1. 'I am sorry': Prime ministerial apology as transformational leadership

Stephen Mills

The apology to the Stolen Generations delivered by Prime Minister Kevin Rudd in the House of Representatives in February 2008 remains a distinctive landmark in Australian political life.¹ Yet, viewed from a distance of five years, Rudd's speech emerges as but one, albeit a significant one, in a sequence of apologies made by Australian politicians. Before Rudd, state and territory parliaments delivered apologies recommended by the *Bringing them home* (1997) report of the Australian Human Rights Commission inquiry into the forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. Following his apology to the Stolen Generations, Rudd apologised again, in November 2009, to the Forgotten Australians — those who, as children, were removed from their families and institutionalised, including children forced to migrate to Australia.² In November 2012, the Defence Minister Stephen Smith apologised in parliament to members of the Australian Defence Force who had been sexually abused. In March 2013, Prime Minister Julia Gillard apologised to mothers and children caught up in the practice of forced adoptions.³

This wave of Australian political apologies has followed in the wake of apologetic speeches by national leaders elsewhere, notably in Europe, which arise from diverse circumstances including the Holocaust, the destruction of indigenous populations by colonial invaders, and acts of violence during civil wars and regional conflicts (Celermajer 2009; Nobles 2008). The gathering tempo and range of political apology from the 1990s has led Danielle Celermajer to refer to the 'apology phenomenon' (2009: Chpt 1) while other scholars, more ambitiously, have asserted the existence of an 'age of apology' (Gibney et al. 2008). Over the

1 Parliament of Australia 2008. Apology to Australia's Indigenous peoples. House Hansard. 13 February. URL: <http://parlinfo.aph.gov.au/parlInfo/search/display/display.w3p;db=CHAMBER;id=chamber%2Fhansard%2F2008-02-13%2F0003;query=Id%3A%22chamber%2Fhansard%2F2008-02-13%2F0000%22>. Consulted November 2013.

2 Rudd's speech is at: <http://www.heraldsun.com.au/archive/news/transcript-of-kevin-rudds-apology-to-forgotten-australians/story-e6frf7l6-1225798255277>. The National Museum of Australia maintains a site on this issue at: <http://www.forgottenaustralianshistory.gov.au/apology.html>. Consulted November 2013.

3 Gillard's speech is at: <http://parlview.aph.gov.au/mediaPlayer.php?videoID=190367#/3>. The Attorney-General's Department maintains a site on this issue at: <http://www.ag.gov.au/ABOUT/ForcedAdoptionsApology/Pages/default.aspx>. Consulted November 2013.

same period, apologies for collective or institutional failure have been expressed by non-state actors, such as church (Marrus 2008) and business leaders (Hearit 2006; Grebe 2013).

Despite the manifestly central role that leaders play in them, apologies have not to date received significant attention from leadership scholars. The three necessary elements of apology — a speaker apologising on behalf of a community, the recipient of the apology, and the wrong for which the apology is offered — reflect the tripartite focus of leadership studies: leaders who possess various attributes of personality and power, their relationship with followers, and the common enterprise of leaders and followers to achieve shared goals (Wills 1994; Bennis 2007). If public leadership requires the performance of distinctive, strategic functions that are necessary in order for a polity to govern itself effectively and democratically, but which are not performed spontaneously or routinely by the polity's other institutions or actors ('t Hart and Uhr 2008), then apology may have emerged as a new instrument of public leadership. Further, in line with the canonical distinction set out by James MacGregor Burns (1978, 2003), the question may be asked of apology whether, with its language of offer and acceptance, it represents transactional leadership or whether, with its language of justice and reconstitution, it seeks transformational goals.

In dealing with such issues, further questions arise around the language of leadership and the significance of speech as a form of political action — and, indeed, about the merits of focusing on speech as a means of understanding politics. Some forms of political speech — for example, a budget announcement or policy launch — can be understood as largely representational, standing for actors and ideas that exist separately from the speech act itself. On other occasions, however, political speech takes on a constitutive, not merely representative, role. An electoral promise does more than describe some possible future executive action; it creates, at the time of the speech, an enduring obligation and expectation. A concession speech on election night constitutes the acceptance of defeat and the passage of authority witnessed by the national television audience. From a leadership perspective, speeches in which political leaders mobilise followers, articulate visions or delineate community boundaries constitute the performance of political leadership. Prime ministerial apology may likewise be thought of as performing a constitutive function, operating not as a speech 'about' a historical circumstance, but as an act whose performance itself transforms the polity and creates new circumstances and relationships within it.

