

COLIN TATZ: “COMPELLED TO REPAIR A FLAWED WORLD”

Douglas Booth

Genocide Perspectives V pays tribute to Colin Tatz, the founder of the journal, and its official host, the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. In this article I outline Colin’s path to becoming an internationally renowned scholar of genocide; I highlight his influence as a teacher and activist, and dissect the form of his scholarship. Colin’s research interests in genocide and suicide may appear, on the surface, macabre and morbid, but I will reveal him as a committed humanist with a passion for life and remarkable verve and exuberance.

My father introduced me to Colin’s work. He sent me several of Colin’s newspaper articles on the politics of sport.¹ Those articles constituted a landmark in sports criticism in Australia.² My father also paved the way for correspondence that led to Colin supervising my PhD research (1989–1993) in which I investigated apartheid in South African sport and analysed the politics of the sports boycott. Colin was the consummate supervisor: available, organised, thoroughly engaged with the subject, insightful, sharing, firm, scholarly, a master communicator and raconteur, hospitable and generous. His greatest pedagogical gift—that I now offer my students—was urging me to present my own arguments. He explains this approach in *Race Politics in Australia*. Citing Doris Lessing who deplored the education system for stifling fresh thought and creativity, Colin wrote, “She asks (and I am with her), ‘why don’t you read what I have written and make up your own mind about what you think. . . . Never mind . . . Professors White and Black.’ ”³ Our relationship continued and grew after I graduated and we co-authored several pieces.⁴ Colin and I,

1 Between 1980 and 1983 Colin wrote 20 feature articles on sport, 19 for the *Australian* and one for the *Sydney Morning Herald*.

2 Colin advanced the concept in his inaugural professorial lecture at Macquarie University, “Race, Politics and Sport” (1983), which was published in the first edition of *Sporting Traditions* 1, no. 1 (1984), 2–36, the journal of the Australian Society for Sport History. For a recent elaboration, see Colin Tatz, “Transient Triumphalism: Oi, Oi, Oi—The Australian Way,” *Griffith Review* 53 (2016), 228–36.

3 Colin Tatz, *Race Politics in Australia: Aborigines, Politics and Law* (Armidale: University of New England, 1979), i.

4 Douglas Booth and Colin Tatz, “South Africa: A Prisoner of History?” *Current Affairs Bulletin*

and our wives, Sandra and Gaye, have now enjoyed each other's company for nearly 30 years. Like many of the contributors to this volume, Gaye and I have watched, admired, appreciated and taken pleasure in the indefatigable and complete relationship between Colin and Sandra. We are privileged that they have included us in their lives.

I met Professor Colin Tatz in 1996 while he was head of the Centre for Comparative Genocide Studies at Macquarie University. Each time I heard him lecture, I was intrigued by his in-depth knowledge of the history and politics of genocide. I was inspired to join as a volunteer for the Centre that same year. Colin became a great mentor and an inspiration for me to research and write on the Armenian Genocide. When the Genocide Centre closed at Macquarie, Colin helped form the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies. We did not have a permanent office to hold our meetings, but Colin and Sandra opened their hearts and home for our monthly meetings (which included a home-cooked meal). I consider it a great honour and privilege to have been associated with an historian of his calibre and integrity—VICKEN BABKENIAN

The best of teachers. Enrolling in "The Politics of Genocide" at Macquarie University set me on the path I continue on today. Sitting with Colin as he supervised me in my Honours thesis in 1991 on the definitions of genocide opened my eyes to an expansive critical engagement with the world. His other students and I were so fortunate to have him as our guide that year. Colin's unwavering demanding ethic of social justice has been a beacon in this country. He has been a pathbreaker in so many fields. I constantly meet activists and academics who sing his praises. And even now when I meet with him and Sandra in their home he opens my eyes still further—JENNIFER BALINT

The making of a genocide scholar

Colin's journey to genocide scholar began as a young boy.⁵ Growing up in Jo-

70, no. 6 (1993), 4–11; Douglas Booth and Colin Tatz, "Swimming With the Big Boys? The Politics of Sydney's 2000 Olympic Bid," *Sporting Traditions* 1, no. 1 (1994), 3–23; Douglas Booth and Colin Tatz, *One-Eyed: A View of Australian Sport* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2000).

5 Colin offers several accounts of his journey to genocide scholar. See Colin Tatz, "Breaking the Membrane," in *Pioneers of Genocide Studies*, eds. Samuel Totten and Steven Jacobs (London: Transaction Publishers, 2002), 195–216; Colin Tatz, *With Intent to Destroy: Reflecting on Genocide* (London: Verso, 2003), 1–16; "Colin Tatz Explores Life as an Outsider Through Racial Discrimination," by Richard Fidler, ABC Radio, November

hannesburg, South Africa, on the eve of and during the Second World War, he first became aware of “social injustice” and that “something was particularly amiss for Jews”—and blacks. One cue recalled by Colin was the separation of Jewish and non-Jewish students at King Edward VII high school: “We were kept truly apart . . . with no explanation or justification.”⁶ This embryonic awareness launched a lifelong journey into the study of politics and race. The journey began in earnest with postgraduate studies at the University of Natal (MA, Public and Native Administration) and the Australian National University (PhD in Political Science and Public Administration); it proceeded to lectureships in politics and sociology at Monash University (where he also founded and directed the Centre for Research into Aboriginal Affairs, subsequently the Monash Indigenous Centre), and continued on to professorships in politics at the University of New England and Macquarie University. Genocide was not a prominent feature of Colin’s journey until the mid-1980s when, following a series of visits to Yad Vashem (Israel’s official memorial site and research centre on the Holocaust), his experiences, observations and analyses of racism “merge[d] into a stream of Holocaust consciousness.”⁷ After Yad Vashem, Colin began teaching the politics of genocide and launched the Centre for Comparative Genocide Studies at Macquarie University, subsequently the Australian Institute for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at the Shalom Institute, University of New South Wales. In this section I look at Colin’s early life experiences in South Africa to which he attributes the “accretion of values” that laid the foundations for a lifelong anti-racism project; I then turn to the 1980s and 1990s during which Colin identified genocide as the “ultimate form of racism.”⁸

