

Reconciliation, Nationalism and the History Wars

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Introduction

In 1991, the Australian Parliament unanimously passed legislation that instituted a formal ten-year process of reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. This process was intended to reconcile Indigenous and non-Indigenous people by the end of 2000, in time for the centenary of the foundation of the Commonwealth of Australia in 2001. The process had several goals: to educate the wider Australian community about reconciliation and Indigenous issues; to foster a national commitment to address Indigenous socio-economic disadvantage; and to investigate the desirability of developing a document of reconciliation, and if considered desirable, to advise on the content of a document. The legislation created the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation (CAR) to promote and guide the reconciliation process.

There were several moderately successful outcomes during this reconciliation process. The most notable were the education campaigns, that assisted in better educating some non-Indigenous people about Indigenous issues and contributed to the creation of a 'peoples' movement' for reconciliation. However, there were also a number of significant, interrelated concerns with the ten-year process. One concern was that a narrow concept of justice was advocated through focussing on socio-economic issues, rather than analysing issues of restitution. A second concern was the failure of the goals of the reconciliation process to be substantially achieved by 2001. A third concern was the nationalist framework of the reconciliation process, which marginalised many issues of importance to Indigenous people, such as land rights, self-determination, a treaty and sovereignty.

In this paper, I discuss this third concern, namely the emphasis on nationalism within the reconciliation process. I argue that this emphasis largely resulted from the significant impact that a number of revisionist historians have made, since the 1960s, upon the wider Australian community. There were two main reactions to these new histories. One reaction, largely from politically conservative elements of Australian society, involved disbelief, denial and hostility. The other reaction, largely from politically progressive elements, involved guilt, shame and a questioning of the legitimacy of the Australian nation. Although both these reactions significantly influenced the reconciliation process, I argue in this paper that the emphasis on nationalism within the process was predominately an attempt to address this second reaction.

The ending of 'The Great Australian Silence'

In the second of his 1968 Australian Broadcasting Commission's Boyer Lectures, entitled 'The Great Australian Silence', W.E.H. Stanner argued that Australia's historians had largely ignored many aspects of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships, such as the invasion and the massacres (Reynolds 1999: 91-92). Further,

Stanner did not see this silence resulting from simple forgetfulness by individual historians, but rather

He believed that it was a structural matter, 'a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned over habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale' (Stanner 1968, cited in Reynolds 1999: 92).

Reynolds argued that whilst many nineteenth century historical texts discussed Indigenous issues, the "cult of forgetfulness" emerged in the late nineteenth century, at a time when Australian nationalism was increasing and the colonies were moving towards Federation (Reynolds 1999: 92). This evasion of any discussion about issues such as frontier violence continued, with some exceptions, until the late 1960s when anthropologists such as Stanner and C.D. Rowley started to discuss them (Reynolds 1999: 114; Attwood 2000: 254-255; Sharp 1998: 32).

Since the late 1960s, though, many historians such as Henry Reynolds, H.G. 'Nugget' Coombs, Andrew Markus and Bain Attwood, have written about the history of relations between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. They have uncovered a history of appalling violence and oppression, discussing issues such as invasion, massacres, stealing of children and genocide. The work of these revisionist historians, that revealed the history of Australia as involving invasion and violent oppression, saw a significant break with previous historical writings, which reinforced the falsehoods that Australia was peacefully settled and that the previous occupiers were gradually "pass[ing] away" (Attwood 2000: 255). This has "forced a fundamental shift in the way in which Australian history has been 'contested' over the last decade" (McKenna 1998: 70; see also Mulgan 1998: 179).

Conservative reactions

Many Australians reacted in denial and hostility against these new histories. They argued that the revisionist historians were disciples of political correctness, interpreting acts of the past through contemporary eyes. Yet Reynolds (1999: 160-164) argued that many of today's concerns about issues of invasion and massacres were similarly expressed by people in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. It was only since the late nineteenth century that the 'Great Australian Silence' prevented discussion about issues of invasion and massacres.

If political correctness were involved in the matter at all it was in the suppression of these questions by nationalist historians writing between 1900 and 1960, who were more interested in telling heroic tales

than in confronting the legal and ethical problems underlying the process of colonisation (Reynolds 1999: 164).

