

## Reconciliation through Tourism

Ian Kelly

University of South Australia

*Reconciliation can stop the cycle of vengeance only if it can equal vengeance as a form of respect for the dead* (Ignatieff, 1997:189).

.....

The tragic events in the Balkans during the 1990s were attributed in part to the Battle of Kosovo which occurred in 1389. On July 12<sup>th</sup>, every year, marchers in Belfast triumphantly celebrate the victory of Protestant English King William of Orange over the Catholic Irish at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690. The visitor centre at Culloden in Scotland educates the visitor on the cruelty and ruthlessness with which, in 1746, the English army destroyed the Scottish Jacobite supporters of the Stuart pretenders to the throne of Britain. The enmities of several hundred years ago are kept alive today.

In Japan, the Yasukuni Shrine honours 2.4 million Japanese war dead, including a number executed as Class A war criminals. Its presence is a continuing contributor to tension between Japan and China. In Kanchanaburi, Thailand, the River Kwai Cemetery and Museum commemorates those who died while used by the Japanese occupiers for slave labour on the Burma-Thailand railway. Despite the horrors documented in the Death Railway Museum, the setting is peaceful and attractive to a large number of visitors. However, while Thailand welcomes Japanese tourists, very few of them visit this memorial. Goldstone (2001) reports that the site of the My Lai massacre in Vietnam still has a memorial which urges visitors to 'forever hate the American invaders,' but notes that the Vietnamese Museum of American War Crimes was renamed the Museum of War Remnants when Americans began visiting the country. The bravery of Australian soldiers at the Battle of Long Tan (1966) in Vietnam is recognized at the site.

The objective of this presentation is to demonstrate that tourism can and should be one of the forces helping to counter continuing hostilities stemming from past events. It is recognized that this is not an easy task.

### **The need for reconciliation**

The need for reconciliation stems from a variety of historical experiences perceived as involving injustice and a denial of human rights. Episodic events include massacres and atrocities, often occurring on a large scale and linked to ethnic cleansing, genocide and terrorism. Staub (1992) attributes these to economic or political crises, a history of division between groups with unequal power, feelings of victimization, scapegoating, and a lack of action (sometimes seen as endorsement) by those who remained unthreatened. The tragic impact of these was demonstrated in Rwanda in the early '90s, when hundreds of thousands of Tutsis were slaughtered by their close neighbours, the Hutus. Clusters of such events are often associated with wars, including civil wars and rebellions which not infrequently have involved deliberate terrorization of civilian populations.

More prolonged experiences relate to the institution of slavery in various forms and locations; subjection to repressive governments as in Iraq and South Africa; colonialism, as in the establishment of empires; and dispossession as has occurred most notably in the Americas and Australasia. The impacts of these are felt in the present and will continue into the future.

According to Minow (1998, cited in Lorey and Beezley, 2002) the goals of reconciliation processes include overcoming denial, establishing facts, creating respect for democracy and human rights, fostering healing, acknowledging victims and expressing the aspiration that such events will not occur in the future.

The major obstacle to reconciliation is the desire for vengeance, often viewed as an essential demonstration of respect and support for the victims. Reconciliation may be more difficult to achieve in the aftermath of recent events, but even the healing effects of time have not eliminated traditional intergenerational hatreds.

Nonetheless, there is perceived value in the pursuit of reconciliation. Although the South African model is perhaps the best-known, Truth and Reconciliation Commissions (under various names) have been established in a number of countries, commencing with Argentina in 1983 (ref. Table 1). Despite the similarity to courts, these commissions do not have the power to impose punishment or deliver compensation, but they have been instrumental in exposing the facts and highlighting individual or institutional responsibilities.

**Table 1: Truth and Reconciliation Commissions**

Country	Commission Title
Argentina	National Commission for Forced Disappearances
Chile	National Truth and Reconciliation Commission
	National Commission on Political Imprisonment and Torture
El Salvador	Truth Commission
Fiji	Reconciliation and Unity Commission
Guatemala	Historical Clarification Commission
Morocco	Equity and Reconciliation Commission
Panama	Truth Commission
Peru	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
South Africa	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
Sierra Leone	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
Timor Leste	Commission for Reception, Truth and Reconciliation in East Timor

*Source: Wikipedia (accessed 31/03/06)*

It must be acknowledged that these commissions have not been completely successful. Ignatieff (1997) commends them for exposing the facts pertaining to the events in question and, in some instances, converting guilt to shame, but submits that they failed to adequately explain how evil regimes came into being, and where the moral responsibility

lay. It should also be noted that reconciliation does not contribute to justice. Admissions of guilt and expressions of remorse by offenders may be required but punishment and reparations do not follow. Ignatieff claims that the reconciliation achieved is of the mind rather than the heart, and it may be that this is a gap to be addressed by tourism.

