40 given pride of place by the national government, and the unprecedented
41

1 hope that this might indeed be a turning point in Australia's political culture.
2 As Don Watson, the historian who had penned the famous Redfern
3 address to indigenous Australians for former Labour Prime Minister Paul
4 Keating in 1992, put it a few days later:

5
6 I think it's a different country since Wednesday [...] It's a bit different
7 in most of our heads, whether we're for or against it. And I think
8 that Kevin Rudd has given a sort of moral compass to the matter
9 of our relations with Aboriginal Australia [...] It's the sort of thing
10 by which we can steer in future [...] next time a bureaucracy, State
11 government, Federal, or whatever, fails to provide those things they
12 have promised to provide, or are supposed to provide in Aboriginal
13 communities, then they can in some way be held to moral account.
14 That's what words can do for the country, and I think Kevin Rudd's
15 words were of that order.

16 *(Radio National)*

17 18 **Indigenous reactions**

19
20 Watson's analysis was similar to that of indigenous leaders and ordinary
21 folk, many of whom had travelled to Parliament House in Canberra
22 to watch the apology on large public viewing screens. We quote their
23 responses at length so that their voices may be heard. They reveal a
24 number of themes: first, that acknowledgement of their suffering was
25 personally significant; and second, that they now felt part of the national
26 story, which was future-oriented and optimistic. They were engaged in
27 both an indigenous and broader national journey. Integration into the
28 political community ('the nation') did not entail the effacement of their
29 Aboriginality. On the contrary, their new feeling of full citizenship enabled
30 them to make distinctive and enduring claims.

31 The official acknowledgement of the Stolen Generation was welcomed
32 effusively by indigenous people. Tom Calma, the Aboriginal and Torres
33 Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner, said that the 'national apology
34 will directly benefit members of the Stolen Generations by validating
35 their experiences and the rest of society as a whole by building a
36 bridge between all Australians' (HREOC 2008). 'I thought it was wonderful,
37 a light shone upon us', declared Chris Stewart, whose grandmother and
38 mother had been stolen (*Herald 1*). Michael McLeod explained the effect
39 of the apology thus: 'I never expected to hear that in my lifetime.
40 Personally, this is part of my healing process – just the recognition on
41

1 that level. It's moving and it's hit me' (Karvelas and Rintoul 2008). The
2 popular Olympic athlete, Cathy Freeman, echoed these sentiments:

3
4 [S]aying sorry will mean so much to so many people. It is going to be
5 a really proud moment for us. For my family, it allows some kind of
6 healing and forgiveness to take place where there is less anger and bit-
7 terness in the hearts of people. It takes away the pain. We will never
8 forget, but this allows us to forgive. In the Prime Minister doing this,
9 we are seeing understanding and acknowledgement.

10 (Koch 2008)

11
12 The reaction of Christine Fejo-King, a Larrikia, Warrangumu woman from
13 the Northern Territory and co-chairperson of the Stolen Generations
14 Alliance, was characteristic:

15
16 For members of the Stolen Generations, their descendents and families,
17 it was a day filled with high emotions. We shed tears of sadness and joy.
18 We hugged with happiness and for comfort. And for many of us, it was
19 the relief and peace we had been searching for, for so long [...] Saying
20 'Sorry' was the right thing to do. Past government policies and prac-
21 tices of removing Indigenous children have damaged so many peoples'
22 lives. Saying 'Sorry' acknowledged the past, the trauma it caused at the
23 time, and the hurt and suffering it continues to cause today.

24 (Fejo-King) **AQ1**

25
26 Full membership of the national community now seemed like a realistic
27 possibility. Brian Butler, who had led the earliest calls for the Inquiry in
28 the 1980s, said that the apology meant that 'we can feel that we are part
29 of Australia. We are part of society' (Irvine 2008). Noel Tovey, who had
30 been removed as a child, agreed: 'It wasn't just saying sorry for what hap-
31 pened, but I'm sorry for 200 years, and now we are all part of Australia.
32 It's the start of a new beginning. It's hugely important' (Patty 2008). Chris
33 Sarra, head of the Indigenous Education Leadership Institute, agreed that
34 the apology made 'a profound difference'. It gave 'people confidence
35 that here is a government that is prepared to do things with Aboriginal
36 communities rather than to Aboriginal communities' (Coorey 2008).