There were three particular events – the *Mabo* decision, the Stolen Generations Report and the *Wik* decision - that occurred during the ten-year reconciliation process that generated much debate about interpreting the past. The issues discussed in the High Court decisions and the HREOC report, namely native title and its continued existence and the stolen generations, illustrated how some Australians could not accept the history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations.

Conservative critics of the *Mabo* High Court judgement, such as Geoffrey Blainey, failed to understand that the judgement was not an invention of the late 20th Century, but rather utilised legal principles from the 18th Century (Reynolds 1999: 201). *Mabo* also reinforced the revisionist histories. By rejecting *terra nullius* and recognising that native title survived British claims of sovereignty, the judgement revealed that Indigenous people “either currently own land under native title or have done so in the past and have a moral, if not a legal, right to compensation” (Reynolds 1999: 203). There was much hostility generated against this recognition by the High Court. Hugh Morgan claimed that the consequences of the “naïve adventurism of the High Court” in the *Mabo* decision had created a “legal, political and constitutional crisis” and could lead to levels of “bitterness” and “divisiveness” comparable to that seen in the conscription campaigns of the First World War (Morgan 1993: 3; Morgan 1992: 19, 24). Morgan also attacked the High Court judges as “being ashamed to be Australian” and seeming “to have no pride in their country and they strive mightily to melt it down and recast it, furtively, in a new self-deprecating and much diminished mould” (cited in Gaita 2001: 25).

Pastoral leases were invented by Britain in the 19th Century to allow both pastoralists and Indigenous people to use the land that was leased by the pastoralists (Reynolds 1999: 211-217). Despite this, the Howard Government and many conservative commentators were furious when the High Court ruled in the *Wik* judgement that this co-existence could continue today. The High Court also ruled that in an instance of conflicting use between an Indigenous group and a pastoralist, the pastoralists’ rights should prevail. Prominent business leaders, pastoralists, conservative commentators and Coalition politicians argued that the High Court was guilty of judicial activism and demanded that the *Native Title Act* 1993 be amended to ensure certainty for pastoralists (Bennett 1999: 54-55). The then deputy Prime Minister stridently asserted that there would be “bucket-loads of extinguishment” (reported in Brough 1997: 3) and Pauline Hanson called for the abolition of native title (Hanson 1998: 20).

The release of HREOC’s Stolen Generations Report in 1997 saw a serious political campaign from both conservative commentators and the Howard Government to undermine the credibility of the report (Manne 2001: 6, 75). Ron Brunton claimed that

“Bringing Them Home, is one of the most intellectually and morally irresponsible official documents produced in recent years” (Brunton 1998: 1) and that it should have resulted in “the abolition of the organisation that produced it, on the grounds of demonstrable inability to discharge its obligations in an honest manner” (Brunton 2000: 37). The report’s finding that genocide had been committed was dismissed and ridiculed (Minouge 1998: 15-17). Most frequently, these campaigns consisted of utilising the same methodology as the Holocaust denialists, nitpicking at slight inaccuracies in the report in the assumption that the entire report would be then discredited (Tatz 1998: 5). The reasons for this campaign included a lack of empathy, a belief in the policies of assimilation and an attempt to justify the actions of their forefathers (Manne 2001: 102). However, the campaign was largely conducted in an attempt to not only prevent Australians from accepting the terrible truths of the stolen generations, but also to dissuade any discussion about broader issues of revisionist histories (Gaita 2001: 25). As Manne (2001: 104) argued:

Their scepticism about the injustice done to the stolen generations, which was reflected in the anti-Bringing them home campaign, was the most important cultural expression of a growing atmosphere of right-wing and populist resistance to discussions of historical injustice and the Aborigines.

A number of conservative commentators have attacked the revisionist histories. Christopher Pearson argued that subscribing to these histories is “succumbing to retrospective Utopianism” (C. Pearson 2000:260). Michael Duffy described the proponents of the revisionist histories as “white moral maggots” (Duffy 2000: 27). The Commonwealth Government has also condemned the revisionist histories and defended Australia’s reputation. In a 1997 speech, John Howard argued that:

One of the things that annoyed (sic) me most about political debate in Australia at the present time, is the way in which so many people who comment about Australia as opposed to Australians, are spreading this view that in some way we are a narrow-minded, bigoted people ... I think it is time we called an end to the self-flagellation, the introspection, the defensiveness and the willingness to accept unfounded criticism, unjustified criticism of the performance of the Australian nation (Howard 1997a; see also Tatz 1998: 6; Howard 1996a).

