

**(Re)membering in the Contact Zone: Telling, and Listening to, a Massacre Story**  
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This paper has been jointly produced by an Aboriginal storyteller and a non-Aboriginal listener. It seeks to explore the meaning making generated in an oral storytelling exchange involving a massacre story. The paper is based on a series of interviews and ongoing conversations that took place in two sequential research projects between 1995 and 2005. We use the idea of the contact zone<sup>1</sup> to frame the exchange as an in-between space where the main purpose of communication is to keep meanings open, 'to preserve the intervals of difference'.<sup>2</sup> We use a mixture of transcript quotes from interviews and an experimental writing form in order to enact the ideas we are trying to explore in the form and structure of the paper.

The contact zone was initially described as a space in which 'peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other'.<sup>3</sup> For Pratt these are zones of 'possibilities and perils', characterised by unequal power relations 'as they are lived out across the globe today' (4). Carter defines the contact zone in the context of Australian history: '[t]he contact event begins with a distance (a physical and psychological abyss between two peoples) and proceeds to dissolve it'.<sup>4</sup> For him, the purpose of the contact event is 'to find a system of communication where the greatest differences can be expressed simultaneously and, instead of cancelling each other out, be instantaneously transferred from one side to the other' (180). The significance of the contact zone lies in its potential to transform meanings, grounded in contestation over actual physical space, and providing the possibility of 'entering into negotiations over land' (171).

Storytelling and listening in specific local places provide us with the opportunity to explore multiple stories about place and the power relationships between them. This contact zone where multiple stories collide has been noted as a space of transformative potential.<sup>5</sup> Undertaking research in the contact zone requires participating researchers to engage with the difficult questions, to move out of their own comfort zone, and to refuse easy answers.<sup>6</sup> The 'borderwork' necessary to negotiate difference in the contact zone<sup>7</sup> is precarious, risky and emotionally difficult<sup>8</sup> and requires movement within, between, and across boundaries. However, it is in this in-between space of tension and struggle<sup>9</sup> that new possibilities lie.

Stories intersect in the contact zone at local, national and global levels. According to Sinclair, contradictory 'stories and histories of connection, exploitation and care continue to converge within public and personal spheres', opening up possibilities for cultural transformation 'when individuals find the words and images that enable people to re-imagine familiar country'.<sup>10</sup> We maintain that the transformative possibilities of the contact zone begin with local storytelling. In this paper we will interrogate the process of telling and listening to a particular massacre story in a specific place, in order to explore how local storytelling participates in broader debates about Australian identity.

**1: massacre**

*M'grandmother,  
 she was tellin' me about the time  
 she was looking after a baby  
 somewhere between Blackadder's Creek and Casson's Creek.  
 She said that these policemen  
 come along on horses,  
 all the men were there,  
 and the women  
 they were washin' an' that sort of thing,  
 and she said  
 they shot the men there.  
 She reckoned that when they chased them  
 they went down through to Red Rock  
 and the men was swimmin' across the river there,  
 and she said up here where they started  
 and down there,  
 the water was red – just red –  
 with the blood  
 where they shot 'em.  
 She grabbed the baby  
 and the women hid in the rushes on the creek banks.  
 She told me that was the worst thing she ever seen  
 that they just came along  
 and started shootin'.*<sup>11</sup>

Tony Perkins told this story in our first interview in a research partnership between the University of New England and Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation. The research was about recording local place stories in Gumbaingirr territory on the mid north coast of NSW, and making them into educational resources for Yarrawarra's ecotourism enterprise. This massacre story was to become central in the interpretation of all that was to follow, a lens through which to understand the place, the people, and any possible research exchange. Tony and I re-visited this story many times and in many iterations, understanding it also as a site for exchange between myself – a white, female, settler/researcher – and Tony – a voice speaking for the place, a representative of the Garby Elders, and manager of the organisation. On this occasion we were sitting in a small demountable building with Blackadder's and Casson's Creeks on one side of us and Red Rock on the other, close to the trail that the massacre story etched indelibly in my brain.