37 The theme of 'national healing' was prominent in indigenous responses.
38 According to Christine Fejo-King:

39
40 The Federal Government's apology to the Stolen Generations was not
41 just about healing for Aboriginal people. It was also about the healing

1 of our nation. It was a proud moment when we, as a country, were
2 mature enough to recognise a dark chapter of our history, face it, and
3 look towards a better future for all. The act of saying sorry laid an
4 important foundation stone for all of us to move forward together.

(Fejo-King) **AQ2**

5
6
7 Marcia Langton, Professor of Australian Indigenous Studies at the University
8 of Melbourne, likewise addressed this theme:

9
10 The nation would be healed if we could consign this history to our
11 past by admitting that it was wrong to take children from their
12 families in order to prevent Aboriginal ways of life and traditions
13 from continuing. I ask that all Australians understand this part of
14 our history and recognise that such terrible wrongs must never be
15 repeated.

(Langton 2008)

16
17
18 For prominent indigenous legal scholar, Larissa Behrendt, the apology
19 was part of a journey of healing for both indigenous and non-indigenous
20 Australians:

21
22 The apology is [...] another step in the healing process for many
23 Aboriginal people who are on the journey home after being removed
24 from their families. It's also another step forward in the broader nar-
25 rative that Australians want to tell themselves about who they are,
26 where they have come from, where our country is headed, and what
27 the political value of home means in Australia.

(Behrendt 2009, 84)

28
29
30 Although the apology apparently took the past as its referent, the repeated
31 references to new national membership and the notion of journeys,
32 'going forward together', 'new chapters' and even 'rebirth', implied that
33 it trained people's eyes towards open futures. Torres Strait Islander Lydia
34 George said, 'The first [Rudd] speech was very symbolic ... I was think-
35 ing of my granddaughter and her future is now, not tomorrow. She'll
36 face a new future that will be bright. The healing process has begun [*sic*]'
37 (Narushima 2008). Aboriginal actor Ernie Dingo said, '[It is] a chance
38 to rejoice, rebirth ... knowing that what has happened over the last 80
39 years has not been swept under the carpet' (Irvine 2008). Noel Tovey
40 said, 'It's also now possible after today for everyone to go forward. I've
41 had people say sorry many times in my life, but that had a particular

1 meaning' (Patty 2008). Ray Fine told a journalist: 'My family had been
 2 affected directly and I felt like a chain had finally broke from us. There's
 3 still racism to deal with but hopefully from this day we'll go forward
 4 together' (Narushima 2008). Rhonda Dixon-Grovener, from a family that
 5 had 13 members removed, remarked, 'To hear this and see this and be
 6 part of this in my lifetime, it's made me feel that maybe there is a new
 7 beginning for Aboriginal people in Australia'. Walgrett-born elder Auntie **AQ3**
 8 Beryl Van-Oploo said that she had 'been in tears for two days just from
 9 remembering the people that fought for our rights. Because my dad had
 10 not [...] I do applaud the Prime Minister and I do applaud the Parliament
 11 [...] I hope we can all move forward together' (*Herald 2*).

12 These themes of a better indigenous and common Australian future
 13 were ubiquitous in speeches by indigenous leaders. Christine Fejo-King
 14 said of the apology: 'We've just had the most momentous thing happen
 15 in the history of this country [...] This is a journey that we're on. We
 16 haven't reached the end' (*NIT 1*). She continued:

17
 18 [The apology] cannot erase the memories and experiences that scar
 19 many members of Stolen Generations. But it's the start of a new chap-
 20 ter. Now is the time for us to write a new future for all Australians
 21 so that no child will grow up to be discriminated against because of
 22 their race or the colour of their skin. And all children will have the
 23 same opportunities to achieve and be the best they can.