Colin describes his early “socialisation” in South Africa as critical to his life direction and goals. He says that his early years were “beset by wars—against . . . family, empty ritual, solitariness, school bullies, street thugs, boxing opponents, Nazi hat makers”—and locates his first encounters with “race hatred, vilification [and] humiliation” in the private realm of the home. There he saw black servants constantly “berated, demeaned or dehumanised.” “Indignation arose *within*, perhaps instinctively, but certainly viscerally” and he developed a deep empathy for victims. A Rubicon moment came in the mid-1940s. After witnessing a white man plough his car into a

29, 2011, <http://www.abc.net.au/local/stories/2011/11/29/3379167.htm>; Colin Tatz, *Human Rights and Human Wrongs: A Life Confronting Racism* (Melbourne: Monash University Press, 2015).

6 Tatz, *Human Rights*, 28 and 44; Tatz, “Breaking the Membrane,” 196.

7 *Ibid.*, 204 and 205.

8 Tatz, *Human Rights*, 10; Tatz, “Breaking the Membrane,” 211.

black African riding a bicycle, Colin made a statement to the police who later asked him to alter his testimony in order to cast more blame on the cyclist. He refused.⁹

During the Second World War, white South Africa swayed between support for the Allies and the Axis powers. Colin's grandparents had left Lithuania amid growing restrictions on Jews and rising antisemitism in the Tsarist Empire. The South African state classified Litvaks, who made up 90 per cent of South Africa's 120,000 Jews, as white, but neither Afrikaners nor British descendants, the dominant white tribes, were welcoming. The pro-Axis Afrikaner *Ossewabrandwag* (Ox-Wagon Guard) "attacked synagogues [and] Jewish shops . . . and printed and distributed Nazi leaflets and propaganda." Jews formed vigilante groups in response.¹⁰ D. F. Malan, the Afrikaner nationalist who would lead the apartheid government as South African Prime Minister between 1948 and 1954, deemed Jews an "unabsorbable minority."¹¹

At home, Colin followed the war through daily BBC broadcasts, which he translated for his maternal grandmother whom he called *Bobbe*. He reported the Axis forces overrunning Vilna, Kovno, Ponevezh, Shadove, Telze, and heard *Bobbe* cry, "Our family is gone." It was not until mid-1945 that the young Colin finally figured the meaning of "gone": the last clue came during a newsreel at a Saturday afternoon movie matinee showing corpses bulldozed into mass graves at Bergen-Belsen concentration camp.¹²

Collectively, these experiences planted a seed in Colin that blossomed into a mission to tackle racism. It was only much later in his career, though, that the Holocaust became part of that mission. Initially, he balked at analysing the "appalling years" between 1941 and 1945. The turning point was Yad Vashem. It opened the door to the "death factory domain" and provided a new "analytical toolbox" in which the Holocaust connected seemingly disparate cases of racism, such as those experienced by Aboriginal Australians and Native Americans, that at first glance "have little in common with processes in the Third Reich."¹³ The key to this connection is a profound definition of genocide as "the resort to biological solutions to real or confected social, political, or religious problems." The power of this definition, which underpins *The Magnitude of Genocide*, immediately reveals itself in comparative cases. For example, "Australia—while seemingly a far cry from the heaped corpses at

9 Tatz, *Human Rights*, 8, 28 and 42.

10 Tatz, "Breaking the Membrane," 197.

11 Milton Shain, *A Perfect Storm: Antisemitism in South Africa, 1930–1948* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2015), 14.

12 Tatz, *Human Rights*, 10; Tatz, "Breaking the Membrane," 196.

13 *Ibid.*, 204.

Bergen-Belsen or the death marches that Turkish authorities visited on their Armenian subjects—responded to its ‘Aboriginal problem’ by finding . . . a solution in biology” based on “the forcible removal of Aboriginal children from their parents, and their subsequent assimilation by intermarriage into white society.”¹⁴ The definition also launched Colin’s subsequent research into youth suicide among Aboriginal Australians: “many of the suicides are either removed children or descendants of those forcibly removed” and can be linked to the “destruction of culture and language,” the physical relocation of communities, “confinement to reserves and mission stations,” “physical and economic abuse,” “destruction of religious sites” and “solace in alcohol.”¹⁵

Colin’s journey to a scholar of comparative genocide studies commenced with experiences of racism in South Africa and culminated in a fresh comprehension and conceptualisation of genocide. This, in turn, led to a new paradigm of racism and intellectual renown. In a later section I explore the form of Colin’s scholarship; first, I discuss his influence as a teacher.

*Long before I knew him personally, Colin’s writing had always seemed to me to stem from a deep and profound awareness of the devastating consequences of racism. He expressed something that existed inside me as well. I felt strongly the experiences of the Stolen Generations and Australia’s refusal to recognise our own history of genocide. Colin embodies the relationship between the Jewish community and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. In my own journey from working with Indigenous communities to studying the Holocaust and Genocide, I am treading carefully in footsteps already made by Colin. Now he is there to guide me in person as well as through his writing, and he will continue to inspire new generations of scholars committed to raising awareness of history and human rights—*NIKKI MARCZAK

The personal tributes in this article acknowledge, implicitly and explicitly, Colin’s influence as a teacher. He recognised very early that good teachers could “promote human dignity” and “change the order of things” by using their skills of observation, inquiry, writing, talking and, where necessary, preaching.¹⁶ Perhaps not surprisingly then, Colin chose teaching as the primary vehicle for his anti-racism mission as well as to help produce what his co-author Winton Higgins calls “socially aware and morally informed” citi-

14 Tatz and Higgins, *The Magnitude*, 6. See also Colin Tatz, *Australia’s Unthinkable Genocide* (Bloomington: Xlibris, 2017).