### **The processes of reconciliation**

The concept of 'reconciliation' is complex. It may refer to the restoration of friendly relationships, acceptance of a given situation or condition, or bringing into balance (as in accountancy). All of those uses of the term may be seen as relevant in the current context.

What, then, are the elements of reconciliation? Saul (2001) submits that the dehumanization and pain associated with atrocities may be countered by public exposure, confrontation between victims and offenders, and a focus on understanding. There must be clear recognition of everything which happened, and a sharing of knowledge which ensures that nothing is forgotten, identifies where possible the rights and wrongs, and highlights the lessons to be learned. Differing versions of the truth must be compared and analyzed, and myth distinguished from fact. Comte-Sponville (2001:125) notes that, 'we forgive more readily when we are aware of the causes determining an action.'

The events in question should therefore be examined in the light of the circumstances which prevailed at the time, including the following:

- the role of culture in conditioning people to participate in or accept the actions now condemned;
- the social and economic conditions which contributed to division and resentment;
- the influence of political figures and opinion makers;
- the rewards, threats and fears which encouraged conformity or collaboration and militated against speaking out in protest;
- the factors behind the acquisition and misuse of power; and
- the extent to which responsibility may be regarded as individual rather than collective.

It is noted that these are criteria for reconciliation at the public and collective level. However, as Lorey and Beezley (2002: xxii) maintain, 'reconciliation ... is not possible without attention to individual trauma.' Genuine reconciliation must occur in the minds of individuals, and not least in those experiencing survivor guilt, the shame felt by those who did not die.

A personal disposition towards reconciliation may be enhanced through the exercise of certain virtues of which the first is compassion, an expression of humanity perhaps best defined as sympathy with those who suffer and the opposite of cruelty and indifference. While compassion towards the victims is usually effortless, it may even be extended to the perpetrators of inhumanity when their involvement is fully understood.

Understanding and compassion can be assisted by empathy - the ability to perceive experiences through the eyes of others - and a degree of introspection. Can we be certain

that we would not have behaved as the offenders did in the circumstances which prevailed at the time?<sup>1</sup>

The objective of understanding, compassion and empathy in the reconciliation context is forgiveness. This is not a feeling but an exercise of will, a choice to accept that the past cannot be undone and to reject anger and hatred as motives for future action. It should be recognized that current generations cannot be held responsible for the transgressions of the past, although they may be expected to acknowledge that they continue to profit from them. It is clearly easier to forgive when perpetrators of injustice or their successors admit guilt and express remorse.

Forgiveness, however, does not extend to forgetting. To forget would be a further injustice to those who suffered, and maintaining awareness of breaches of human rights and of the contributory factors may help reduce the likelihood of reoccurrence in the future.

### **The role of tourism**

As noted above, the goal of reconciliation is to strengthen the ability and willingness of people to recognize and resist the forces contributing to breaches of human rights. *A major strength of tourism as a contributor to reconciliation is its freedom to make the first move, the move which breaks the bonds of inertia and encourages others to take action.*

Touristic involvement with history is generally based on visits to sites where notable events occurred and commonly involves an educational element. Interpretation is provided by displays, tour guides or by site managers using a variety of presentation media. In some instances, visitors may undertake a journey in order to experience to a limited extent the hardships of the victims. As noted, many commemoration sites or activities with a tourist orientation recognize events of significance in the evolution of national or regional cultures, but it is apparent that they help to keep alive the hatreds of the past, especially where there is an emphasis on 'shock value'.

At some sites such as war memorials, a concern with sacredness and patriotism may serve to discourage tourism involvement and critical analysis of the ethics involved in the event commemorated. Braithwaite and Lee (2006) describe efforts to heal the psychological wounds stemming from the Japanese occupation of Sandakan (Borneo) during World War II. Atrocities were inflicted on the native community, resident Chinese and Allied prisoners-of-war (of whom only a very few survived). The authors were involved with the local Sabah community in the development of a historical tourism strategy to generate economic benefits and encourage reconciliation. They recognize the importance of a 'sense of place' by which visitors feel they are welcomed and the provision of interpretation which is complete. Memorial sites are shielded by a zone

---

<sup>1</sup> It may be useful to recall the Stanley Milgram experiments in 1961-62 (Milgram, 1974) which demonstrated that a high percentage of ordinary New Haven residents were willing to administer harmful electric shocks to protesting victims when commanded to do so by an authoritative figure.

which separates them from visitor facilities. The number of Japanese visitors is growing, and the Japanese government has built a Peace Park dedicated to all soldiers and civilians who were killed on the island.