This first verse of the massacre story is embodied and emplaced in the storytelling. It was told to Tony by his grandmother; all the way through the story he reminds the listener of her authority to tell it, through her direct participation. The story evokes her life. She is there at the creek looking after a baby. It is set in a very particular place, located for the listener by the names that have been given to the creeks by whites, in an intimate scene of everyday life. All the men and women are there and the women are doing the washing.

The sudden intrusion of the police on horses is shocking as it bursts in on this intimate scene of daily life. The story is embodied through the blood of the people who were shot as they tried to escape by swimming across the river. It is inscribed onto the landscape through the colour of their blood, 'the river was red', that in later iterations of the story give the place its name *Blood Rock*. The story is also relational, creating a relationship, albeit an uneasy one, between Tony, his grandmother, the place, and me as the listener. It challenges me as a white researcher: *What are you going to do with this one?* But it is not primarily about me: it is a lesson about how to begin to read this place that Tony wants to communicate to a broader audience.

My first response was to ask Tony about what this story meant to his grandmother: *What sort of sense did she make of it? Was she bitter? What sort of feeling would she tell you with?* He responded by telling me about her gestures as she told the story, *She was always a person that sort of waved her hands a lot when she spoke. And she would talk fairly loud when she was talkin', an' always had her hand goin'.* He said that she told the story so that they could learn about the bad things that happened, so they would respect, and learn to listen to, those who were left behind.

I had fallen in love with Red Rock some time earlier, and had written in 1995:

The beach is so rich in colour and form it seems to invite only a short ritual presence. At the southern end, just south of the confluence of river and sea, is the red rock, liver-coloured bodily extrusion, as dramatic in form as colour, marking this sacred place where river meets sea. What Aboriginal stories about this red rock are washing in these waves? On one side of the rock, a small sheltered beach, with silver grey casuarinas dripping towards silver white sand, curves in a quarter moon to a jutting headland. On the other, the bank of the river, extruded red and white, curls and crumbles with its fragile colonies of banksias, casuarinas and pandanus.<sup>12</sup>

What Aboriginal stories, indeed, were washing in these waves?

I wonder now what was this presentiment? Rose says that 'a country is rich in sentience. The Dreamings are there, of course, and so too are the dead people who belonged to the country in life.'<sup>13</sup> I had lived and worked in the Northern Territory, and with Aboriginal people and their place stories in other parts of NSW, so I knew that there are always already Aboriginal stories that I have not yet heard in all places. I came to Red Rock as a not-knower also, but this feeling was different. The place had struck me as overwhelmingly beautiful – a small, undeveloped holiday place between Coffs Harbour and Grafton, with wildflower plains and wild uninhabited beaches. It was dangerous too, in the place where the river meets the sea. A strong rip runs out from the river around the headland and many have drowned there. Sometimes we would dive in and swim as fast as we could to make it across the river when the river run was strong. Then we'd float down at great speed, coming in just before the red rock, always with a sense of danger. But it was the depth of colour of the red rock that clung to me.

Katrina Schlunke, in re-telling another massacre story, writes about ‘dumb places’ where the quiet landscape has only two very gentle sounds, ‘shallow running river over smooth river rocks ... less than a gurgle ... something like the resonance of your own circulatory system’ and the ‘breeze through the casuarinas’.<sup>14</sup> The landscape does not yield its human stories until we are ready to ask and listen.

Tony and I talked again, on another occasion, about his grandmother’s storytelling so I could understand more about the quality of the interaction between storyteller and listener.