15 Tatz, “Breaking the Membrane,” 211–12.

16 Tatz, *Human Rights*, 347.

zens who understand those “central modern western values” of “justice, the dignity of the individual human life, and sensitivity to the suffering of others.”¹⁷ In the following section I delve further into “Colin the teacher” who one former student calls “very gifted.”¹⁸

Teacher

The motto of Macquarie University is “And gladly teche” (adopted from Chaucer’s description of the Clerk of Oxenford in the prologue to *The Canterbury Tales*). Colin taught at Macquarie for more than 17 years and as numerous voices in this volume attest, no one better embodied the University’s motto. Across his teaching career Colin “triggered many career—and life-changing priorities among students.”¹⁹

After training as a nurse I enrolled in a degree in ancient history at Macquarie. In my final year I gained special permission to enrol in “The Politics of Genocide.” That course, taught by Colin, changed my life and the lives of those around me. The history was significant—the biomedical vision of race, the distortion of science and medicalised care, the role of doctors and nurses in killing—and, combined with the urgency of Colin’s message, had an immense impact upon me. Today, I still share what I learned from Colin with others—doctors, nurses, students. I am indebted to him for inspiring me to be a better person, a better scholar, a better teacher, and unafraid to point out the indignity suffered by those who are marginalised and humiliated, and indeed murdered, by others’ misperceptions, fabrications and machinations. This is profoundly the case when a genocidal regime inverts the “duty of care” of medicine—DARREN O’BRIEN

There are some people who come into one’s life who set about a process that changes direction and creates opportunities for seeing the world anew. In 1991 I met Colin Tatz. That meeting proved pivotal: his passion for truth and justice, for making this world a better place through teaching and ensuring that the past, no matter how uncomfortable, was not lost, left a profound mark on me. As mentor, teacher, companion and friend, Colin demanded nothing less than the best I could give. The debt I owe this extraordinarily humble man

17 Cited in Tatz, *With Intent*, 172–73 and 182.

18 Robert Orr, review of *Human Rights and Human Wrongs*, *Indigenous Law Bulletin* 8, no. 27 (2016), 26.

19 Winton Higgins, personal correspondence, May 9, 2016.

is one I can never repay. The Talmud says there is no greater obligation for a student than to honour their teacher (Talmud Torah Chapter 5, Halachah 1). I honour my teacher, Colin Tatz—PAUL O'SHEA

Colleagues, too, recognise Colin's influence on their lives. John Maynard, Director at the Wollotuka Institute of Aboriginal Studies at the University of Newcastle and Chair of Indigenous History acknowledges Colin as "a source of great inspiration" throughout his career and comments that he "has always been willing to offer support, encouragement and advice."²⁰ Just as colleagues and students sing their praises of Colin, so is he quick to identify those who inspired him and who continue to do so. His first inspiration was a teacher at Yeoville Boys' Primary School (Johannesburg) who Colin says "changed my life":

My first lessons in injustice, inhumanity and the width and depth of moral divides came not from family or Judaism but from Phil Green. He took us through prisoner-of-war camps, death camps, refugee camps, and South African military camps. . . . The embodiment of life learning rather than book learning, [Green delivered an invaluable] lesson: there is simply nothing better than an inspirational teacher in the flesh.²¹

Others followed Green, including Edgar Brookes and Arthur Keppel-Jones at the University of Natal, and Yehuda Bauer at Yad Vashem. In 2015 Colin still described Bauer as his "mentor and inspiration."²²

Colin the teacher neither merely imparts knowledge nor simply assigns readings. He performs and projects his entire persona onto subject matter. At the heart of Colin's pedagogical performances lies a modulated voice with a highly controlled tempo and cadence that instantly commands the attention of those who meet and listen to him. Tony Barta and Raimond Gaita both refer to the power and presence of Colin's voice. Tony underscores a radio interview in which Colin "tells us about his early life and the way his values were formed in South Africa."²³

Genocide Perspectives is about different voices. Colin's writing voice is known to people concerned about genocide all round the world. Now, wherever they

20 John Maynard, personal correspondence, November 16, 2016.

21 Tatz, *Human Rights*, 41–42.

22 *Ibid.*, 257.

23 "Colin Tatz," by Richard Fidler.

are, they can hear his unforgettable speaking voice as well. It will make the same impression it immediately made on me 30 years ago, resonant and direct. His radio interventions still resonate his national importance in Australia. In this conversation he tells us about his early life and the way his values were formed in South Africa—TONY BARTA

What I most admire about Colin's work—as a writer, a “doer” (as he puts it) and as a teacher—is the way he is present in it, the way his voice informs and is informed by the content of what he says and does. To paraphrase Wallace Steven: Colin is a man whose fine character passes through him like a thread through a needle. Everything he does is stitched with its colour. To explain why a “doer by nature” should have been a teacher for much of his life, Colin refers to Elie Wiesel. Asked what anyone could do about the Holocaust Wiesel replied, “one must teach and teach again”—RAIMOND GAITA

Although less than enamoured with the “excruciating elocution lessons” that he endured as young boy,²⁴ Colin encourages his students to practise and develop their communication skills, to expel jargon, to use plain language—especially when explaining complex subjects—and to craft their writing. He leads by example on each of these fronts. Colin's alliterations inject life into his prose: “Suicide is fraught with faith, fear, folk lore, demonology, dogma, dread, mystery, secrecy, speculation and tradition.”²⁵ He sharpens focus by juxtaposing seemingly disparate descriptions: “At Mitzpe Ramon [Negev desert] we saw some spectacular ibex goats tip-toeing on precipices. We also observed and talked to a few Russian immigrants trying to tip-toe into life in a new and very different place and culture.”²⁶ He is creative: who else would describe a cardiac operation as “a cross between mediaeval butchery and Belgian tapestry making!”²⁷ He playfully exposes the follies of his opponents: Professor Goldney, a prolific writer on suicide, “embraces the real estate slogan of ‘location, location, location’ when he calls suicide ‘depression, depression, depression.’”²⁸ Above all, Colin marries lucid and vivid writing with a sharp eye and ear to capture profound insights. The following account of an

24 Tatz, *Human Rights*, 39.

25 Colin Tatz, “Suicide and Sensibility,” *Death Studies*, 2017. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/07481187.2017.1333358>

26 Tatz, *Human Rights*, 342–43.

27 *Ibid.*, 287.