24 (Fejo-King)

25
 26 Chris Graham, editor of the *National Indigenous Times*, who overcame his
 27 deep scepticism about the apology after the event, summarized his new
 28 position thus:

29
 30 Rudd's speech marks the end of ignorance and arrogance. The work,
 31 obviously, is far from done. And don't doubt for a minute that Rudd
 32 won't be at the centre of plenty of disputes as we move forward. But
 33 in apologizing to members of the Stolen Generations, Rudd has pro-
 34 vided a roadmap to the future for this nation, built on mutual respect
 35 and understanding. Or in his own words, a 'new beginning'.

36 (Graham 2008)

37
 38 Professor Mick Dodson, a member of the Yawuru peoples, co-chairman
 39 of Reconciliation Australia, director of the National Centre for Indig-
 40 enous Studies at the Australian National University and co-chair of
 41 the original National Inquiry, echoed this when he said, 'The apology

1 to indigenous Australians is not about dwelling on the past, it's about
2 building a future'.
3

4 The significant action being taken today by the Australian Parliament
5 will provide a foundation of respect on which we can build a proper
6 relationship and work together to make things better. It is only one
7 piece of the complex puzzle of reconciliation, but it is the corner piece
8 that sets us on our way. I am inspired by this apology as an act of
9 true reconciliation towards indigenous Australia. It allows us to move
10 forward with honesty, an acceptance of shame about parts of our his-
11 tory and with courage, pride, maturity and hope. It is delivered in an
12 environment of determination that may just see us addressing the
13 unfinished business of reconciliation, demonstrated in stark terms by
14 the 17-year life expectancy gap between our children.

15 (M. Dodson 2008)
16

17 His brother, Patrick, chairman of the Lingiari Foundation and the
18 founding chairman of the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, like-
19 wise hailed the historical significance of the apology for opening up
20 both an indigenous and a common Australian future:
21

22 A simple word has opened the door to a better future for all. [...] We
23 have at this point in Australian history an opportunity for a national
24 renaissance based on modern settler Australia connecting with those
25 who have occupied and managed these lands for countless millen-
26 nia. In this process we have the liberating potential to forge a unique
27 national identity and purpose; one that rises above the tragedy of our
28 colonial and racist history and enshrines respect for cultural diversity
29 as a pivotal cornerstone of our nation's existence. The saying of these
30 few words in our national Parliament does open the bridge to the
31 future, a future we can share, a future we can shape, a future we shall
32 achieve if we have the courage. For the first time in many years the
33 resolution of the unfinished business between us seems possible.

34 (P. Dodson 2008)
35

36 Larissa Behrendt referred to both a national and an indigenous agenda.
37 For the former, now constituted by an indigenous and non-indigenous
38 collective 'we', there were common tasks.
39

40 For the Aboriginal people I spoke to, it was uplifting to see that
41 so many Australians did not share Howard's view, one that had

1 dominated for so long, but instead clearly understood that they
2 could not escape what happened in the past and should acknowl-
3 edge that, without guilt, but with a positive view about how we can
4 do better in the future.

(Behrendt 2009)

5
6
7 The apology was not of course seen by indigenous peoples as a universal
8 panacea. Indigenous leaders Lowitja O'Donoghue, Mick Dodson, Pat
9 Dodson, Larissa Behrendt, Michael Mansell and others insisted that it
10 was not inconsistent with and should not put an end to the demand for
11 material compensation (*NIT* 2; Coorey 2008). 'The Fight [for compensa-
12 tion] Continues', declared indigenous journalist Amy McQuire eleven
13 months after the apology (McQuire 2008). And there was ambivalence
14 from other indigenous people. Walangari Kartanwarra said, 'I still have
15 mixed emotions. It will probably be a year later before things start to
16 happen and people start to feel Aboriginal people belong' (Jopson 2008).
17 Edward Alfred Lovett, Elder of the Gunditjmarra Nation, said:

18
19 So how can I accept an apology without proper compensation for
20 all the injustices, pain and suffering that I experienced as an indig-
21 enous person that resulted from government policies and procedures?
22 Words alone can never make up for the loss of family and for what
23 many of us suffered in institutions. The word 'sorry' cannot mean
24 anything to me as an individual without compensation for the pain
25 and suffering that occurred during the colonization and dispossession
26 of my people.

(Lovett 2008)

27
28
29 John Moriarty was upset that the apology omitted 'cultural genocide',
30 while Mick Edwards doubted that any gestures would suffice: 'How can
31 you compensate for a broken mind?' (Karvelas and Rintoul 2008; Cooke
32 2008).

