

Preface:

Interrogating place, conflict and communication in the contemporary world

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

Yet places can equally and just as easily be the arenas of exclusion and marginalisation of particular individuals and groups. They can also be locations over which competing claims are made, and that can be mobilised by conflicting communities for opposing interpretations and purposes. Similarly, the communication of meanings about places can contribute to understandings that are reciprocal and respectful in relation to contending claimants, or alternatively that function to exacerbate conflict – sometimes over extensive territory and across multiple generations – about those places.

Given these circumstances, it is timely in this edited book to interrogate anew the enduringly significant nexus among place, conflict and communication in the contemporary world. This timeliness derives from two seemingly contradictory yet mutually constituted observations about that world. Firstly, the world today is clearly beset by all manner of conflicts, many of

them associated inextricably with competing notions about particular places, whether through territorial disputes, the crossings of national and regional borders by asylum seekers and refugees, and asserted interference by certain countries in other nations' domestic affairs. Moreover, these place-based conflicts are often pursued by means of increasingly sophisticated communication strategies and technologies that also traverse national and regional borders, and that are aligned closely with the outworkings of current manifestations of globalisation.

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

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

several different countries and continents, including Australia, England, Europe, Indonesia, Ireland, Singapore, South Africa, and Zimbabwe.

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

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

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

synthesise the chapter authors' diverse engagements with the organising questions listed above.

Each chapter underwent a process of rigorous peer review and independent editing, designed to maximise its coherence and to ensure its readability. In combination, this book constitutes a set of prominent landmarks in scholarly endeavour and understanding that yield new and striking insights into the continually important issue of the nexus among place, conflict and communication in a globalising world.