THE NEXUS AMONG PLACE, CONFLICT AND COMMUNICATION IN A GLOBALISING WORLD

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The Nexus among Place, Conflict and Communication in a Globalising World

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For our families, friends and pets, who make us who we are.
And for all those who contribute to empowering those making more harmonious and peaceful places in the world today and for the future.

Preface

Interrogating Place, Conflict and Communication in the Contemporary World

Places stand tall in human consciousness and social imaginaries. Places are integrally and intimately associated with our identity development and meaning-making processes, and they are also crucial to building inclusive and productive communities. In doing so, places operate as sites with which we form powerful and empowering bonds of association and affinity, sometimes throughout our lives, and as settings in which acts of continuing memorialisation are performed. This is the case regardless of whether these places are physical or virtual, and whether they are experienced synchronously, asynchronously or retrospectively.

Yet places can equally and just as easily be the arenas of exclusion and marginalisation of particular individuals and groups. They can also be locations over which competing claims are made, and that can be mobilised by conflicting communities for opposing interpretations and purposes. Similarly, the communication of meanings about places can contribute to understandings that are reciprocal and respectful in

relation to contending claimants, or alternatively that function to exacerbate conflict—sometimes over extensive territory and across multiple generations—about those places.

Given these circumstances, it is timely in this edited book to interrogate anew the enduringly significant nexus among place, conflict and communication in the contemporary world. This timeliness derives from two seemingly contradictory yet mutually constituted observations about that world. First, the world today is clearly beset by all manner of conflicts, many of them associated inextricably with competing notions about particular places, whether through territorial disputes, the crossings of national and regional borders by asylum seekers and refugees and asserted interference by certain countries in other nations' domestic affairs. Moreover, these place-based conflicts are often pursued by means of increasingly sophisticated communication strategies and technologies that also traverse national and regional borders, and that are aligned closely with the outworkings of current manifestations of globalisation.

Second, and in contradistinction to the first confirmation of the timeliness of this book's focus on the tripartite phenomenon of place, conflict and communication, there is growing evidence of highly diverse activities and tactics from around the world that have in common the determination to contest and displace the nexus that associates place with conflict and conflict-infused communication. On the contrary, these actions reflect a very different worldview, one that understands places as sites of empowerment and transformation, and that apprehends communication as contributing centrally to creating a more peaceful and sustainable world.

Both these themes and tensions—places as sites where conflict and conflict-informed communication hold sway; and places as locations of more harmonious relationships and dialogues—are taken up comprehensively in this volume. The chapters' authors reflect a diversity of approaches to exploring the interplay between these themes and tensions. In doing so, they draw on a range of concepts and research methods gleaned from a number of disciplines—including anthropology, education, history, international relations, law and sociology—as well as mobilising the productive affordances of interdisciplinary and

multidisciplinary research. The authors also represent the approaches and experiences of several different countries and continents, including Australia, England, Europe, Indonesia, Ireland, Singapore, South Africa and Zimbabwe.

While chapter authors were invited to approach their respective interrogations of the nexus among place, conflict and communication from the perspectives of their separate backgrounds and research interests, they were requested to engage explicitly with at least one of the following organising questions framing the book:

1. What are some of the multiple and different ways that we can experience place through conflict?
2. How do the mechanisms of conflict, narrative and interpretation affect memory and place and how in turn does this (re)vision place?
3. Is the location of conflict relevant to the communication pattern and the evolution of the conflict, and if so how?
4. How does place affect the emotional and communicative patterns of conflict?
5. Do place meaning and attachment create a supportive or tense dynamic that has outcomes for the active care of place and self?
6. What are the consequences of consideration of place for aspects of conflict and conflict communication that might be opened up by improving our understanding of the interconnections?

These questions were selected carefully to encapsulate many of the concerns and debates currently animating scholars researching in the highly varied projects related to place, conflict and communication, and at the same time to provide some commonality of focus in the chapters to follow. Chapter 1, written by Victor Igreja, outlines the rationale for the book and a framework for the subsequent chapters, while Pauline Collins uses Chapter 13 to synthesise the chapter authors' diverse engagements with the organising questions listed above.

Each chapter underwent a process of rigorous peer review and independent editing, designed to maximise its coherence and to ensure its readability. In combination, this book constitutes a set of prominent

landmarks in scholarly endeavour and understanding that yield new and striking insights into the continuingly important issue of *The Nexus among Place, Conflict and Communication in a Globalising World*.