33 34 **Post-liberal critique of reconciliation and the apology**

35
36 The principle intellectual opposition to the apology and 'reconciliation',
37 however, came not from indigenous intellectuals or even conservatives,
38 who were defeated politically in late 2007 and who grudgingly supported
39 the apology largely for pragmatic reasons. It came from post-colonial
40 critics for whom apologies are the latest technique of colonial domi-
41 nation. The means of oppression is no longer outright racism but the

1 optimistic liberalism of multiculturalism that allows national elites and
2 populations to think they have solved the problem of indigenous (or
3 minority) alterity. This style of argument is popular in North American
4 anthropology in particular, which has made 'late liberalism' its object of
5 inquiry (having lost interest in 'late capitalism'). Multiculturalism and
6 human rights discourses in Guatemala and Mexico, for instance, are
7 held to be a greater 'menace' to indigenous people than previous poli-
8 cies of assimilation (Hale 2002, 485–524; Speed 2005, 29–47).¹² Elizabeth
9 Povinelli has applied this paradigm to 'Australian liberal multicultur-
10 alism', which she regards as 'an ideology and practice of governance'
11 (Povinelli 2002).¹³

12 The principal fear of post-colonial/post-liberal critics is that the pre-
13 sumed totalism of liberal governmentality and liberal (for example non-
14 indigenous) subjectivity effaces the radical alterity of indigeneity. There
15 is a danger of essentializing indigenous otherness as a form of resist-
16 ance to colonialism and the capitalist imaginary, and of these critics
17 projecting the 'rebellious academic subjectivity' into their ethnographic
18 observations (Brown 1996, 729–35; Morton 1998, 355–85). This move
19 is particularly evident in a much-cited critique of apologies by Haydie
20 Gooder and Jane Jacobs, who mocked the apologizers as 'sorry people'
21 (Gooder and Jacobs 2000, 229–47). The problem with apology, accord-
22 ing to this line of attack, was that even as the apology acknowledged a
23 historical failure, it nevertheless affirmed a core of goodness, providing
24 assurance that at base, the nation did have the right norms, be they
25 equality, unity or respect for the law; the only problem was that some
26 people had misunderstood or misinterpreted them, or failed to realize
27 them in historical time. Thus, it was not those fundamental orienting
28 norms that needed to be corrected, or amended, but rather their histori-
29 cal realization.

30 But what if it is not the failure to realize those foundational norms,
31 but rather the norms themselves that are the source of the violation? If
32 that is the case, then realizing them in however perfect a form would
33 only reinforce the problem. In other words, if the nation is, at core,
34 constituted around inequality or non-recognition of a particular type
35 of other, then apology's dynamic of return to those fundamental values
36 can never break through the conceit that underpinned the abuse.

37 To understand the thrust of this critique, it is important to differenti-
38 ate it from more standard criticisms for which it might be mistaken;
39 that is, those that see apology as hypocritical or worthless because it is a
40 superficial, merely symbolic/rhetorical measure, substituting words for
41 harder forms of 'real' justice, for example monetary compensation.¹⁴

1 This analysis accepts the value and importance of the symbolic in
2 politics, but faults the type of symbolic work of reconciliation afforded
3 by the apology.¹⁵ Apology is seen here as pasting together the political
4 imaginary of the nation in a way that forecloses representation of the
5 very real divisions and inequalities. Because harmonious unification is its
6 ultimate value, the apology renders invisible the differences that persist
7 without actually addressing them. From the point of view of these crit-
8 ics, the Australian apology prematurely glossed the ‘fractured Australia’,
9 whereas what Australians needed to do was keep this fractured image
10 firmly in view as continued incentive for the long road of justice that
11 lay ahead.