*I remember if there was any storm or anything comin’, or if she was tryin’ to get a message to you in some way, yeah, she used to get a really, like a really high pitch, and her arms’d be goin’. You know, like this. Oh it was unusual, it was, with the voice, and the same as down at the old camp, I dunno who passed away, it might have been Auntie Elsie Cowan, I’m not sure, but a lot of the old ones were there. And I can still remember them all outside the old hut there, near the bamboo, the same thing there, I still can hear it. It sounded like cryin’, but it wasn’t like normal cryin’. It was strange, like a cry but it was sort of all broken up. Some’d be sort of high, sort of raisin’ the voice an’ they’d fade an’ another one would come in and the same, like that. Yeh, I remember it like that.*<sup>15</sup>

A chill ran down my spine as Tony talked, recalling the uncanny sound of sing-song wailing in the desert. Often the sound was preceded by a sign or portent, a whistling wind from nowhere blowing dust and unsettling the corners of the mind, and then the wailing, three days or more sometimes. I can remember it when someone died in Alice Springs, and the body made the 250 kilometre journey back to its place. Wailing to help the spirit continue on its journey, to mourn the dead; sorry business. In ‘Crying to Remember’, Fiona Magowan describes the ritual crying-songs of Yolgnu women showing respect for the deceased and expressing personal loss.<sup>16</sup> I hear the wailing song of Tony’s grandmother singing the massacre story as her crying to remember.

High pitched singing, Tony says, is about fear,

*If they went high, really higher, it’s more like a fear, sort of thing. And it’s like willing someone, too. See they used to, you could sing someone to death you know. But [women’s singing] was a more higher sound. My grandmother used to sing if she was in fear of anything. She would sing, but a very high sound. Even though grandfather would sing, it’d be more – the only thing he used to sing to me about was how they used to sing the corroborees. It’d go a certain height but come down all the time. Very different. Women seem to have sung higher all the times because I think they had more fear or something. It’s like if you get a pippi shell and you throw it, it’ll give a whistle. Well that whistle has got a meaning, you see, it’s got a meaning on why you shouldn’t do that. Because that’s a sound, it’s not because you’re throwin’ it, it’s the sound. It doesn’t matter what you do, the higher the sound the worse the message. And then you’ve got the death bird, of a night time. If*

*anything's wrong, a high squeal comes through the sky. So the higher it is, that's more fear or the worse the message.*

Voice and sound have power in places, a power that belongs equally to pippi shells, the death bird, and a woman's high pitched singing. It is the voicing of the landscape through his grandmother's crying-song of the massacre story.

Tony suggested that I ask his Aunty, Marie Edwards, as the oldest member of the community (then in her 80s), about the massacre story. The first time I asked, she told me she had never heard of any such story but went on to tell me that the headland at Red Rock is a special place where women and children must not go. She told me another story about the drowning of a white child at the junction of river and sea below the headland. Each time I asked her, gently, over a number of years, she revealed only a little more. For her, the story was represented by a taboo, especially for women and children, against going to the top of the headland at Red Rock. The taboo defined how she and I could talk about the story. Many others in the Yarrawarra community told the story only in terms of silence and taboos about the headland. I asked Tony what made the telling of the story so important that he would break the taboo and confront the intense emotions attached to the telling.

*I think it is important, it is very important. We hear a lot of history about everything else, you know, so I think it's gotta be told. That type of history, that's a history too and that's important to us. We gotta accept that it is part of the history of Aboriginal people from here, it happened. I think it is time that things are known, what went on. There's no-one got any grudges against nobody, you know all we want is that people accept what we say, what did happen, but there's no grudges against anyone. We know that even if there's any relatives here today belonging to them people, we don't hold them responsible for that, they weren't part of it, they probably didn't know anything about it and they are just things that happened in them times. It's just important that everybody should know.*

Amazed by this remarkable generosity of spirit, I asked him, *Does it make you angry?* and he talked about the silences and absences in his genealogy:

*It does, there are some times - you know like lots of times you can link up and you can find background for yourself but when you can only find halfway, and the reason why you can't find the rest cause over this period of time no-one will tell yer, you know it takes you all that time when you're growin' up and you become 13, 14, 15, and older people they don't tell you where their brother is or where their uncles are, or where their father was or anything then when you get to a certain age they tell you what went on somewhere, then you think well that's the reason why you can't trace back where and who you're related to or anything.*

These are the people whose story cannot be named. No proper burial, spirits hovering, unable to be told in the stories of this world or to make their way to the next. The telling of the story of the Red Rock massacre functions as something of an initiation into these

silences. It is a story that can only be told when a child reaches a certain age, ready for the transition from child to adult. Having named the silences, Tony then went on to express his anger about the act of the massacre:

*I do get angry at some things. I'm sure they could have worked it out in a better way back in those times. They knew our people were there with 'em, they knew that and when they give them selections out there, there must have been another way they could do it, not just give it away like that, put the owner in there then just come through and shoot anybody that's on your property. That seems a very uncivilised way. They talk about our people being uncivilised, but when you look at it I don't think you can get anything more uncivilised than just shooting people, especially people who never had the defence. They probably had never seen a gun in their life, and when you're only carryin' a stick with you, you got no protection whatsoever. It must have been an awful shock to see what a bullet could do I suppose in them times.*

I tell the story with the desire to make language time and place stutter through it and I turn to the senses to try and keep us there within that moment where a body thought agonises. I hope that such stories change our worlds.<sup>17</sup>

### **11: (Re-)birth**

*what's said today  
is that the only reason why  
there's survival  
was because under Red Rock headland  
is a cave  
that comes back out,  
all the way back under Red Rock to Jewfish Point.  
It came back out and the men actually got around into there  
went under and came back up  
and that was the only way that most survived,  
in that way.*

The extraordinary feature of this particular massacre story is that it has a second verse of re-birth, a new creation story that follows. This story of rebirth has all of the conventions of the mythical creation story of the cave and the labyrinth. It is resonant of the creation stories of the Dreaming in the way it (re)creates people and Country:

We should start with origins. Dreamings are the great creative beings who came out of the earth and travelled across the land and sea. The Australian continent is crisscrossed with tracks of the Dreamings: walking, slithering, crawling, flying, chasing, hunting, weeping, dying, giving birth. They were performing rituals, distributing the plants, making the landforms and water, and making relationships between one place and another, one species and another. They were leaving parts of

essences of themselves; they would look back in sorrow; and then they would continue travelling, changing languages, changing songs, changing identity.<sup>18</sup>

The place of this new beginning is called the 'Old Farm'. A space of some twenty or thirty years in real time had elapsed between the massacre story and the coming to the Old Farm. But this story is not about real time. It is about the cyclical and ongoing creation of people and place through singing them into being: 'song evokes place, place evokes song, together they constitute relationships through time. Performance in place unfolds in time and draws other times – recent past and creation events – into a shared performative present' (178).

Aunty Marie was a young child when the family group arrived at Red Rock and Tom Richards, a local white settler invited them to live in a shed on his place by the Corindi River. Aunty Marie Edwards, and Tony's Grandmother, Celia, both told Tony the story of the 'birthing grounds' where his mother was born:

*Just this side of Red Rock, that's where the birthing grounds are. That's the birthing grounds for this area. My grandmother, Celia, used to do all the deliveries of the children. She used to do up all the women, they used to come there. See they used to walk miles, they used to go there, so the children were born. You see them comin' from Nana Glen, walk from over at Nana Glen, Glenreagh, right around, Moonee even, they used to come. All the women used to come up and this is where they used to stay and they used to have the children there. There used to be camps set up and that was a birthing area, on that ground there.*

They never owned the Old Farm where the birthing grounds were, and eventually moved up to Corindi Lake where the group grew and continues to live. Even though the birthing grounds were on private property and the family have not lived there for over 60 years, both Tony's grandmother and aunty took him there. They told him the stories in the place and showed him how to read the signs that marked the places where the birthing took place. For the older women it was a place of re-membering, for Tony, it became the conceptual framing of life experience. When he visited the place with Aunty Marie Edwards, she said to him, *I used to be here myself, when I was a young girl, when your mother was born. I was asleep in the hut just over there.* These stories locate Tony in relation to his female relatives and the place, creating the place and his people anew through the telling of the new creation story. The telling of the story becomes a new ritual-in-place.