James Curran has explored how prime ministers have used the past to engage in 'the shaping of Australian national ideals and the voicing of national aspirations'. Curran noted that for prime ministers Gough Whitlam, Malcolm Fraser, Bob Hawke, Paul Keating and John Howard, the evocation of history was

'no idle glance backwards', but instead 'affected the way they have performed as leaders and given substance to how they have conceived Australia' (Curran 2004: 1). Consideration of prime ministerial apology builds on Curran's themes by presenting a new instrument for political engagement with the past (Celermajer 2009: 47), and extends his project to include the post-Howard Labor prime ministers. More importantly, where Curran was concerned with the leaders' individualised conceptions of Australian history, apology entails a collective understanding by a community of its own past, albeit articulated and crystallised on its behalf by its political leader. Indeed, where Curran's leaders adopted an essentially educative relationship with their audiences, prime ministers can apologise only if authorised to do so by their community. On the lips of a prime minister, then, the words 'I am sorry' have shed much of their traditional association with retrospective admission of failure at the personal or executive policy levels. Instead they have taken on a collective and more positive, forward-looking and even transformational character. Notably, in the case of the Stolen Generations apology, the uttering of these words has allowed the Australian polity to address and deal with, after decades of avoidance and failure, profound questions of national reconciliation and identity.

The first and essential consideration in understanding prime ministerial apology is to understand the nature of the wrongs to which apology responds. The wrongs experienced by the Stolen Generations, Forgotten Australians, and victims of forced adoptions constitute a special category of wrongs, whose unusual characteristics have the effect of making difficult the attribution of responsibility for them.

At their core all involve a violation of the fundamental human relationship between parents and children, which as a consequence caused vulnerable people to experience physical pain and psychological suffering. These hurtful acts were not directed externally at a foreign enemy or alien people, but were, in each case, directed internally, against members — albeit marginalised members — of the community responsible for them. In the language of apology, the vulnerability of these individuals bestows an incontrovertible status of innocence or blamelessness upon them.⁴ While the argument has been made that the removal of Indigenous children constituted an act of genocide, these violations did not constitute an act of war as legally understood, and were not carried out solely or even largely by uniformed agents of the state. Rather, institutions of civil society (hospitals, churches, orphanages, so-called 'homes' for children) were critical actors seeking, with the at least implicit permission of

4 As Rudd put it in his Apology to Forgotten Australians: 'The protection of children is the sacred duty of us all'. A recurrent element in the apologies is the reassurance provided to the wronged of their innocence: 'The valley of tears was not of your making' (Rudd, Apology to Forgotten Australians) or, more prosaically, Gillard's declaration that 'these mothers did nothing wrong'.

the state, to intervene in and destroy the parent–child relationship.⁵ Critically, all these events occurred in the past, continuously over periods of time measured in decades; some of the behaviours they represent — notably, the destruction of Indigenous society — can be traced to the earliest period of settler society.⁶ All of the wrongdoing behaviours have now ceased, and the former official sanction for them has been withdrawn. Yet many of their victims remain members of the contemporary community. In summary, the wrongs were perpetrated and experienced collectively, by diverse groups through time.

Parliamentary democracies are reasonably well equipped to deal with the exposure and punishment of individual fault. The doctrine of ministerial responsibility provides, however imperfectly, an enduring process of accountability to Parliament for policy failures of the executive and individual failings of the minister. Question time, committee inquiries, censure motions, confidence motions, and the ultimate sanction of ministerial resignation or dismissal provide a flexible range of means to test accountability. Beyond the legislature, the courts also provide forums to expose and punish actions found to be illegal. But such accountability mechanisms provide little assistance in dealing with wrongs whose cause cannot be sheeted home to identifiable individuals. It is this space that is being occupied by the practice of apology.