Toowoomba, Australia Patrick Alan Danaher

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Contributors

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1

Frames and Intersections of Studies of Place, Conflict and Communication

Victor Igreja

Introduction

The emerging intersection of place, conflict and communication is the focus of this work. While attention has been given separately to the analysis of place, conflict and communication in diverse studies of interpersonal relations and conflict resolution, the increasing importance of analysing projects directed at mediating and reducing conflicts has demonstrated the need to refocus attention on the interplay of these domains and modes of social action. We pursue this goal by reiterating that human beings are both makers and products of places, conflicts and forms of communication, which nevertheless are subjected to constant negotiations, adaptations and reformulations. This is not intended to be interpreted as a denial

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of deterritorialisation (Appadurai, 1996), which is one of the hallmarks of globalisation, and a reflection of how 'the capitalist modernization is very much about speed-up and acceleration in the pace of economic processes and, hence, in social life' (Harvey, 1989, p. 230). Instead, it is suggested that all conflicts arise in a place, and in a context of social relations and practices, even if over time some conflicts become deterritorialised and manifested in a myriad of ways in new places and times. Even the increasing recognition of global warming and its global impacts cannot be properly grasped without considering the conditions in which people live in specific places.

In this work, we embrace the idea that places are physical, psychical, cultural, historical and social (Casey, 1996, p. 31). We engage with diverse places, conflicts and versatile forms of communication: from provincial and district levels of political action in contemporary Africa; from urban, rural and cyberspaces in Australia to schoolyards in England; from street life in Dublin to courtrooms in Singapore, informal memorialising sites in Indonesia and secret rooms in sites of the Australian Defence Force.

Framing the Nexus

All contributors deal with various facets of the concept of place. Yet they intersect on the idea that space and place are socially constructed (Massey, 1994); as 'places are experienced and lived, they are essential components of political and social relations' (Ethington & McDaniel, 2007, p. 132). The connection of conflict with place and the communication dynamics that precede and follow this connection can create lasting impacts, memories or histories. This work explores instances of conflict as they are expressed through bodies and testimonies (Whitaker's Chapter 6 and Palmer's Chapter 10); memorials (Higgins-Desbiolles, Hales, & Sparrow in Chapter 11); stories and senses of humour, and African and Christian religious practices (Maringira & Núñez Carrasco in Chapter 12); and academic research in order to develop understandings of why and how conflict intersects with, and is influenced by, places and forms of communication. Certain places are prone to generate specific types of conflicts, as in the case of domestic violence (Igreja, 2018a) or ethnic conflicts (Cunningham & Weidmann, 2010), and the expressions of these conflicts can reveal the tensions in power relations, forms of subordination and resistance (Massey, 1994).

Places embody simultaneously expectations of positive behaviour and prohibitions, but these expectations do not exhaust people's actual behaviours in that people follow but also subvert social conventions, which concur overall to render visible some conflicts more than others, and to shut down, give voice to or elude communication among some people more than others. In this regard, it is pertinent to ask: what happens when conflicts are removed from their original places? Does it transform the nature of the conflict and the possibilities of communication? Or does it make the conflict less visible and accessible and therefore liable to misrepresentation and miscommunication? On the other hand, the dislocation of the interconnectedness of places of conflict can be liberating and amenable to the ethics of verbal transactions (Smith, 1975) that are equal and that hold a promise of effective resolution.

Experiences of forced displacement and ongoing discrimination and marginalisation in new places raise serious questions regarding the possibility of ever leaving behind past traumas from past places. There seems to be an experiential continuum of discomfort from one place to another that can be silencing and unproductive for the people involved. Yet people are also creative, and they can use a myriad of genres of communication from their own bodies and bodily actions, to metaphors, direct and indirect speech, imagination and legal and more idiosyncratic forms of talk (Igreja, 2018b).