28 Tatz, “Suicide and Sensibility.”

exchange in the foyer of the Moree bowling club in rural New South Wales illustrates Colin's view that sport is a "passport to respect":

A very short, very fat Aboriginal bowler, complete with bowls case and creams, approached a very blue-rinse matron, visibly, undoubtedly a National Party conservative: "Heather, would you care to play with me in the mixed next month?" he asked. "Harold, I'd be delighted," was the unhesitating reply.²⁹

Irrespective of whether they agree with Colin's arguments, peer reviewers almost universally praise his style with phrases such as "dramatic," "sharp," "enthusiastic," "passionate," "poignant and powerful," "forcefully argued," "thought provoking" and "compelling."³⁰ Perhaps the ultimate accolade for style and presentation comes from Israel Charny, Executive Director of the Institute on the Holocaust and Genocide (Jerusalem), who describes *The Magnitude of Genocide* as "an amazingly readable intellectual tour de force. Rarely have I seen the dread topic of genocide addressed so humanely and interestingly. Strangely, this is even a book to enjoy."³¹

Curriculum development is one area of Colin's teaching that warrants comment. He has been a prominent advocate for courses about Aboriginal Australians in contemporary society, antisemitism and the Holocaust in universities and teachers' colleges. Aboriginal activist, and Australia's first Aboriginal magistrate, Pat O'Shane, observes that in the 1960s Colin "fought a one person battle" to bring Aboriginal Australians into the curriculum beyond such traditional discussions as prehistoric and historical artefacts.³² In the 1980s and 1990s he advocated for teaching genocide and Holocaust studies. His accounts illuminate the nature of this advocacy and, in particular, the inordinate energy expended on advancing pedagogical justifications and translating them into (typically bland and lifeless) administrative and bureaucratic goals, ob-

29 Colin Tatz, *Obstacle Race: Aborigines in Sport* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 1995), 257.

30 Gill Cowlshaw, review of *Aborigines and Uranium and Other Essays*, *Mankind* 14, no. 3 (1984), 236; Bret Harris, review of *Obstacle Race*, *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 1 (1996), 71; Rob Hess, review of *Obstacle Race*, *Victorian Bulletin of Sport and Culture* 5 (1995), 17; Robert Goldney, "Is Aboriginal Suicide Different? A Commentary on the Work of Colin Tatz," *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 9, no. 2 (2002), 257; Sam Garkawe, review of *With Intent to Destroy*, *Current Issues in Criminal Justice* 17, no. 1 (2005), 164 and 166; Emma Kowal, review of *Aboriginal Suicide is Different*, *Australian and New Zealand Journal of Public Health* 30, no. 4 (2006), 394. See also Pat O'Shane, review of *Race Politics in Australia*, *Australian Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (1979), 114; Sally Weaver, review of *Race Politics in Australia*, *Aboriginal History* 4, no. 2 (1980), 223; Joseph Reser, "What Does It Mean to Say That Aboriginal Suicide Is Different?" *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2 (2004), 34.

31 *The Magnitude*, back cover.

32 O'Shane, review of *Race Politics*, 110.

jectives and mission statements, lobbying peers and colleagues for support, mobilising resources, and negotiating compromises in the hotly contested and highly charged political environment of higher education.³³

*I worked with Colin primarily during my tenure as Education Director at the Sydney Jewish Museum. An enduring memory I have of Colin was his absolute commitment to teaching the difficult topics of Holocaust and genocide to secondary school teachers. Despite a demanding academic schedule and many other commitments, Colin was so convinced of the importance of this work that he undertook these initiatives voluntarily. His dedication and passion for educating at all levels was palpable to all who attended these seminars. His contribution will resound as the next generation of teachers undertake their work, enriched by the knowledge conveyed so expertly and movingly by Colin—*AVRIL ALBA

Curriculum changes invariably ruffle the feathers of academic conservatives. Proposals for change may be couched in the scholarly jargon of evidence and objectivity but they are no less biased and barbed. Colin constantly confronted this conservatism. In several places he tells the story of the colleague who asked him how he would balance his presentations of genocide. Never slow, Colin retorted that “there could be no such thing as a pro-genocide viewpoint” and that he would never give an ex-Nazi camp *Kommandant* the opportunity to lecture to his students.³⁴ Advocacy slides into activism in such circumstances; in the context of genocide this is particularly apt. Activism is commensurate with Colin’s anti-racism project. Tony Barta puts activism at the fore of Colin’s work: “Out of the dire South African environment [Colin] brought to Australia his ability, and passion, to make everything he wrote a political intervention. He made *sport* an activist concept. He made *Aboriginal Affairs* an activist site. So Lemkin’s activist concept found in Colin Tatz the kind of activism that made his intellectual contribution count for so much.”³⁵

Activist

Activism typically evokes discomfort in the academy where it is widely deemed incompatible with detached reflection and scholarly objectivity and

33 Tatz, *Human Rights*, 273–84.

34 *Ibid.*, 277. See also Tatz, “Breaking the Membrane,” 207.