Howard has been involved in these history and culture “wars” since at least 1988, when as Opposition Leader he released his *Future Directions* statement (Macintyre and Clark 2003: 121-122). This statement “illustrates Howard’s dismissal of identities larger than the family and smaller than the nation – class, religion, ethnicity, gender, race” (Kelly 2003: 28), which he saw as detrimental to the unity of the nation. Although Howard was heavily criticised at this time for his attack on Asian immigration, “once in office [in 1996], he took up the prosecution of the History Wars

with a vengeance, helped this time by Geoffrey Blainey's Black Armband epithet" (Macintyre and Clark 2003: 220-221). Howard criticised attempts to "rewrite Australian history" and "stifle voices of dissent" through "abuse and vitriol" (Howard 1996b cited in Macintyre and Clark 2003: 137; Howard 1996b cited in McKenna 1997). He argued that instead, history should tell "the story of all our people and ... is owned by no-one" (Howard 1996b: 1-2 cited in McKenna 1997). Further, Howard argued that any "blemishes" in Australia's history cannot alter the "overall story of great Australian achievement" and 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 1997b).

In seeking to defeat the 'Black Armband' view of history, Howard utilised several strategies. He appropriated the "Australian Legend", with its allusions to egalitarianism, "mateship" and nation building, from its traditional owners, the Labor Party and the Australian working class (Brett 2003: 20-21). He also appointed conservative ideologues onto the boards of important cultural institutions such as the Australian Broadcasting Commission and the National Museum to defend them from a "trendy postmodernism and postcolonialism" (Moses 2003: 351-352). Further, Howard supported conservative historian Keith Windschuttle's arguments that the "character of the nation" was under attack from the "wildly anachronistic, conceptually odious and historically false" claims of the Black Armband historians (Windschuttle 2001; see also Reynolds 2003: 109; Lake 2003: 163). Windschuttle's criticisms of revisionist historians were seen as so fundamental to Howard's history wars that Stevenson (2001: 8) stated: "if Keith Windschuttle hadn't existed, John Howard would have been sorely tempted to invent him".

These conservative reactions illustrated a continuing "politics of 'fear'" that significant sections of the Australian community still possess which posits an "oppositional binary between 'whiteness' and the Other" (Gale 2001: 128). As Gale argued:

Embedded in this discourse is a fear of Indigenous rights, manifested in claims that Indigenous rights would create a separate nation within a nation or the creation of a disadvantaged class of whites who are not treated the same as Indigenous Australians (Gale 2001: 128)

Progressive reactions

Although some Australians reacted with disbelief and denial to the revealing of the history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, many other Australians reacted in shock at the discussions of invasion, massacres and genocide. In learning how Australia was founded, many people viewed the history of Australia differently (Manne 2001: 104). There was also a questioning of the moral underpinnings of the nation. As Attwood argued, "the old history has been exposed as a travesty; most

importantly, it is now realised that Australia was not founded through discovery and settlement but by conquering another people – and so its legitimacy has been drawn into question” (Attwood 2000: 255).

As well as the writings of revisionist historians, other factors also influenced many Australians’ sense of identity since the 1960s. These factors included the success and visibility of Indigenous activism, international changes such as the civil rights movement in the United States, the anti-apartheid campaigns concerning South Africa and the decolonisation of many African and Asian countries, the shift from racial nationalism to a more civic form of nationalism following the Second World War, the gradual abandonment of emotional links with Britain, and the changing “ethnic composition” of Australia’s population (Moran 1998: 105-106; McKenna 1998: 70; Markus 2001: 11-12). All these factors contributed to a decline in “the previously dominant colonial paradigm” (Moran 1998: 106). The critique of the colonial paradigm can result in non-Indigenous people experiencing feelings of guilt. Mulgan (1998: 184-185) argued that, although the “moralising liberals” embrace this guilt as a “badge of honour and a source of self-esteem”, the majority of non-Indigenous people feel uneasy about the emotion of guilt.