Places of Connection and Conflict

It is generally accepted in the spatial social sciences that 'where people are placed affects their fortunes and adds structure to their lives' (Logan, 2012, p. 508), which can demoralise or reinforce resilience practices. Along these lines, in Chapter 2 Heckenberg's chapter provides insight into the dialectical relations between people and land among Aboriginal nations and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia. The land, space and place cannot be dissociated from people's mood, practices of respect and recognition in the sense that the destruction of one can lead to the destruction of the other. This philosophy and way of being in the world have not been easily understood

by generations of British settlers who arrived and settled in these lands. The land and water are sacred entities, and humans achieve isomorphic status only when they die and are incorporated as layers of land and water spirits. In this context, death and burial rituals constitute meaningful practices of the renewal of kinships links, and the performativity of the connections between past and present (Babidge, 2006). The enduring relations with the land, water and everything that falls from the sky are not the source of conflict. Instead, the sources of conflict are founded upon competing claims: who has legitimacy and entitlement to renew relationships continually with land, water and everything included in there. The trajectories of European colonialism and the various metamorphoses into a post-settler state with a multicultural outlook did not resolve this enduring conflict.

Heckenberg demonstrates that conflict has shaped the identities of both colonial settlers and their descendants and the various groups of Aboriginal people throughout the country. In spite of the forced separation, land destitution and ultimately persecution and death, the Aboriginal people have been resilient, and Heckenberg's chapter provides further insights into some of the mechanisms of that resilience, the legal language used by state institutions to abate the sense of Aboriginal identities and the resolve to struggle for their moral visions and ways of being in the world. The highlight of this chapter is the revelation of how Aboriginal people have relied on their own senses and histories of place, the narratives that are constitutive of their land and the flows of water to magnify the fairness of their struggle. We have known from cultures and histories of other peoples that struggles inspired by land, water and nature are difficult to defeat. It is the enduring qualities of such types of conflicts that have turned them into transnational struggles with manifestations in the Asia-Pacific region, North and South America, and many parts of Africa. In 2007, the United Nations General Assembly approved *The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations, 2007). At the time of the approval, some of the dominant post-settler states such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United States voted against this Declaration. Initially, this rejection appeared as a setback, but over time it proved instead that the Aboriginal causes and struggles

are here with us to endure. In this regard, nine years (2016) following the Declaration, these countries reversed their initial decision and now support the Declaration.

The plight of Aboriginal people in Australia today can be grasped through the struggles over land and water resources, which often occur in the discreet places of courtrooms and through some of the work of anthropologists on the ground reconstructing genealogies to be used in legal settlements (Trigger, 2011). Chapter 11, by Higgins-Desbiolles, Hales and Sparrow, provides further evidence of the enduring tensions between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal Australians. The focus is on the contested legitimacy of the physical representations that fill in some of the public spaces throughout Australia. Public monuments do not just aestheticise places; they carry moral values and, according to the political stakes, they become illustrative of another version of the use of memories as weapons (Igreja, 2008). In these memory wars, a number of selective memories and stories are affirmed as true, and as more monumentally valuable than others, and those that are suppressed are meant to signal their non-existence in place (Igreja, 2013). Yet Higgins-Desbiolles, Hales and Sparrow demonstrate the resolve of Aboriginal people, in their diversity, to ensure that pasts and memories written in stone (Levinson, 1998) have been made in the continent for at least the past 40,000 years (Barker, 2007). The conjugations of the material stories made visible, and those turned invisible, create a place fertile in social, cultural and political conflicts. In this regard, what Australia is, and has been evolving into over time, cannot be grasped without considering the migration movements and spatial politics, as well as the moral and historical tensions between the ancestral and new occupants of the land, a similar point to that made by Heckenberg. The resilience of the First Nations and their offspring is a permanent testament that, with or without state-funded public monuments, and in spite of their forced dislocation from sacred places, Aboriginal people have used their own creative modes of commemoration to renew their commitments to place even in conditions of displacement. These commemorations are meaningful because 'Indigenous Australians,' as Higgins-Desbiolles, Hales and Sparrow assert, 'see the landscape as a living landscape that communicates the origins of creation, the laws of society and the proper relationships between all things.'

Given that there are no nations whose modern birth was not tainted with the moral and physical destruction of peoples, bloody massacres, sexual violence and rape, and the obliteration of entire lands, the selected statutes cannot escape the unpredictability and contingencies of interpretation. For instance, besides the usual heroic connotations and commemorations, the size and location of certain statutes can still be interpreted as permanent indictments of the guilt of the memorialised figures in stone, iron or bronze. As in many contemporary societies, all of them are male and, in the case of Australia, the revered historical figures originated from the same geographical, cultural and Christian religious space and they spread out around the world in search of new places, in the process creating new and enduring conflicts. In their chapter Higgins-Desbiolles, Hales and Sparrow refer to some of these statues, such as those of Captain James Cook, Captain Arthur Phillip, William Cox and John Batman. But the list could grow longer. Nevertheless, this social, cultural and political landscape of representation is gradually becoming multi-historical and multicultural because of the emerging glimpses of historical justice through the writing in stone of some of the massacres against Aboriginal people, as well as their contributions to the country's military history, which Higgins-Desbiolles, Hales and Sparrow also analyse.