12 The apology may have claimed to affect a form of restorative justice
13 by attending to the losses suffered by indigenous people. Indeed, in
14 apologizing it might have sounded like white Australia was returning
15 to indigenous people their lost ideal and objects. In fact, if the apology
16 was returning anything, it was the ‘settlement’ that the settler nation
17 had been gradually losing. A litany of public remembrances of its vio-
18 lent past had disrupted white Australia’s long and comfortable slumber
19 in the ignorance of its own illegitimate political heritage. When these
20 were capped by the very intimate and affecting narrative of stealing
21 Aboriginal children, Australians could no longer avoid the ugly mirror.
22 Still worse, the legitimacy they could no longer find in their own post-
23 colonial identity now seemed to be firmly rooted in Aboriginal Australia.
24 If, in the classical colonial narrative, indigeneity had been the mark of
25 illegitimacy, now, as Gooder and Jacobs observe, it ‘assumed a legitimacy
26 in excess of that which can be claimed by the colonial’ (ibid., 236).
27 Faced with their experience of lack (of a long or dignified history and
28 legitimate sovereignty) and the corresponding projection of indigenous
29 Australia as abundance (of history and authentic connection to the
30 country), white Australians looked for a strategy to return their lost
31 object. And it was at this juncture that they apologized, turning to indig-
32 enous Australians for forgiveness as a way of restoring the lost ideal of
33 legitimate place and nationhood. If restitution was at work here, what
34 was restored was white Australia’s national imaginary: its conception of
35 itself as the principled, legitimate sovereign nation.

36 The argument puts a bitter twist on what had been touted as an act
37 of recognition and respect. The indigenous other is asked to affirm their
38 oppressor as worthy of love after all, even as legitimate in its sover-
39 eign claim, despite the very history that this process has brought into
40 view: a history of hatred and disrespect on the part of non-indigenous
41 Australia. The past, then, does no more than serve as an earlier stage in a

1 progressive, even a redemptive history. All the threads and perspectives,
2 no matter how disparate, can apparently be stitched together into the
3 grand, national narrative, now in the form of the 'sorry' nation. Ideally,
4 there would be no residues, no experiences, events, perspectives or pat-
5 terns of relation that resist integration and remain uncoded, unspeak-
6 able, beyond apology. All that would have been left behind.

7 As theorized here, then, apology appropriates the aspect of shame and
8 the language of inclusion only so as to reconstitute the self-same national
9 form and institutional rules, but now with their lost legitimacy returned
10 to the fold. True, it involves the recognition of the historical conflict
11 between the indigenous and non-indigenous; but this is only a way
12 station to blurring the difference between them so that all can become
13 legitimate Australians. By distancing themselves from the acts of dispos-
14 session, white Australians symbolically join with the dispossessed and
15 perform their allegiance to the rightful values of respect and recogni-
16 tion. With this they can re-settle, but without subjecting those values
17 themselves to the critical evaluation that the indigenous perspective
18 should be opening up.¹⁶ Cleansed of the sully sense of itself as the
19 perpetrator of an illegitimate theft (of children, of land, of sovereignty),
20 Australia can now stand proud in its national identity and better carry
21 on the basic neo-colonial project.¹⁷ Indigeneity is thus symbolically
22 revalued, but in a tamed, reappropriated version. It becomes Australia's
23 unique token, the icon it places at the beginning of its Olympic Games'
24 opening ceremony, the identity it can now use to distinguish itself from
25 an increasingly culturally flat West. In this sense, the apologetic act is
26 ultimately one of narcissism and not recognition.¹⁸

27 28 **The apology: Just more colonialism?** 29

30 The lynchpin of these critics' argument is that apology is always bound
31 to the original norms. No matter how sorry we are, we are always at best
32 affirming our original views about how things ought to be, albeit in a
33 slightly expanded version. Justice for indigenous people, however, does
34 not simply require a quantitative expansion of norms that are, after all,
35 fundamentally neo-colonial. A full justice for the first Australians requires
36 a more radical qualitative break with those norms. The issue is not sim-
37 ply one of re-evaluating who should be included, but also what they
38 should be included in. Indeed, the very assumption that justice for
39 indigenous people can be done through the expansion of the existing
40 vision of justice and citizenship in Australia is just another product of
41 the underlying failure to recognize the different political culture and

1 social organization of indigenous peoples. At best, what apology can
2 recognize is that the historical Australia has not been true to its own
3 normative claim to be a liberal egalitarian nation and seek to repair the
4 disparity between the vertical (ideal) and horizontal (historical) norms.
5 It can even expand the conceptualization of those vertical norms them-
6 selves: for example, to whom equality applies and what it means. But it
7 cannot fundamentally contradict the essential normative orientation of
8 the neo-colonial state. If it did, it would be affecting an absolute break
9 in its identity and undermining its own legitimacy. And this, these crit-
10 ics contend, is logically beyond the limits of apology.