In 2002, New South Wales became the first jurisdiction to provide legislative protection for apologies: under the *Civil Liability Act 2002*, an apology by a member of the community for any harm they have done does not constitute an admission of liability and is not admissible in civil proceedings. Full apologies, it is argued, encourage individuals to take responsibility for their actions, and to make recipients of an apology feel their grievance has been taken seriously (Wheeler 2011). At the Commonwealth administrative level, the 2005 discovery of the illegal immigration detentions of Cornelia Rau and of Vivian Solon led the minister, Amanda Vanstone, to issue a written statement in which ‘the Government’ apologised to the two women for the treatment they received and provided ex gratia assistance to them (Vanstone 2005). More recently, the family of two Afghan boys killed in a military action involving the Australian Defence Force led, in March 2013, to an apology and payment

5 Gillard made the link explicit in her apology: ‘This story has its beginnings in a wrongful belief that women could be separated from their babies and it would all be for the best. Instead, these churches and charities, families, medical staff and bureaucrats struck at the most primal and sacred bond there is: the bond between a mother and her baby.’ In the case of the Australian Defence Force, similar issues of institutional neglect and abuse are apparent although victims are adults.

6 Where the wrongs have not definitely ceased taking place, apology may be a premature or incomplete response and is typically preceded by a process of formal investigation. The current Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse perhaps offers an example of this. URL: <http://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au>.

of cash compensation (Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) 2013). Here, collective or organisational malpractice and misadventure towards identified individuals have been addressed through a collective apology.

Attributing responsibility for the wrongs for which Rudd and Gillard have apologised raises more difficult questions of attribution. Which historical individuals and institutions of the state and civil society were responsible? To what extent can those historical actors be identified in contemporary society and, in a kind of reverse-grandfathering, responsibility attached to them? And can responsibility properly be attached to any of those actors while the broader societal norms that permitted them escape censure? As Celermajer (2009: 4) puts it, in relation to what she calls the systematic nature of the atrocities of the twentieth century, it is simply not viable to attribute responsibility to those who wielded machetes or drove the children away; the massive body of the society that condoned the violence, albeit perhaps silently, stands in the shadows. The only statement about responsibility that can be made with certainty concerns the innocence of those who suffered.

The *Bringing them home* report, which documented the harrowing personal stories of the Stolen Generations and the legal frameworks that permitted them, was clear in identifying that governments were responsible for the denial of common law rights, breaches of human rights and other instances of victimisation. Relying on the UN-authorised van Boven principles (van Boven 1996), the report recommended that the 'first step in any compensation and healing for victims of gross violations of human rights must be an acknowledgement of the truth and the delivery of an apology'. For governments, this would involve official acknowledgement by 'all Australian Parliaments' of the responsibility of their predecessors for the laws, policies and practices of forcible removal (Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) 1997: Chpt 14, 5a). State and territory governments responded with formal parliamentary apologies. Yet the Commonwealth Government resisted the call.

Bringing them home did not specify a mechanism for parliamentary apology. Leadership theory however is emphatic in requiring that statements on behalf of any organisation must come from a person, usually the most senior officer, with unfettered authority to speak on its behalf and to take responsibility for its actions. In the case of the Stolen Generations, Howard refused to apologise — but in doing so he implicitly accepted that, as prime minister, he was responsible for making that decision. Conceivably, an apology by the Governor-General could have been made on behalf of the Australian state, though this could not have carried any parliamentary authority. Less likely still, a parliamentary apology could have been issued by the presiding officers (Speaker of the House of Representatives and President of the Senate), but this would have

lacked appropriate political accountability. In other contexts outside Australia, attempted apologies by public officials below prime ministerial rank have tended to fail.⁷

In refusing to heed the call for apology, Howard was apparently deterred by the complex collective and inter-temporal character of the wrong: he asserted that responsibility could not be taken by one collective (the present generation) for the acts of another (a previous generation) and, implicitly, that responsibility could not — and would not — be taken by an individual (himself as prime minister) for a collective of which he was not a part (previous Australian generations). Moreover, he believed that apology implied the acceptance of guilt for actions which may have been, in the circumstances of the time, properly based and sincerely intended; apology could in turn have carried some form of collective liability. Thus he told the Australian Reconciliation Convention in 1997 that 'Australians of this generation should not be required to accept guilt and blame for past actions and policies over which they had no control' (Howard 1997). Howard was willing only to express his 'deep sorrow' for the injustices brought about by past generations and the hurt and trauma that contemporary indigenous people may continue to feel as a consequence. Likewise in 1999, Howard moved a Motion of Reconciliation in the House of Representatives which expressed 'deep and sincere regret' for the injustices but rejected an Opposition amendment seeking an unqualified apology.⁸

Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations vaulted such hurdles by accepting, and dramatically elaborating, parliament's enduring responsibility for its prior actions as well as his own capacity to issue apologies on their behalf. In his speech he apologised for 'the pain and suffering that we the parliament have caused you by laws that previous parliaments enacted' and for 'the indignity, the degradation and the humiliation these laws embodied'. That is, Rudd asserted that the Commonwealth was the original author of the policies and practices at issue and, as an enduring institution, was capable of accepting contemporary responsibility for its previous acts. He implied further that, as a representative

7 For example, the Canadian Federal Minister of Indian Affairs formally apologised in 1998 to the Aboriginal people of Canada for the government's policies of assimilation, yet this statement was largely discounted coming as it did from a junior minister. In 2008 Canadian Prime Minister Stephen Harper made a full apology (Celermajor 2009: 30–32).

8 This position captured the well-known distinction between *feeling sorry* that your window broke while not *saying sorry* for breaking it. That Howard deliberately carved out this niche of non-apologetic regret was made clear in a different policy context when, during the 2007 election campaign, the Reserve Bank of Australia announced an increase in interest rates. Howard told a press conference: 'I would say to the borrowers of Australia who are affected by this change, that I am sorry about that. And I regret the additional burden that will be put upon them as a result'. The following day he was asked by another reporter: 'Mr Howard, if you are not responsible for the interest rate rise, why did you apologise for it?' Howard replied: 'Well I said that I was sorry they had occurred. I don't think I actually used the word apology. I think there is a difference between the two things. I think we have been through that debate before, haven't we?' (See www.abc.net.au/worldtoday/content/2007/for_7_and_8_November_2007).

elected institution, the Commonwealth Parliament embodied the social attitudes of the Australian community — those of the past, which had permitted the removal of children, and of the present, with its preparedness to apologise and reconcile. A narrow apology might have focused on the Commonwealth's historic responsibility for laws of the Northern Territory up to self-government in 1978, while rejecting responsibility for the legislative acts of sovereign parliaments in the states. Rudd instead took the largest course, claiming to speak on behalf of 'we the parliaments' — that is, of state and territory parliaments as well as the Commonwealth Parliament.⁹ Indeed Rudd's apology, while largely focused on the Stolen Generations issue, is actually framed as an apology 'to Australia's Indigenous Peoples' and addresses, in its opening words, their 'past mistreatment' in general.

Like Howard, Rudd felt sorry for the pain and suffering of the Stolen Generation, and he expressed this in powerful, empathetic language. But unlike Howard, Rudd also felt equipped to say sorry for it. Moving a parliamentary resolution of apology, Rudd did so by drawing on a powerful multi-layered authorisation:

To the stolen generations, I say the following: as Prime Minister of Australia, I am sorry. On behalf of the government of Australia, I am sorry. On behalf of the parliament of Australia, I am sorry. I offer you this apology without qualification.

In this triple apology, Rudd spoke in an individual capacity as prime minister — that is, as leader of the majority party in the House of Representatives; in an executive capacity as leader of the national government; and, in a representative capacity 'on behalf of' the Parliament (which came into effect with the passage of the resolution). Rudd's triple formulation demonstrated that an appropriately authorised prime minister can, through the institution of parliament, effectively address complex historical wrongs.¹⁰

Rudd's identification of parliament as the responsible institution made it highly appropriate, of course, that the apology be delivered in this location and during — indeed, at the beginning of — a parliamentary sitting. Moreover, the

9 Rudd's words on this point were as follows: 'The uncomfortable truth for us all is that the parliaments of the nation ... enacted statutes and delegated authority under those statutes that made forced removal of children on racial grounds fully lawful ... Put simply, the laws that our parliaments enacted made the Stolen Generations possible. We the parliaments of the nation are ultimately responsible, not those who gave effect to our laws, the problem lay with the laws themselves.' Rudd may have overreached in this claim; nor did he acknowledge the apologies that had already been made by state and territory parliaments. Likewise, Rudd also blurred state-Commonwealth boundaries in apologising to the Forgotten Australians with the broad claim: 'These children, both from home and abroad, were placed in care under the auspices of the state, validated by the law of the land'.