Another meaningful point of the intersection of place, conflict and communication is grasped through migratory movements, which in the contemporary world are everywhere and under the constant gaze of local authorities and the general public. In the case of Australia, the trends in migration have been changing. In the modern history of Australia, migrants originated mainly from Europe. Over time, and as a result of global political and economic shifts, the points of departure of migrants shifted in the late 1960s. First, they originated from South–East Asia and more recently from Africa, particularly from Sudan. Migratory movements, forced or voluntary, settlement possibilities in the host societies and the types of reception that migrants encounter invite interesting analyses of the nexus among place, conflict and communication. It has been suggested that 'every place is socially constructed with a history and a future' (Logan, 2012, p. 508). In this regard, whenever individuals and their families migrate, they carry with

them the whole or parts of their imagined place and culture in the form of habits, customs and lifestyles, but also their fears and hopes for better lives. At the same time, the host communities, which are both producers and products of diverse historical processes, also develop expectations. Integration of the recently arrived is central to social and political expectations, which is often reduced to the idea of assimilation of the hosts' habits, customs and lifestyles. These processes often create gaps in communication and misunderstandings, competition, tensions and open conflicts. Yet the conflicts can also emerge as a result of serious disagreements and misunderstandings between members of the same migrant community.

Hove, in Chapter 3, deals with some of these conundrums, but also draws attention to the fact that in the modern world physical and virtual places cannot be hastily conceived separately. Thus, his analysis focuses on some of the conflicts that emerge in cyberspaces, known as cyberbullying, as well as the conflicts in family relationships and parenting faced by a number of South Sudanese-Australian families settled in Australia. The chapter provides interesting insights regarding the ways in which processes of social transformation and continuity are not linear, as these can occur in multiple contexts within the same space and traverse gender and intergenerational factors. Thus the South Sudanese-Australians face the challenge of resolving conflicts in ways that differ from the precepts of their home country culture in order to be consistent with the goal of integration in the new place. Yet the resolution of conflicts should also deal with the fact that women and young children, in particular, have rejected their original cultures and have embodied a number of social practices of the host society, which in turn fuels a dynamic of new and challenging conflicts.

One central source of conflict in migrant communities evolves out of the tensions between the household language and the language officially recognised and used in school places. The contribution of D'warte in Chapter 4 further expands the idea of the potentials and limits of linguistic diversity in Australia. While political authorities in the country embrace and openly celebrate multiculturalism, this cannot be said for the potential of linguistic diversity in schools as the norm of linguistic homogeneity dominates the teaching–learning processes in

Australia. The links between home place and school place languages have not been officially established for students with migrant backgrounds, which helps partly to explain some of the predicaments of the families described and analysed by Hove. Nevertheless, places are not passive entities, nor are students just reacting agents. Drawing from Vertovec's (2007) notion of 'superdiversity' communities and social science's contemporary theorisation of space and place, D'warte engages with the multiple layers of embeddedness of places such as schools, and the multiplicity of meanings that they evoke, as well as the mechanisms of negotiation and communication with which teachers and students engage. If on one level the reality of super-diverse classrooms is prone to a myriad of conflicts and to instigating a sense of alienation among some students, the acceptance of this challenge by teachers, and their ongoing commitment to engage students with this reality, is shown by D'warte to demonstrate that active communicative strategies can create opportunities for acceptance and increase a sense of belonging and inclusion. In this regard, places are not the starting points or endpoints in the creation and sustenance of individual and collective identities. Instead, places play a role in mediating such processes, without necessarily evoking a sense of neutrality.

Ownership and Communication in Place

The sense of ownership of place against the view of the neutrality of places is elaborated by Ralph and Levinson in Chapter 5, through their analysis of students' activities in schools located in disadvantaged neighbourhoods in England. Following the notion of space as open, multiple, relational and unfinished, Ralph and Levinson analyse the students' processes of constructing and subverting the school place. They show how the students protested discursively against a number of places in their school on the grounds that such places did not allow them to undertake their school activities properly, but they also demonstrated agency by appropriating a number of spaces in the school and transformed them in ways that responded to some of their projects and interests.