11 In evaluating the post-liberal argument, the critical question is thus
12 whether the reform of the self can only involve an aesthetic rearrange-
13 ment of existing norms, or whether it can put those norms into question.
14 Is the voice of the excluded other admitted only conditionally, through
15 the filter of entrenched norms that will always exclude its most chal-
16 lenging claims or cast them in its own image, or might it enter into the
17 apologetic discourse to challenge the polity's fundamental rules? Can
18 apology force revision of the norms around which a political community
19 has constituted itself, or is it essentially a conservative act, reinforcing
20 the original norms.

21 The important point to note here is that this line of criticism is not
22 simply accusing Australians of a lack of political will, or of abusing their
23 apologetic discourse so as to conserve their original values and orienta-
24 tions. This is not an empirical critique of the failure of the movement
25 to live up to apology's potential. Rather, it suggests that this type of
26 conservative action is located at the heart of the apologetic dynamic. We
27 must ask, however, what is the structural or logical reason that apology
28 necessarily entails a return to original values? Why, in apologizing, would
29 the subject necessarily be looking back to its constitutive norms, rather
30 than looking out to other extrinsic sources? When apologies were the
31 property of religious communities, where the constitution of the com-
32 munity itself seemed to be based on a thick set of absolute immutable
33 norms, one could understand this insistence, but one might think that
34 by definition liberal democracies allow for the revaluation of values in
35 the light of ongoing experience.¹⁹ If not, then in the background is an
36 accusation that despite its apparent normative fluidity, the secular nation
37 is also constituted around certain thick and immutable norms and that
38 its identity is bound up with these to the core. If so, then to the extent
39 that its apology is oriented by norms drawn from an extrinsic and new
40 source, they would not be its norms. Correlatively, to the extent that the
41 members of the community adopt those new norms now as their norms,

1 they would have become a different political community. In so doing,
2 however, the polity would also be breaking with its old self, and so
3 cannot assert the continuity of identity implied by apology.

4 The appeal of what claims to be a purely structural argument is cer-
5 tainly strengthened by the empirical facts: a country characterized by
6 a continuous thread of structural racism. One is well entitled to expect
7 that the next step in that trajectory will be another version of that
8 theme, albeit in the ideological language of remorse. What this argu-
9 ment fails to allow, however, is that it is precisely this logic of continu-
10 ous normative identity that the dynamic of apology calls into question,
11 and offers an alternative. The paradox, or tension that apology uniquely
12 holds in place is the assertion of a continuity and a break between two
13 conflicting normative positions or identities, and it does so by allowing
14 that the expansion of norms in fact requires historical experience and
15 the encounter with the other.

16 To insist that apology's reconstitutive work is monochromically con-
17 servative is to overlook that unique and most powerful quality that
18 Hannah Arendt noted when she observed the radical and unique power
19 of forgiveness (Arendt 1958, 236). What distinguishes the dynamic of
20 apology is precisely this: it opens the possibility of a different future only
21 because it simultaneously asserts continuity, but cannot be fully, logi-
22 cally derived from the past. In saying sorry, Australia was indeed assert-
23 ing that it was the nation that sanctioned removal, even that it was still
24 a nation that fails to fully recognize the rights and dignity of indigenous
25 Australians. At the same time, apparently paradoxically, it was declar-
26 ing that it was not that. Within the apologetic moment, it occupies the
27 conflicting normative identities, and gestures the movement from one
28 to the other.

29 What this implies is that this apology does not integrate all moments
30 of the abusive past into a grand, harmonious narrative stretching from
31 Australia's beginning to its current incarnation. On the contrary, it
32 allows that there are some things that Australia, as constituted, cannot
33 make right, that the historical Australia has committed wrongs that are
34 beyond repair, beyond redemption, even beyond sorry. At best, it can
35 create a punctuation point, a moment to take breath and face the past
36 without explaining it away.