10 Rudd's apology had also been facilitated, as Celermajor has pointed out (2009: 190–93), by the reframing of the apology debate away from connotations of guilt, for which punishment of the specifically guilty is the appropriate response, towards feelings of shame, which can be expiated by non-punitive atonement and apology.

presence of members of the Stolen Generation in the galleries of the chamber effectively meant Rudd presented his apology face-to-face to (some of) those who had suffered from these parliamentary wrongs. A live television broadcast allowed people around the country — outside the parliament in Canberra, in Redfern, in Federation Square, Melbourne, and in public and private spaces generally — to participate in this event.¹¹ These locational considerations form a key element in determining whether the apology can, in the language of scholars and practitioners, be deemed ‘effective’. Ineffective apologies include those that express regret without taking responsibility (‘sorry that’ rather than ‘sorry for’), that use passive language to avoid responsibility (‘mistakes were made’), and that impose conditions on the other party (‘If you were offended then I am sorry’). By contrast, ‘effective’ or ‘full’ apologies are performed in an appropriate context (in the parliament, in this case, rather than, for example, in a television studio). In an effective apology, the speaker explicitly acknowledges wrongdoing and accepts responsibility for it; the apology is truthful, sincere, and voluntary; the apologist shows identification with injured stakeholders, asks them for forgiveness, seeks reconciliation with them and offers corrective action and appropriate compensation (Hearit 2006). In a similar vein, the New South Wales deputy ombudsman suggests an effective apology should recognise the wrong, take responsibility, explain the reasons, express regret, implement redress and seek release.¹² The apologies by Rudd and Gillard fulfil most of these criteria, suggesting linkages between the requirements for effective apology and the deliberate construction of performative leadership. A familiar trope of their apologies, for example, is the way in which both prime ministers drew evidence from the reports of formal investigations into the wrongs and, further, recounted their personal meetings with individual victims. In so doing they confronted the reality of the collective wrongs while also establishing the authenticity of their own understanding of and responses to them.

Some criteria for effective apology are inherently problematical. In relation to Hearit’s emphasis on timeliness, it is noted that apologies rediscover past events with a contemporary awareness of them as wrong. Apology cannot precede the emergence of that awareness, but must not be delayed once it is complete. Leaders must also wait until they have authority to proceed. Howard could have made an apology following the release of *Bringing them home*, but delayed for a decade. Rudd needed to wait until he became prime minister after the election, but then moved promptly to apologise in Parliament on its

11 The subsequent apologies by Rudd and Gillard varied the staging in a significant way. Both these speeches were delivered in the Great Hall immediately prior to a session of Parliament. Neither speech, therefore, forms part of Parliament’s formal record of proceedings and they serve only to foreshadow the ‘actual’ apologies, which were moved and passed later, in Parliament. The trade-off for loss of parliamentary authenticity was that more people could participate in the larger spaces of the Great Hall, thereby receiving their apology face-to-face from their political leader.

12 The NSW Ombudsman (2009) has published a useful and wide ranging ‘practical guide’ to apologies.

first sitting day. More problematic still is the requirement for compensation as part of an effective apology. Howard apparently regarded an apology as potentially exposing the Commonwealth to the risk of claims from individuals for loss or damage (Celermajer 2009: 173–74). Rudd dealt with the issue through proposing a collective form of compensation — initiatives to 'close the gap' in living standards between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, which have so far failed to deliver on their promise; in the later apologies, collective compensation assumes largely symbolic forms such as the provision of funding for memorial exhibitions.

Any discussion of the performative aspects of apology must acknowledge partisan calculation. Acting and speaking as a national leader, as opposed to a mere political executive, is always politically attractive to prime ministers, who have increasingly ascended a platform that, in earlier periods, might well have been occupied by the Governor-General. International forums such as the United Nations or G20, national disasters such as a bushfire or terror attack, celebrations or commemorations such as Australia Day or Anzac Day, provide opportunities for a prime minister to express and reinforce the nation's identity, elevating his or her personal authority to that of *parens patriae* (Mills 1996). Meanwhile the Opposition leader is rendered — temporarily at least — irrelevant and virtually unable to oppose. Prime ministerial apology must now be added to this genre.