*I've been back to that birthing ground, I've been there twice. You can see the well there, you can see where they dug down, you can see all the floors. Straight across from it there is a tree, a tree with the bark taken out like a big canoe there, just across from it and the honey tree just next to it, runs up there on a bit of lean like that you can see the toe holes goin' all the way up. When I was shown properly, and taken there, you can see all the raised floors, you can actually see where they are. There's clay, like it's all grassed over but you can see the raised areas where they carried the clay from the creek, carried it up and raised all the floors where*

*each camp was built. And the one, the raised floor that's furthest to the east, is where the children were born, there. Aunty Marie showed me the one floor that you can sort of see raised where, she said that's where they used to be born there, that was the place. She told me that she could remember one night when she was only young, my grandmother said to her 'you gonna have to go to sleep early tonight', and she didn't understand first up, and she said 'well what's wrong?' and her grandmother said 'oh never mind but you will see in the morning'. And next morning she woke up at the other camp and when she woke up the grandmother, grandfather come out and said to her 'oh the reason why you had to go to sleep early was because you had to wait for your sister to come along this morning.' And they took her over and showed her which camp it was.*

That was the birth of Clariss, Tony's mother.

Aunty Marie Edwards and I talked often in her little unit on High Street in Coffs Harbour about her days at the Old Farm. Although now in her eighties, when she told me stories of the Old Farm it was as if we were back there in a vivid present with her a young girl, erasing the space of fifty years and the modern unit around us. She talked about all the women who came there to give birth and how her grandmother had delivered all the babies:

*Yeah, we always had a place built up, made of bamboo for when they got pains or sick. And my Grandmother, we'd just go out and sing out to her, and she'd come over, big fire burning and deliver the babies. They used to put up their tents. They had special places for their baby and they'd go back in their tents.*

She remembered the time when Clariss was born:

*Cause my father, he 'ad this tarpaulin put up out there near the lemon tree. And I said 'who's campin' there? And he'd say, I'm gunna camp out 'ere tonight. Oh we had this fire, that's where my mother had my sister, that's Tony's mother. And we went to sleep I suppose and I went out the next morning when we woke up and my father said, 'You got a baby sister' and I said 'sister? Where did it come from? And he said 'walking down the road!'*

Marie laughed at her childish innocence and created, through her storytelling, a sense of a secure and happy time as they lived a rich but sparse existence in the new conditions they now found themselves in. Part of the creation story was to tell how they newly inhabited this place, made dwellings, found food, sang, lived, loved and gave birth by the Red Bank River, re-claiming it, in a sense, from the terror of the massacre. The story of their dwelling-in-place creates a productive tension between the warmth of the fire in the loving circle of grandmothers and aunts, and the hard boards and bags they had to sleep on. Marie's stories were often tinged with irony.

*We had an old shingle 'ouse, big old place. No rooms in it, just one big one. Mother had a bed up the side, but we used to all sleep in front of the fire. A big*

*fireplace, oh it'd be wide as that. And my father's seat over there. Us kids used to put our foot to the fire and we'd all sleep up this way. I dunno how we slept on those hard boards. Just slept, it was all just bags and whatever, and then the blankets over us. And further over my grandmother and my auntie. They lived further over. They made a camp out of a bark hut.*

Marie creates an embodied relationship to place in the detailed materiality of stories of eating food caught from the place. Her food stories contained intimate detailed knowledge of the physiology of animals, part of her appreciation of what it meant to 'live off the land' where eating food is eating place.<sup>19</sup>

*When we were down at the Old Farm, this carpet snake, I remember that, and Ted killed it. It was down where he had the little garden and he got it, cleaned it and it had thirty six eggs in it. So anyhow, he cooked it, a fire each side and the head in the middle. Round, it was round and round and round he turned it, and you know that carpet snake flesh was like chicken, it was white and tastes like chicken, sweet.*

In stories of catching fish, Granny becomes one with the river and the story invites the listener into the same intimate relationship with the place. Marie describes the precise locational detail of the place where the weed grows in the river past Jew Point where they used to catch lots of crabs:

*Old Granny, Armi, all day she'd sit down at the creek, Red Rock River. She'd go down there, she'd sit and she'd be pulling in the big bream, fish all round her. Just down the front. Then they'd go to Jew Point to fish up there all day, they used to catch big jewies up there, or anywhere up that river, or they might go get some crabs. So after you go past Jew Point you see all that weed, you see all the crabs landing where you can see 'em, spear 'em, bloody big crabs, used to be beautiful.*

And finally, laughter and singing echoes again along the river in stories about her father, Clarrie Skinner, returning from Red Rock in the old flat bottomed, home-made boat, singing his way to and from the village.