37 Moreover, what makes apology's radical break possible is the fact
38 that the ones apologizing do not find the source of the condemnation
39 in who they are already (as a bounded individual or political commu-
40 nity), but only by virtue of the perspective of the other. It is only an
41 encounter with the other that allows for a development of the existing

1 norms beyond their historical expression. At worst, apology may be a
2 narcissistic, monological act in which I look to the other as a voiceless
3 projection of my own needs, but at best the apology encounter is one
4 in which I judge myself according to a perspective that I could only
5 attain by virtue of being open to the other. It was the other's speech,
6 here literally the testimony of the indigenous Australians, which tore
7 non-indigenous Australia out of itself, and gave it a different view of
8 itself. Taking on that perspective may be deemed appropriation, but it
9 may also be the occasion for an expansion of the original identity. Which
10 of these trajectories emerges will depend on the degree to which the per-
11 spective of the other actually penetrates the discourse of the nation. And
12 this is a contingent and empirical matter, not a logical one.

13 Other scholars have argued, similarly, that a totalizing harmony is not
14 the apology's only implication. 'Negotiated forgiveness' would require
15 'a dialogue between the parties and ultimately for the wrongdoer to
16 accept accountability and responsibility for offending actions' (Mellor
17 et al. 2007, 1–36). The apology is only a moment in the process of nego-
18 tiation, then, suggesting the opening up rather than closing down of
19 political discourse, as the determination of indigenous people to insist
20 both on their autonomous agency and participate in the collective 'we'
21 of the Australian political nation indicated. The apology 'should be
22 understood as a willingness to work together without a presumption of
23 having overcome the past'. This is an open process that is now much **AQ4**
24 more inclusive of indigenous people than before, rather than impos-
25 ing finality or closure as feared by post-colonial critics (La Caze 2006,
26 447–68).

27 Post-liberals may object that such a dialogue not only presupposes a
28 non-existent power symmetry but also a nefarious incorporation of indi-
29 geneity into mainstream discourses. The indigenous people quoted in
30 this chapter indicated that the situation is far more complex than the
31 either/or dichotomy of resistance/incorporation posited by the critics.
32 To theorize out from the experience of people involved in an apolo-
33 getic drama, rather than from the outside in, shows that, for indigenous
34 people in Australia, the apology did not simply reinforce old norms (for
35 example neo-colonialism), but opened a space for those norms to be
36 renegotiated into a now open future. Far from experiencing apology as
37 a new version of an old relational trope (assimilation), their words indi-
38 cate that it opened a new relational space in which they would partici-
39 pate as subjects or authors of the national narrative. Of course, apology
40 did not itself write that narrative, but it seemed to make a clearing in
41 which it might then be co-written. In seeking to make sense of novel

1 political acts like apology in real and not imagined contexts, it is critical
 2 that we listen not only for what we think indigenous people ought to
 3 be saying but to what they actually say.

4 The danger of the post-liberal critique, then, is that, in its theoretic-
 5 ally driven imperative of recognizing alterity, it confuses the alterity
 6 before us with theorists' projection of what alterity ought to be. What is
 7 more, the preoccupation with alterity is insufficiently theorized because
 8 it presumes a consensus about its universal value, a disavowed consen-
 9 sus that Thomas McCarthy calls 'multicultural universalism' (McCarthy
 10 1992). After all, can radical difference be conceived, let alone advocated
 11 and defended, without such a consensus? Far from the apology, reconcil-
 12 iation and multiculturalism representing greater menaces to indig-
 13 enous people than the explicit racism of assimilation, as supposed by
 14 critics of liberal governmentality, they signal that, perhaps for the first
 15 time in Australian history, non-indigenous people will start listening
 16 attentively to indigenous people.