35 Tony Barta, personal correspondence, May 10, 2016.

integrity. Of course, these traits are more closely associated with the positivist philosophies and methods of the hard natural sciences that conceptualise truths as independent realities that can be counted, calculated, computed, measured and weighed. By contrast, researchers in the social sciences and humanities, who opine about social phenomena, and the structural and ideological forces that bear on them as well as the overt political struggles that they entail, are more receptive to truths as the social products of contextualisation, historicisation and reason. These are Colin's primary "sources of knowledge, of discerning and perceiving." Reasoning, he explains, provides the means by which to identify "paradoxes and contradictions between stated aims and actual behaviour," to reveal "inconsistencies, why are they present, and how [to encourage] people . . . to see, even accept, the need for reasoned congruence."³⁶

Reasoning is political, moral, and an element of activism. Citing the Hungarian-born scholar of politics Robert Berki, Colin declared that:

political thought is not only descriptions and explanations in the so-called neutral sense, but also . . . evaluations and advocacies: "they are factual statements, philosophical arguments and value judgments all at the same time." Further, "they are *consequential*: their importance reaches into the realm of future alternatives. They pronounce on the morality, the rights and wrongs of actions connected with changing or maintaining the character of the state." Those are the "visions" of political (science) workers: they are also mine.³⁷

By its very nature, political and moral reasoning compels researchers to insert themselves into their research, to make clear their judgements and values, and to assign responsibility. These practices resound in Colin's writings. "My bias is clear," he affirms in *Obstacle Race*, his major treatise on racism in Australian sport:

it is pro-Aboriginal in most things and anti-racist in all things. I am not politically correct and do criticise some Aboriginal attitudes and behaviour. Every effort is made to be meticulous about matters of fact, but I cannot hide my anger or frustration at facts that by their nature embody either evil, moral turpitude or professional negligence.³⁸

36 Colin Tatz, "Criticism of Criticism: A Reply to Thiele," *Mankind* 14, no. 5 (1984), 401.

37 Ibid.

38 Tatz, *Obstacle Race*, 8.

Such statements have brought charges of polemics. Colin does not recoil. “Yes, I am a ‘polemical scientist,’ ” he told one critic: “[I] engage in controversial discussion or argument, attacking or refuting the opinions of others. I have spent a lifetime controverting the doctrines and belief systems of many, especially in the fields of race relations and genocide studies.”³⁹

*Colin is unwaveringly committed to frank engagement with justice and social equity. His scholarship in race relations and genocide studies has been all the more rigorous and energetic for this commitment, which ultimately rests on a fierce fidelity to truth. While truth-seeking has won him a well-deserved international reputation as an intellectual, it has also attracted the toxic enmity of those who have a vested interest in untruth. The latter have included revisionist “historians” of Australian race relations, the Turkish government in its century-old struggle to obliterate the memory of the Armenian Genocide, and lunar-right bloggers. Colin has drawn their fire because he has not contented himself with academic publications—he has also sought to publicise his findings and arguments, thus becoming an un-ignorable public intellectual. One with the moral fibre to stand up to the inevitable thuggish hostility—*WINTON HIGGINS

Colin readily assigns responsibility. In *The Magnitude of Genocide* he and Winton Higgins blame the West for the “lion’s share” of genocide in the twentieth century and for “replenishing” the “swamps” in which genocide continues to “fester” in the Middle East and North Africa.⁴⁰ While many activists stop short of solutions, Colin is always alert to answers. Genocide prevention may have attracted little attention from scholars,⁴¹ but he proposes an international agency to identify potential politicides, ethnicides and genocides. Of course, he is the first to acknowledge that any solution will require the political will to act.⁴²

Colin’s activism has not hinged on criticism. He also employs celebration. This is strikingly evident in his encouragement of Aboriginal Australians to celebrate their sporting successes achieved despite colossal obstacles including, *inter alia*, “geography, isolation, incarceration, prejudice, racism, alienation, exclusion, children stolen.”⁴³ Significantly, Colin did not just en-

39 Colin Tatz, “Rejoinder to ‘Is Aboriginal Suicide Different?’ A Commentary on the Work of Colin Tatz,” *Psychiatry, Psychology and Law* 9, no. 2 (2002), 260–61.

40 Tatz and Higgins, *The Magnitude*, 227.

41 *Ibid.*

42 *Ibid.*, 238.

courage; he also acted, conducting research to prove these achievements *and* helping to compile the inaugural Aboriginal and Islander Sports Hall of Fame to highlight the accomplishments.⁴⁴ Colin published the research and the Hall of Fame in *Obstacle Race*; he and son Paul subsequently twice updated the Hall in *Black Diamonds* (1996) and *Black Gold* (2000).⁴⁵

Obstacle Race articulates the three pillars of Colin's activist project: critique, celebration and scholarship. Colin is at his critical best in the opening chapters, exposing the fallacies, myths, untruths, inconsistencies and hypocrisy of Australia's anti-Aboriginal racist alliance of miners, pastoralists, big business, conservative politicians, lobbyists and policy advisers, newspaper editors, columnists and talk-back radio hosts. The final chapter, "Aboriginal and Islander Sports Hall of Fame," bestows dignity on the best Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes and helps restore confidence among victims of racism. Between these two bookends Colin showcases his research skills. Some dozen chapters describe, analyse and evaluate the circumstances of around 1,200 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander athletes and entire communities within the contexts of a "welfare" system and public prejudice. The historian of sport, Rob Hess, rightly calls this research, based in part on visits to 80 Aboriginal communities across Australia, "a considerable feat."⁴⁶

Obstacle Race won the non-fiction section of the 1995 Australian Human Rights Awards and received glowing peer reviews. Hess recommended it as "essential reading for all historians" and the Australian Studies scholar Daryl Adair later acknowledged that Colin's research in this field "has been instrumental" in raising "awareness of the extent of discrimination against Aboriginal people in Australian sport, past and present."⁴⁷ Clearly, Colin has achieved his goals as an activist scholar.⁴⁸ But a scholar is judged on more than unearthing facts and raising awareness. While there is much ambiguity about

43 Tatz, *Human Rights*, 287.

44 For details of the selectors, see Colin Tatz and Daryl Adair, "Darkness and a Little Light: 'Race' and Sport in Australia," *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2 (2009), 9.