*They built themselves a flat bottomed boat. They'd leave Red Rock with the music playin' and the Red Rock people used to say 'Oh Clarrie's gone 'ome, they're all gone home, they're singing'. They'd sit at the back and one at the front playing the gum leaves and one fella singin'. You could hear them comin', here they come, they'd be coo-eein' and playin' and singin'.*

Their singing and music is immortalised in stories of the Red Rock Band. They played the gum leaf, a kero pump whistle, a tea box bass, home made guitar, and harmonica. They played for local dances and at Christmas time they would go round the houses making music and singing for the holiday makers who would share food with them.

Through her stories Marie celebrated the return, (re)creating a warm and intimate present in place that draws us into its embrace.

I tell the story with the desire to make language time and place stutter through it and I turn to the senses to try and keep us there within that moment where a body thought agonises. I hope that such stories change our worlds.<sup>20</sup>

### ***111: sacred space***

*In memory of the victims and survivors  
of the Blood Rock massacres.  
Understanding their sacrifice  
will make us stronger.  
We as Gumbaingirr people  
have survived many conflicts  
over ownership  
of our traditional lands,  
Including a massacre  
where many were driven off the headland at  
Red Rock (Blood rock).  
Gumbaingirr descendents, especially women,  
Still avoid this headland.  
The significance of this place  
And the rebirthing of our culture  
Will never be forgotten.  
(Text from memorial cairn on Red Rock Headland.)*

How do we sing our stories in country<sup>21</sup> in such a way as to respect the complexity<sup>22</sup> of singing our contemporary country into being? How do we mark these stories in our places, and how do we re-member rather than forget?<sup>23</sup>

In 2002 Tony Perkins and other members of Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation and the Corindi Beach community marked the headland at Red Rock with the massacre and rebirth story. They placed a memorial cairn, telling the story in written text, at the edge of the taboo place, half way up the Red Rock headland. To the south a vast stretch of uninhabited beach, to the east the great Pacific Ocean, to the west the belly of the Red Rock estuary and the river winding silver around the rebirthing place at Jewfish Point. In this act they asserted their claim to their traditional lands as survivors of the massacre, celebrating their rebirth and continuity. This claim is not through the horrific and factionalising legal processes of Native Title, but through telling their story as the original descendents of this country in this very particular place.

I asked Tony in the course of our interviews about what it was like for me as a white researcher to ask about the massacre, why it was important for me to hear this story:

*I see it like this like you're sort of helping us get through what we've been trying to cope with for a lot of years, you know, to get everyone to understand what went on. Because our message sometimes doesn't seem to come across very clear and*

*strong, I don't know why that is, we've been unable to link up, you know, Aboriginal people find it hard to link up with people like yourself who get that understanding of what went on so that we're both carrying the message. In the past they thought themselves so silent because why tell anybody, because you're gonna tell them they're not gonna look at you anyway, and they're not going to believe it or they're not going to bother tellin' anyone else.*

*I think that's the important part, because I think the thing is we're not afraid to - I'm not afraid to communicate about it and that's been the most important part of it all the way along, the sharing what went on and instead of us hiding that away, we've got someone else to listen to it and to carry that same message, what we're sayin'. I hear lots of things here today. I sit sometimes in the Club and I hear different things being said about Aboriginal people, you know, they're always whingeing and wanting this and that.*

*All we want you to do is listen to what we're talkin' about, that's all we want you to do. I hear 'em say I don't know how much land they want. I think to myself you know how much, it's both ways, goin' back in the past. I don't know whether some of the people talkin' but maybe some of their relations they took up a selection too, you know how much land they want, they never paid for it either, yeah it sort of works both ways. But then you can see what I'm saying, sometimes I might only be one person sitting in that Club and my voice wouldn't go very far inside maybe five or six hundred people sitting there. I'm better off being quiet, sitting there listenin'. And I think that sometimes that's the frustratin' part havin' to sit and listen, join in the conversation that says how you will be treated before you start.*