17
 18 **Notes**

- 19
 20 1 They have spawned a huge secondary literature: Tavuchis (1991), Brooks
 21 (1999), Amstutz (2005) and Daly and Sarkin (2006).
 22 2 Thompson (2002) argues that political apologies for historical injustice can be
 23 philosophically coherent.
 24 3 Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC), 'Bringing Them
 25 Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and
 26 Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families' (Sydney, April 1997). Report
 27 available online at www.hreoc.gov.au/social_justice/bth_report/index.html.
 28 4 The Inquiry took evidence from 535 indigenous people around the country
 29 affected by removal. Significantly, not a single mother whose child had been
 30 removed came forward to give evidence.
 31 5 See 'Content of apologies by State and Territory Parliaments', available at
 32 www.humanrights.gov.au/social_justice/bth_report/apologies_states.html (last
 33 visited 5 January 2009).
 34 6 A number of church apologies can be found on the Reconciliation and Social
 35 Justice Online Library at [www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/
 36 hreoc/stolen/stolen31.html#Heading112](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/hreoc/stolen/stolen31.html#Heading112) (last visited 5 January 2009).
 37 7 'Collectively, we feel a particular sense of responsibility for the consequences of
 38 these racist policies because their implementation required the active involve-
 39 ment of community welfare organizations. We unreservedly and wholeheart-
 40 edly apologize to the individuals, families and communities who have suffered
 41 such pain and grief from these terrible acts of injustice'. Statement of Apology
 and Commitment to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People by the
 Australian Council of Social Services, November 1997.
 8 The form of words Howard used was: 'Personally, I feel deep sorrow for
 those of my fellow Australians who suffered injustices under the practices of

- 1 past generations toward indigenous people'. Opening Address to the recon-
 2 ciliation Convention, May 1997. Available online at [www.austlii.edu.au/au/](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/car/arc/speeches/opening/howard.htm)
 3 [special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/car/arc/speeches/opening/howard.htm](http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/special/rsjproject/rsjlibrary/car/arc/speeches/opening/howard.htm) (last visited
 4 5 January 2009).
- 5 9 Comprehensive studies on the level of support for Howard's position were
 6 not done, although one fairly small study conducted in Perth in 2001 found
 7 that only 27 per cent of residents supported a political apology (McGarty
 8 et al. 2002).
- 9 10 On 26 August 1999, the Commonwealth Parliament did pass a motion express-
 10 ing its 'deep and sincere regret that Indigenous Australians suffered injusti-
 11 ces under the practices of past generations, and for the hurt and trauma
 12 that many Indigenous people continue to feel as a consequence of those
 13 practices as part of a Motion of Reconciliation' (CoA1).
- 14 11 For example: 'In some cases government policies evolved from the belief that
 15 the Aboriginal race would not survive and should be assimilated. In others,
 16 the conviction was that "half caste" children in particular should, for their
 17 own protection, be removed to government and church run institutions
 18 where conditions reflected the standards of the day. Others were placed with
 19 white families whose kindness motivated them to the belief that rescued
 20 children deserved a better life' (CoA3).
- 21 12 Speed's thesis about the 'new forms of resistance to the neo-liberal model
 22 and its particular configurations of power' is elaborated in Speed (2007).
- 23 13 Making the same point is Short (2008).
- 24 14 'We [...] do not attempt to calculate the relative merits for indigenous people
 25 of, say, a symbolic gesture as opposed to more materially grounded ones [...]
 26 Rather we reflect specifically upon the "psychic life" of the apology' (Gooder
 27 and Jacobs 2000, 231–2).
- 28 15 'The Australian apology [...] has the power to form and reform what and
 29 who is considered to be legitimate within the reconstituting imaginary. It is
 30 an utterance [...] which has immense potential as a redistributive force, both
 31 material and symbolic' (ibid.).
- 32 16 The Marxist/structural underpinning of the critique of 'ideology' is evident
 33 here (Povinelli 1998, 581–2).
- 34 17 This critique is structurally similar to critical work on the use in truth com-
 35 missions of witnesses to trauma. The act of giving testimony of traumatic
 36 events is understood not as a liberating process that breaks the chains of
 37 violence, but as a mimetic form of violence that positions the witness within
 38 existing (dominant) juridical and medical structures. See Feldman (2004,
 39 163–202).
- 40 18 'Relatedly, let us remember that the apology is as much an act of narcissis-
 41 tic will and desire as of humility and humanity' (Gooder and Jacobs 2000,
 244).
- 19 On the religious background to political apologies, see Celermajer (2009).

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