45 Published by Allen & Unwin, and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies respectively.

46 Hess, review of *Obstacle Race*, 17.

47 Ibid; Daryl Adair, "Indigenous Australians and Sport: Critical Reflections," in *Beyond C. L. R. James: Shifting Boundaries of Race and Ethnicity in Sport*, eds. John Nauright, Alan Cobley and David Wiggins (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 2014), 67. See also Richard Broome, review of *Obstacle Race*, *Sporting Traditions* 12, no. 1 (1995), 175–77; Annemarie Jutel, review of *Obstacle Race*, *Journal of Sport History* 25, no. 2 (1998), 335–57; Douglas Booth, review of *Obstacle Race*, *International Journal of the History of Sport* 12, no. 3 (1995), 202–04.

48 In 1997 Colin was awarded Officer of the Order of Australia (AO) for "service to the community through research into social and legal justice for people disadvantaged by their race, particularly the Aboriginal community, and to promoting the equal participation in community life of all Australians."

what precisely constitutes scholarship, in the following section I focus on the form of Colin's deep explanation of events and the reception of those explanations by his peers.

Scholar

Colin defines himself as a contextual historian, "an action-oriented field-worker" with "an anthropological and sociological bent, and a particular interest in comparative analysis."⁴⁹ History is a cornerstone of Colin's political project. In his words, "if one wants to begin the very difficult journey of overcoming racism, one has to start *facing history*, looking down the tunnel of its ugliness, not dismissing it, orchestrating amnesia or sanitizing history."⁵⁰ Here, however, I am interested in the form of Colin's historical practice.

The two most prominent forms of explanation in history are argument and narrative. The latter contains a plot, a mode of organising evidence as a genre of story (for example, romance, tragedy, comedy, satire) in order to "add meaning—usually a moral meaning"—and to "wrap" the subject up "in an account . . . from which instruction can be derived."⁵¹ Arguments often contain key elements of a narrative such as the origins of the subject and conclusions that contain moral lessons. Without a plot, however, the narrative dimensions of an argument remain "impressionistic."⁵² Colin occasionally veers into narrative, particularly in his research into Aboriginal sport; mostly, he presents his history as formist and contextualist arguments. *The Magnitude of Genocide* contains both forms.

A formist explanation engages empirical evidence, rather than pre-formulated concepts, in order to emphasise the unique, distinctive and peculiar, and

49 Tatz, *Human Rights*, 284.

50 Tatz, *Obstacle Race*, 159.

51 Hayden White, *The Practical Past* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2014), 83. While White deems the Holocaust "the most significant event in the internal history of the West in our time" ("The Public Relevance of Historical Studies: A Reply to Dirk Moses," *History and Theory* 44, no. 3 [2005], 337), he maintains that history is not especially well suited to establishing its meaning. He suggests that the "significance" of the Holocaust—"its meaning, its relevance to us, today, tomorrow [and] for the next generation"—transcends "a discipline devoted to establishing 'the facts of the matter.'" Consistent with his views that narratives are more fundamental to representations of the past than evidence and that historians impose narratives on the past, White argues that "better narratives," "imagination and poetic insight," rather than more facts, are required if we are to "divine" the meaning of the Holocaust ("The Public Relevance," 336 and 338). White identifies Saul Friedländer's *The Years of Extermination: Nazi Germany and the Jews, 1939–1945* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007) as an exemplary ethical and intellectual representation of the Holocaust (White, *Practical Past*, 76–92).

52 Hayden White, "The Structure of Historical Narrative," *Clio* 1, no. 3 (1972), 6, 9 and 11. Arthur Danto argues that even non-narrative forms of presentation, such as statistics and economics, are typically translated into narratives. Arthur Danto, *Narration and Knowledge* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

to avoid abstraction and reductionism.⁵³ In *The Magnitude of Genocide* Colin and Winton use comparison as a formist explanation for different grades of genocide. While acknowledging that all genocides impose “seismic calamities” on the victims, they argue that the term itself is “a single, flat word that covers a spectrum of behaviours and processes.” Thus, one genocide is not the same as another and analysis demands the differentiation of events according to “type, scale, scope and intensity,” and “outcome and legacy.”⁵⁴ The philosophy of history is largely silent with regard to the rules of comparison other than to note that cases should be culturally appropriate and share a common context. In the end, comparison requires judgement, discernment and perspicacity on the part of the researcher who is the final arbiter of what constitutes an appropriate comparison.

Colin presents his best history as contextualist explanations, setting his subjects, whether genocide, racism or sport, within clear contexts. Contextualist explanations proceed from the assumption that “‘what happened’ . . . can be accounted for by the specification of the functional interrelationships existing among the agents and agencies . . . at a given time.”⁵⁵ Establishing a context is no simple task: one does not simply integrate every event and trend. Rather, the art of contextualisation involves selecting particular “threads” and joining these into “chains of provisional and restricted” explanations that constitute a “manifestly ‘significant’ occurrence.” Advanced contextualisation also means tracing the threads outward into the surrounding social environment in which the event occurred, and both backward and forward in time. Tracing the threads backwards enables the scholar to determine the origins of the event; tracing them forwards allows them to determine the impact or influence of the event on subsequent events. Contextualisation ends when the “threads either disappear into the context of some other event or converge to cause the occurrence of some new event.”⁵⁶ Like comparison, contextualisation always involves judgements and distinguishing between the significant and the insignificant.⁵⁷

The Magnitude of Genocide contains powerful and persuasive examples of

53 Hayden White, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973), 13–17.

54 Tatz and Higgins, *The Magnitude*, xiii and 7; Tatz, *Human Rights*, 261.

55 White, *Metahistory*, 18.

56 *Ibid.*, 18–19. See also White, *Practical Past*, 90.