In telling the massacre and new creation story for a non-Indigenous audience, Tony invites us into the shared space of the contact zone. In this space, he asks us *to listen* and *to carry that message out*. But this is not such an easy thing to do, 'the dispossession of Aboriginal people, both historically and in the present day, lies at the heart of Australian consciousness and identity, and is connected to every aspect of our past'.<sup>24</sup> We have 'a preference for forgetting':

[T]he overwhelming desire of human beings in certain circumstances to prefer not to know, to forget and 'move on', the constant struggle in public culture between coexisting narratives of acknowledgement and denial, and the intensely political nature of public remembering – all surface in settler Australia. (132)

Peter Read, reflecting on an educational process in which he worked with Aboriginal people to present a dramatic account of a massacre to a non-Indigenous audience, spoke about our intense love for this country and said that 'educators should reflect that Australia is now the physical – and emotional home of many other peoples besides Indigenous peoples'. He does not suggest, however, that one story should erase the other, but that '[r]econciliation at once becomes much more complex, much more painful, much more traumatic. This is as it should be.'<sup>25</sup> Maori storyteller and activist, Patricia Grace, responded to a question from a non-Indigenous member of an Australian audience who

asked ‘what can we do’, by saying ‘know your own history’. I took this to mean that we should know the history of our local places and understand how, as non-Indigenous people we have benefited from the privilege associated with these acts of bloody violence. In Tony’s words, we know how much land. Read completed his re-enactment of the massacre story by asking participants to brainstorm how they could re-arrange a symbolic table to share the goods more equitably. McKenna talks about ‘a conversation of hope’ by which he means ‘to connect the frontier to the crucial question of explaining who we are and who we have become as a nation and as a people’.<sup>26</sup>

It would be satisfying if we could end the story there but there is another verse in the ongoing saga of dispossession. In 2000 the Old Farm came up for sale. Tony and Yarrawarra Aboriginal Corporation, partly as a result of bringing the massacre and rebirth story to articulation and public expression, initiated a process to purchase the Old Farm under an ATSIC sponsored buy back scheme. They put their desires on the line to purchase the place and develop it as a site where they could educate their young people, and others, about their history. They waited and waited. But in the waiting, the buy back scheme was abandoned and the property was sold to a private developer. Recently the developer bulldozed large areas of trees, including trees that marked Aboriginal stories there. They recently gained a court injunction to temporarily stop the massacre of the scarred trees with the toe holes and the trees with the canoe bark removed that had marked the place of Tony’s journey of self learning from his grandmother and aunties.

I tell the story with the desire to make language time and place stutter through it and I turn to the senses to try and keep us there within that moment where a body thought agonises. I hope that such stories change our worlds.<sup>27</sup>

There is no conclusion to this act of storytelling and listening because it is located in the ongoing context of negotiations in the contact zone. The contact zone is a useful framework for understanding the telling and listening of such stories because it reveals the workings of the power dynamics that are not otherwise visible if we consider them as simply Indigenous stories or Indigenous history. They are stories that inevitably participate in the relationship between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Australia. And the question, on a local and national level, is will we listen, and will we help get the story out?

In many ways the concept of place or Country is even more significant. For Tony, it is telling and listening to the stories in the actual physical place of their belonging that is powerful. The power resides in the connections, connections between people and places and people and people in those places that are created and recreated through storytelling. Those connections now inevitably include relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, even in the most remote Aboriginal lands in this country.

We believe that we need to learn to sing this country differently. We need to make songs that are sad and painful, a requiem for what has happened in the past; songs that are joyous, that celebrate survival and re-birth; and songs that beat with the rhythm of our

hearts in this country. And we need to keep on singing them because, as Debra Bird Rose says,

Place, while wondrously dense, is also immensely vulnerable, because the ongoing life of a place happens through the actions of ephemeral living beings. ... Ephemeral beings are the crucial actors in all these processes; bringing life forth, sustaining patterns, returning and returning in life and in death.<sup>28</sup>

‘From this starting point’, she says, ‘one’s responsibilities towards life are most properly understood as responsibilities toward emplaced connections’ (182).