The problem of healing a divided society is addressed by Higgins-Desbiolles (2003) who examines efforts to achieve reconciliation between indigenous and non-indigenous Australians. She laments the rejection by the Australian Government of an apology for indigenous dispossession and notes the significance of symbolic gestures and of the tourism experience offerings, festivals, events and travel guides which seek to inform and diminish the barriers which exist.

She reminds us (pp.37-38) that

*... when Aboriginal people engage with tourism, they may be simultaneously attempting to secure their Native Title rights, build the self-esteem of their youth through revival of culture and secure a reconciled community in which their children can grow up in safety and comfort - as well as the obvious economic benefits that tourism can provide.*

Commemorative and tourism functions are also combined in peace museums, designed as an alternative to the more common war museums (van den Dungen, 1999). Many of these emphasize the horrors and futility, rather than the honour and glory often associated with war. Japanese peace museums and parks discuss atrocities committed by Japanese forces while presenting a case for nuclear disarmament. Some recognize the contributions to non-violence of individuals such as Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King. Those concerned with the aftermath of colonialism and slavery focus on the struggle for freedom and dignity. More than 100 Holocaust Centres remind us of our capacity for evil and the dangers of intolerance, but demonstrate that heroism and altruism can survive even in such extreme circumstances.

There are recent developments which have a general focus on the objectives of reconciliation without attachment to particular places or events. An example is the 1993 Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles, based on the Holocaust but also including the Tolerancenter devoted to encouraging an awareness of prejudice in everyday life (Lennon and Foley, 2000). A similar approach is used in the New York Tolerance Center, opened in 2003, and the Jerusalem Centre for Human Dignity, planned for 2007.

However, as Goldstone (2001:239) notes, there is a difficulty in ensuring that such places are not merely locations 'where people walk through the experience of victimhood on their way to shopping or a nice lunch - precisely what a tourist attraction requires.'

This review suggests that there are certain criteria to be observed if involvement of tourism is to contribute to reconciliation:

1. Location is important. A basic requirement is a site or sites to which visitors can be attracted. In the interests of authenticity, these locations usually have direct spatial links with the events or persons commemorated.
2. Presentation should ensure an appropriate atmosphere, maintained through the use of signage and landscape and/or building design which facilitates visitor access and channeling. Restoration and repair measures may be required to maintain the 'sense of place' pertaining to events of the past. Separate spaces should be created for reflection and more mundane tourism activities such as shopping, dining and socializing.
3. Interpretation is central to the reconciliation objective. Space and visitor time limitations impose a degree of selectivity in the texts, artifacts and images displayed, and in the stories delivered, but they must be truly representative and, perhaps, initiate a desire to learn more. It is important to avoid what has been termed 'presentism' – exclusively imposing perspectives of the present on the past. It is equally important to avoid conveying a view that the past is 'another world' of little significance in the present. Tour guides have a special responsibility to avoid the temptations of bias and sensationalism and to be fully equipped to answer questions.
4. Development and maintenance of the site is likely to depend on the generation of revenue. Where this is so, visitors may be invited to make a donation rather than pay for admission. The availability of souvenirs is often welcomed, but stock should be carefully selected for relevance and appropriateness, and should include material which reinforces or extends visitor understanding.
5. Opportunities for collaboration with non-tourism interests should be pursued. The link with museums has been identified above, but there are also clear synergies to be gained from collaboration between tourism and arts bodies seeking to attract visitors to cultural festivals, concerts, theatre performances and exhibitions with an anti-war or reconciliation theme. Community organizations such as Rotary International pursue peace as part of their vision and may provide assistance. Opportunities may be provided for the involvement of local historians in producing high quality souvenir interpretive material.

### **Cautionary comments**

As Young (1993, in Lennon and Foley, 2000: 158) notes, "Only rarely does a nation call upon itself to remember the victims of crimes it has perpetrated."

However, tourism is not alone, and is indeed a minor player in the encouragement of reconciliation. For example, in the face of conservative accusations of betrayal and bias, Australian and British school history courses increasingly encourage students to question and examine interpretations of past events from a number of critical perspectives.

It is apparent that the growing interest in what has been termed 'dark tourism' (Lennon and Foley, 2000) provides additional opportunities to deliver to a wide audience a future-

oriented message which confirms a commitment to reconciliation and the rejection of violence but there are some limitations to be taken into account.

Given the importance of locational coincidence between site and historic event, opportunities for development of reconciliation-oriented attractions are relatively rare. It is also clear that while economic viability is an essential consideration (with opportunities for what has been termed 'practical reconciliation'), the motivation for such developments should not be exclusively instrumental.