57 While contextualisation is primarily a matter of judgement, Arthur Marwick offers a model for a systematic approach that opens the process to the broadest possible perspectives. Marwick’s model comprises four principal components: major forces and constraints, events, human agents, and convergences and contingencies. Arthur Marwick, *The Sixties: Cultural Revolution in Britain, France, Italy, and the United States, c.1958–c.1974* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 23–25.

systematic contextualisation such as locating the Holocaust in the context of Germany's response to the forces of modernisation. This piece of contextualisation begins with a defective German state and a particularly reactionary "ethnic version of nationalism and national identity" that nurtured antisemitism. The First World War was a critical event that set the stage for the Holocaust:

[It] exacerbated [Germany's] social breakdown and administrative dislocation; this, in turn, overwhelmed the fragile democratic republic that replaced the second Reich, and ushered in the yet more disfigured Third Reich. It pursued mass support by appealing to fanatical antisemitism.⁵⁸

These events subsequently facilitated the rise of the key agents of the Holocaust, videlicet, the fascist movement and its Nazi elite, and provided them with "both a camouflage and a pretext for . . . genocide." The Holocaust also involved a convergence between its agents and a number of emerging forces associated with modernisation such as "bureaucratic organization," advanced "technology and infrastructure," a scientific culture built on "social engineering and the dehumanization of victims," and a mass media that pacified and lulled the broader population into "moral indifference."⁵⁹ Venturing toward the literary style of a meaningful narrative, Colin and Winton conclude that "if any event deserves the title 'a modern tragedy'—or better still, 'a tragedy of modernization'—[the Holocaust] is it."⁶⁰

Beyond history, Colin champions multidisciplinary. "To probe genocide," he and Winton write, "we need the analytical tools of several humanities and social science disciplines, as well as some from the natural sciences, medicine, and law."⁶¹ A notable element of Colin's penchant for multidisciplinary is his criticism of narrowly constituted research bogged in jargon and constricted and constricting social theory; in these regards anthropologists and medical researchers are prime targets.⁶² Some scholars in turn have questioned the absence of theory in Colin's work.⁶³ Others, such as Tim Rowse, note that

58 Tatz and Higgins, *The Magnitude*, 78.

59 *Ibid.*, 84–85.

60 *Ibid.*, 78. White, however, argues that the Holocaust poses unique problems of historical representation. See Note 51 above.

61 Tatz and Higgins, *The Magnitude*, 8.

62 Colin Tatz, *Aborigines and Uranium and Other Essays* (Melbourne: Heinemann, 1982), 3. For example, see Colin Tatz, "Aboriginality as Civilisation," *Australian Quarterly* 52, no. 3 (1980), 362; Tatz, "Rejoinder to 'Is Aboriginal Suicide Different?'" 260–261; Tatz, *Human Rights*, 302; Colin Tatz, "Innovation Without Change: Suicide Prevention is Going Nowhere," *+61j*, March 19, 2016, www.plus61j.net.au.

63 For example, see S. J. Thiele, "Anti-intellectualism and the 'Aboriginal Problem': Colin Tatz and the 'Self

Colin's research involves "strategic evaluations" and political objectives, not theoretical positioning, while Robert Orr, Special Counsel at the Australian Government Solicitor, makes the pertinent observation that Colin wants to rise above "easy or accepted answers" and has no qualms querying "group enthusiasm for fashionable trends."⁶⁴ Colin's editorship of *Genocide Perspectives [I–IV]* offers perhaps the clearest evidence of his engagement with theory. Jurist and academic, The Honourable Michael Kirby, who launched *Genocide Perspectives IV* and whose work appears in this volume, praises the journal for its "outstanding contributions" to "both the theoretical and practical issues of genocide: past, present and potential."⁶⁵

By any measure of assessment, Colin's scholarship is deep, rigorous, logical and systematic. It has been scrutinised and acknowledged for its impact by peers such as Michael Kirby and John Maynard; it has contributed to social knowledge and debate across a wide range of fields including the politics of race, Holocaust and genocide studies, youth suicide studies, migration studies and sport history.⁶⁶ For purely illustrative purposes, I single out four of Colin's contributions. I begin with his definition of genocide as a biological solution to social, political or religious problems. As discussed above, this definition has facilitated a new paradigm of racism that is contributing to a richer understanding of the term and its deadly consequences. The second contribution involves Colin's mediation in the international legal definition of genocide that includes a broad range of acts from physical killings, to removal of children, preventing births, and causing mental harm to a group. Responding to the breadth of these acts, Colin proposes different levels of culpability, like the laws around murder in the United States. Under this schema the law would recognise "first degree" genocide for acts such as mass murder, second degree genocide for less serious acts, and other lower degrees for even lesser acts. Thus, while removal of children from their families would still be considered genocide, such acts would be legally distinguished from the mass slaughters associated with the Holocaust and Rwanda.⁶⁷ There are two particular merits in this position. First, it intellectually disposes of comparative trivialisations

Determination' Approach," *Mankind* 14, no. 3 (1984), 170–72 and 177; Christopher Anderson and Ian Keen, "On the Notion of Aboriginality," *Mankind* 15, no. 1 (1985), 42, 43 and 44.

64 *Ibid.*, 45; Orr, review of *Human Rights*, 27.

65 Michael Kirby, personal correspondence, July 1, 2016. Kirby was the Chancellor at Macquarie University between 1984 and 1993; he presented me with my PhD in 1993.

66 In early 2016 Colin's curriculum vitae included 11 sole-authored books, five co-authored books, seven edited books, 75 chapters in books and 112 journal articles.

67 Colin Tatz, *Genocide in Australia*, Canberra Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, Research Discussion Paper Number 8, 1999, 28–32; Tatz, *Unthinkable Genocide*; Tatz, *With Intent*, 146.

such as comparisons of My Lai (Vietnam) with Auschwitz (Germany). “If everything that results in the killing of more than a handful of people is genocide,” Colin argues, “then nothing is genocide. There is no need for the word, the idea, the crime or its analysis.”⁶⁸ Second, it offers a potential solution for dealing with some of the legal issues around genocide, including restitution for victims and their families.