Further aspects of prime ministerial leadership through apology can be discerned through consideration of the critically important leadership function of providing direction: that is, formulating and articulating the organisation's vision. This is not a process in which the leader selects a personal preference and imposes it on followers; instead, the leader identifies a goal that is mutually shared with followers and the attainment of which would serve their best interests. Leaders must then communicate the vision within and beyond the organisation and mobilise and coordinate followers so as to facilitate its attainment. Leaders need the 'ability to communicate their mission in ways that generate intrinsic appeal' (Conger 1991). Understanding of the diverse suite of leader mobilisation practices continues to evolve. Marshall Ganz, for example, speaks of social movement leaders needing a number of strategies to overcome or catalyse barriers to purposeful action by followers; for example, urgency to overcome inertia and hope to overcome fear (Ganz 2010). It appears that in setting out to achieve reconciliation of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, to 'remember' the Forgotten Australians, and to recognise the victims of forced adoption, prime ministers are indeed performing these goal-setting roles. Having recognised a community preparedness to reach a just settlement with its violated members, a goal that would serve the best interests of the Australian community, the prime

ministers delivered formal apologies in ways that mobilised their followers to reconcile. Ganz's list of catalysing communications strategies could be extended by positing apology as a means of overcoming the barriers of shame or guilt.

Burns' distinction between transactional and transformational leadership (Burns 1978, 2003) provides a useful frame for addressing prime ministerial goal-setting in the context of apology. For Burns, transactional leadership is a reciprocal process of mutual benefit based on modal values such as fairness and honesty. There are clearly important transactional elements in these apologies: the apology to the Stolen Generations represented the transactional fulfilment of an election promise; compensatory measures, however symbolic, can also be seen as good-faith attempts to lay out a modally commensurate transaction between the parties. Most fundamentally, the nature of apology itself is a transaction: an offer by one party that can be either accepted or rejected by the other. In Burns, transformational leadership transcends the existing motives and values of followers by mobilising them towards end values such as justice, liberty and equality. The language of the prime ministerial apologies provides many such transformational aspirations. Rudd spoke of the need for a new beginning, turning a new page, crafting a new future, and embracing a new partnership between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians; likewise, to the Forgotten Australians, he urged 'us' to go forward with confidence as 'equal, valued and precious members of this one great family that we call Australia'. Gillard spoke of a profound act of moral insight that would right an old wrong. Transformation is here seen taking place both as the apologist acknowledges shame and as the recipient of the apology moves from rejection to acceptance and from injury to wholeness. Importantly, to achieve this transformation, the prime minister speaks both on behalf of the society that has committed a wrong and to the victims of that wrong — victims who are not, as noted earlier, foreigners or aliens but members of the same society. Apology is expressed on behalf of 'us' and also directed to 'us' or, perhaps, to 'the others within'. Here, then, transformation occurs in the constitution and identity of the community as a whole: the leader articulates the apology of his or her existing followers and then, where the apology is accepted, enrolls the marginalised as full members of a restored community. Thus the apology for past deeds becomes the basis for a national future-oriented project (Celermajer 2009: 172).

Conclusion

Prime ministers can refuse to apologise; attempted apologies can fail; and, the practice of apology might degenerate into ritual or partisan manoeuvring. There may, in a happier future perhaps, be fewer societal wrongs for which to apologise. It is argued here, at least in relation to the category of the profound social

wrongs under discussion, that apology is a new and distinctive mode of prime ministerial leadership. Delivered in the chamber of the House of Representatives, in the presence of the victims of parliamentary wrongdoing, witnessed by a national television audience of millions, the prime ministerial speech act, which is often dismissed as a transient and contingent representation, is here correctly seen as an act of social construction and transformation, bringing into being a new set of relationships among and between citizens and their political leaders. This emergence has coincided with evidence of an apparent intensification of the authority exercised by individual prime ministers (Strangio 2012; Kefford 2013; Dowding 2013), of increasingly tangled relationships between political leaders and the media (Savage and Tiffen 2007), of rising public dissatisfaction with politicians (Young 2000), and of the exhaustion of the Australian polity's repertoire for problem-solving and innovation (Marsh 1995; Marsh 2012). It is all the more striking, then, that prime ministerial apology has operated as an effective and innovative, though still problematic, leadership tool in addressing hitherto unresolved issues of historical responsibility and national identity. Indeed, the transformative impact of apology would be practically impossible were it not for the mutual affection of media and political leadership and their shared capacity to include a national audience in a profound moment of respect, recognition and reconciliation.

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