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<sup>1</sup> Pratt, Mary Louise *Imperial Writing and Transculturalism*. London: Routledge, 1992. Somerville, Margaret, and Tony Perkins. ‘Border Work in the Contact Zone: Thinking Indigenous/Non-Indigenous Collaboration Spatially’. *International Journal of Intercultural Studies*. 24/3 (2003): 253-266.

<sup>2</sup> Carter, Paul. *Living in a New Country: History, Travelling and Language*. London: Faber and Faber, 1992, 179.

<sup>3</sup> Pratt, *Imperial Writing and Transculturalism*, 7.

<sup>4</sup> Carter, *Living in a New Country*, 174.

<sup>5</sup> Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. London: Routledge, 1994. Haig-Brown, C. ‘Continuing Collaborative Knowledge Production: Knowing When Where Why and How’. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*. 22.1 (2001). 19-32. hooks, bell. *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*. Boston: South End Press, 1990. Soja, Edward. *Postmetropolis: Critical Studies of Cities and Regions*. Blackwell: Oxford, 2000.

<sup>6</sup> Haig-Brown, ‘Continuing Collaborative Knowledge Production’.

<sup>7</sup> Somerville and Perkins, ‘Border Work in the Contact Zone’.

<sup>8</sup> hooks, *Yearning*.

<sup>9</sup> Somerville and Perkins, ‘Border Work in the Contact Zone’.

<sup>10</sup> Sinclair, Paul. *The Murray: A River and its People*. Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 2001: 57.

<sup>11</sup> Tony Perkins, 11/06/96.

<sup>12</sup> Somerville, Margaret. *Body/landscape journals*. Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 1999: 162.

<sup>13</sup> Rose, Deborah Bird. ‘Dance of the Ephemeral: Australian Aboriginal Religion of Place’. In McDonald, M.N. (Ed), *Experiences of Place*. Centre for the Study of World Religions, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003: 168.

<sup>14</sup> Schlunke, Katrina. 2003. ‘Myall Creek: Dumb Places’. Presentation at *Writing Events: New Writing in Cultural Studies*, University of Technology, Sydney.

<sup>15</sup> Tony Perkins, 30/12/97.

<sup>16</sup> Magowan, Fiona. ‘Crying to Remember’. In Attwood, Bain. and Fiona. Magowan. (Eds), *Telling Stories: Indigenous History and Memory in Australia and New Zealand*. Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2001: 41-60.

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- <sup>17</sup> I echo the words of Schlunke, ('Myall Creek: Dumb Places'), here as a refrain in the telling of this story.
- <sup>18</sup> Rose, 'Dance of the Ephemeral' 166.
- <sup>19</sup> Somerville, Margaret. and Hartley, L. 'Eating Place: Postcolonial Explorations of Embodiment and Place'. *Journal of Intercultural Studies*. 21:3 (2000). 353-364.
- <sup>20</sup> Schlunke, 'Myall Creek: Dumb Places'.
- <sup>21</sup> Rose, 'Dance of the Ephemeral'.
- <sup>22</sup> Read, Peter. 'Reconciliation, Trauma and the Native Born'. *Humanities Research*. 9.1 (2002): 29-35.
- <sup>23</sup> McKenna, Mark. 'A Preference for Forgetting: Some Reflections on Publishing *Looking for Blackfellas*' *Point: An Australian history of place*. *Aboriginal History* 27 (2003): 131-138.
- <sup>24</sup> McKenna, 'A Preference for Forgetting' 136.
- <sup>25</sup> Read, 'Reconciliation, Trauma and the Native Born' 34.
- <sup>26</sup> McKenna, 'A Preference for Forgetting' 134.
- <sup>27</sup> Schlunke, 'Myall Creek: Dumb Places'.
- <sup>28</sup> Rose, 'Dance of the Ephemeral' 182.