Highlighting the role of the law in fostering social change is another area where Colin has contributed to social knowledge. This is no idealistic position proffered from an ivory tower. Colin fully acknowledges that the “law has been, and will continue to be, an impediment” to social change, empowerment, and access to rights and dignity. Nonetheless, he correctly identifies sets of laws that have had positive effects on social behaviour. These include laws that prohibit discrimination, allow for positive discrimination (for example, affirmative action), establish “protective legal incorporations” and provide “recourse to civil law.”⁶⁹

Finally, Colin has shown that there are different cultural values and beliefs around suicide. He argues that indigenous values warrant a “contextual anthropology” to first understand the acute sense of helplessness that fuels the problem and second, to generate targeted solutions (such as personal empowerment, literacy training, highlighting positive role models, anchoring communities in their own histories).⁷⁰ Colin’s research in this area has brought him into sharp conflict with the medical profession, which insists that suicide is a medical problem grounded in depression, mental ill health, genetic tendencies and chemical imbalances.⁷¹ But it has won him more academic plaudits. Damien Riggs, for example, believes that Colin has demonstrated “that Indigenous suicide is indeed ‘different’ . . . to non-Indigenous suicide,” and commends his work for its “original and cutting edge approaches” with respect to “intervening in, or alleviating, suicide within Indigenous communities.”⁷²

Thus far I have touched on Colin the teacher, activist and scholar. What of Colin the person? In concluding this article, I draw attention to the verve, exuberance, grace and humour of a man who thinks about, teaches and finds

68 Ibid., 147.

69 Tatz, *Race Politics*, 49 and 52; Tatz, *Genocide in Australia*, 31. Interestingly, Sir Graham Latimer, former president of the New Zealand Māori Council, believed that the New Zealand courts had been instrumental in getting Māori and Pakeha talking to one another. Neville Glasgow, interview by Sir Graham Latimer, *Te Ahi Kaa*, Radio New Zealand, June 12, 2016, <http://www.radionz.co.nz/national/programmes/teahikaa>.

70 Tatz, “Suicide and Sensibility.”

71 For example, Goldney, “Is Aboriginal Suicide Different?” 259.

72 Damien Riggs, review of “Aboriginal Suicide is Different,” *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2 (2005), 83.

inspiration in genocide. “Clearly,” as one reviewer laconically puts it, “this is not everyone’s cup of tea.”⁷³

Conclusion

Colin immerses himself in genocide and suicide. Yet neither subject subsumes him. On the contrary, he retains a keen sense of perspective. An insight into this dimension emerges from his comments on life in the Centre for Comparative Genocide Studies where, amid reflections on death, there was “warmth, camaraderie, even excitement” and “insider jokes” that helped relieve some of the suffering and “ever-present tears.”⁷⁴ Colin is also pragmatic. While justifiably confident that his words have improved the “understanding” of genocide among “many students and members of the public,” he makes no claims to having alleviated, much less prevented, the crime.⁷⁵ He disagrees with Christian notions of justice founded on “guilt, admission, absolution, expiation,” that include “a prohibition on any criminal or civil action against the confessed perpetrator by the family of the deceased.” Nonetheless, he concedes that the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for example, is a “reasonable compromise” between those who wanted a Nuremberg-type trial and those who wanted nothing.⁷⁶ Notwithstanding the acquittal of three Australians for war crimes in the late 1990s, Colin places “more value on the evidence that emerges from trials than on conviction and punishment.”⁷⁷ “Trial,” he said in his inaugural Abraham Wajnryb Memorial Lecture in 1994:

is an articulation by the state that an evil of some kind is believed to have occurred. . . . Trial is about as much of a public declaration as we can get that there are moral and ethical values which society wishes, or needs, to sustain. Trial records . . . are . . . infinitely more powerful educative tools about contemporary social and political history than the passive voice and indirect speech of history texts.⁷⁸

73 Garkawe, review of *With Intent*, 166.

74 Tatz, *Human Rights*, 278.

75 Tatz, *With Intent*, 184.

76 Tatz, “Breaking the Membrane,” 208.

77 Tatz, *Human Rights*, 280.

78 Colin Tatz, “Reflections on the Politics of Remembering and Forgetting: The First Abraham Wajnryb Memorial Lecture, 1994” (North Ryde, NSW: Centre for Comparative Genocide Studies, Macquarie University, 1995), 31–32.

Colin plunges to the depths of genocide and suicide but an intense and wide-ranging curiosity means that, paradoxically, he also dives head first into life.

Love of and engagement with life shines through Colin's accounts and stories of his experiences. He injects intense feelings into his descriptions of new places, sights—architecture, customs, geography—sounds and tastes.⁷⁹ Humour is a constant companion. At the 2003 Canadian Association for Suicide Prevention conference in Iqaluit (Baffin Island), the roads on the banks of Frobisher Bay were “simply frost with soil covering” and “some wag had planted a road sign in the permafrost: ‘Beware of the Kangaroos.’ ”⁸⁰ Reflecting on his humour, Colin writes, “*to be funny, you first have to think sad*. And seeing how much of my life has been about things that are sad, I do see the funny side—or at least part of it, part of the time.”⁸¹

In the final chapter of his memoir, Colin discusses his Jewish identity. He refers to the ethnic and intellectual traditions to which he feels strongly attached, and he highlights the concept of *tikkun olam* in which one is “compelled to try to repair a flawed world.”⁸² *Tikkun Olam* invokes considerable debate within Judaism but as a moral dictate to make the world a better place through your own actions, it has framed Colin's life. All of us who have been taught by Colin, worked with him, read his words, listened to him or sought his advice, and especially those who have been championed by him, have benefitted from his unyielding commitment to this commandment.

79 For example, see Tatz, *Human Rights*, 259, 333 and 336.

80 *Ibid.*, 335.

81 *Ibid.*, 346. Emphasis in original.

82 *Ibid.*, 345.