It is also likely that among visitors to reconciliation sites there will be many who do not have the strong emotional involvement of the local community. The potential for conflict between the values of commemoration and tourism is exemplified in the popularity of Gallipoli as an annual pilgrimage site for young Australians recalling the unsuccessful invasion of Turkey by Anzac forces on April 25, 1915. There has been controversy over the appropriateness of infrastructure development, visitor behaviour, types of entertainment and litter disposal, and more stringent controls have been imposed. Despite this, a strong reconciliation element has emerged, with recognition of the humanity, courage and suffering of both Turkish and Anzac troops, and of the failures of political and strategic leadership which led to the event. Commenting on how Gallipoli can contribute to a better world, the Turkish Ambassador to Australia, Murat N. Ersavel (2006: 41), said, "War is tragic and heroic, but it is also futile, brutal and unnecessary. Commemorating all those dead and all that our armies suffered helps prevent us from forgetting that truth."

Efforts to bring about reconciliation will not always succeed. Not everyone will exercise the willpower required to reject vengeance. There are instances of actions to which it is impossible to become reconciled, actions which cannot be explained by psychological disturbance, misconception, ignorance, coercion or persuasion, and which can only be regarded as evil, occurring, according to Morrow (2003:19) 'when human behaviour crosses certain lines beyond which more civilized vocabulary refuses to follow.' Rejection of reconciliation is apparent in very negative visitor book comments at some Holocaust and former prisoner-of-war sites (Lennon and Foley, 2000). It appears that exposure to the facts pertaining to certain events may serve only to reinforce hatred in some people.

There is also a danger that an emphasis on atrocities may contribute to 'compassion fatigue' and desensitization among visitors. We live in an age in which euphemisms such as 'collateral damage' and 'friendly fire' have been adopted to cover what should be recognized as atrocities. However, it is clearly useful to highlight the circumstances in which such abuses of power became possible, and to identify measures which militate against a recurrence of these.

## **Conclusion**

The value of reconciliation is best illustrated through a consideration of the alternative. In the absence of reconciliation, there is a continuing state of resentment, uneasy or volatile relationships and, perhaps, an ongoing cycle of tit-for-tat actions with inevitable 'collateral damage' and reinforcement of hatred.

Despite its focus on historic events, reconciliation tourism is not about the past. It is a counter against exploitation of the past for political or personal purposes, and about taking control of the future. Sites devoted to the reconciliation objective require us to look into ourselves, to examine what Morrow (2003:250) terms 'the dialectic of good and evil in the human heart', and to maintain our awareness of the extent to which a repetition of such evils remains a continuing possibility.

## References

Braithwaite, R. and Lee, Y.L. (2006). Dark tourism, hate and reconciliation: The Sandakan Experience, Occasional Paper 8 in *Peace through Tourism: A Range of Perspectives*, ed. I. Kelly, International Institute for Peace through Tourism, CD-ROM.

Comte-Sponville, A. (2003). *A Short Treatise on the Great Virtues: The Uses of Philosophy in Everyday Life*, London: Vintage.

Ersavci, M.N. (2006). Those who lie in Turkish soil are our own sons: Murat N. Ersavci on Gallipoli's role in building a better world, *The Sunday Mail*, April 23: 41.

Goldstone, P. (2001). *Making the World Safe for Tourism*, Dexter, Michigan: Thomson-Shore (printers).

Higgins-Desbiolles, F. (2003). Reconciliation Tourism: Tourism Healing Divided Societies, *Tourism Recreation Research*, 28(3): 33-44. (An edited version is published as Occasional Paper 7 in *Peace through Tourism: A Range of Perspectives*, ed. I. Kelly, International Institute for Peace through Tourism – [www.iipt.org](http://www.iipt.org) )

Ignatieff, M. (1997). *The Warrior's Honor: Ethnic War and the Modern Conscience*, New York: Metropolitan.

Lennon, J. and Foley, M. (2000). *Dark Tourism: The Attraction of Death and Disaster*, London: Continuum.

Lorey, D.E. and Beezley, W.H., eds. (2002). *Genocide, Collective Violence and Popular Memory: The Politics of Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, Wilmington, Delaware: Scholarly Resources.

Milgram, S. (1974). *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View*, New York: Harper Collins.

Morrow, L. (2003). *Evil: An Investigation*, New York: Basic Books.



Ride, A. (1999). In pursuit of peace and reconciliation, *New Internationalist*, 311.

Saul J.R, (2001). *On Equilibrium*, London: Penguin.

Staub, E. (1992). *The Roots of Evil*, New York: Cambridge University Press.

van den Dungen, P. (1999). Peace Education: Peace Museums, in *Encyclopaedia of Violence, Peace and Conflict*, Vol. 1, Academic Press.