It can be argued that by adhering to a nationalist discourse, the reconciliation process aimed to remove much of the guilt, concern and uncertainty that many non-Indigenous Australians felt because of their recently acquired knowledge concerning Australian history. The reconciliation process endeavoured to develop a “viable and legitimate single national identity out of both settler and Aboriginal cultures” (Moran 1998, p.108). One of reconciliation’s main proponents, Frank Brennan, illustrated this aim in 1991 when he commented on the desirability of a treaty. He firstly quoted two Indigenous people, who in discussing the need for a treaty, stated that Australia “is their [non-Indigenous people’s] country too now”, “we have to share this country” and “there should be one Australia and we should be part of it” (Brennan 1991: 20). Brennan secondly argued that:

Approaching the first centenary of our existence as a federation under the Constitution, we have the time to negotiate a just and proper settlement. Committed to finding common ground, we need to settle so that no Australian be alien to the land or to the society which is our common heritage. We might then share this country with all belonging to this land (Brennan 1991: 20)

Over the ten-year period, the formal process of reconciliation was dominated by ideas of nationalism. During the process,

A single national story has come to dominate understandings of what the process of reconciliation was designed to achieve. Stories and headlines such as ‘United Nation’, ‘The People’s Apology’ draw on a

notion of reconciliation being about a singular united action (Pratt, Elder and Ellis 2000: 10).

This idea of constructing a single national identity was illustrated in a speech Paul Keating delivered at Redfern to mark 1993 as the United Nations Year of the World's Indigenous peoples:

We are beginning to more generally appreciate the depth and the diversity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures. From their music and art and dance we are beginning to recognise how much richer our national life and identity will be for the participation of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders. We are beginning to learn what the indigenous people have known for many thousands of years – how to live with our physical environment. Ever so gradually we are learning to see Australia through Aboriginal eyes, beginning to recognise the wisdom contained in their epic story. (Keating 2000: 63)

Similarly, CAR also encouraged the development of a united identity and history. In one of its Key Issue Papers, *Sharing History*, CAR argued that:

A shared sense of history has the potential to be an influential agent of reconciliation ... By actively sharing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' history and culture, non-indigenous Australians are able to lengthen and strengthen their association with this land. Any immigrant peoples will, for a time, experience a degree of historical discomfort in a 'strange' and 'new' land, and one way of coming to terms with an adopted country is to view the land through the eyes of its indigenous owners. In forging a new identity, the immigrant peoples in Australia have sought to share with, and often appropriate, indigenous symbols, motifs, phrases, and place names - defining Australia's distinctiveness by seeking to share Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' culture and history. (CAR 1993: 1; see also Read, 2002: 29; Gordon 2001: 125)

For the first several years of the formal reconciliation process, CAR also released several documents that argued for a *united* Australia and described Australia as *one nation*. Following the 1996 Federal Election, and with the advent and subsequent notoriety of Pauline Hanson and her *One Nation* party, the term 'one nation' disappeared from official reconciliation literature. However, CAR continued to advocate for a *united nation*. As Moran argued, "curiously, given its historical pedigree and its contemporary appropriation by Pauline Hanson's political party, 'one nation' has been a catchcry of reconciliation, in official documents from the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, and in public and media commentaries" (Moran 1998: 102).

It is interesting to note that this nationalist framework of the reconciliation process was the latest manifestation of a long-standing focus of non-Indigenous Australians. Gale (2001: 131) argued, “white nationalism has been a significant feature of Indigenous and non-Indigenous relations in colonial Australia and continues to be a significant notion in shaping public debate on reconciliation” (see also Moran 1998: 103-105). As Moran (1998: 109) argued:

Official Reconciliation represents a new phase of a more continuous nationalist project aimed at resolving the colonial legacy of ‘shallow history’ for the nation, enabling it to tap into deep sources of connection with the continent through the full incorporation of indigenous people. At the same time, by making the indigenous ‘Australian’, the settler nation would remove an alternative and competing claim to the *national* landscape.

The nationalist discourse of reconciliation attempted to fuse Indigenous and non-Indigenous identity and history. Indigenous people were referred to as “the nation’s first peoples” (Commonwealth Parliament 1999: 14), as “first Australians” (Neill 2002: 1, 3; Nossal 2000: 298; Gordon 2001: 108) and as the “first peoples” of the land of Australia (CAR 2000: 3). Further, Gale (2001: 129) argued, “Indigenous people are represented as part of the nation as citizens, with an emphasis on the significance of the 1967 Referendum, and the inclusion of Indigenous people as part of the Australian nation”. Thus, major reconciliation events, such as the 1997 Australian Reconciliation Convention, Corroboree 2000 and the National Reconciliation Weeks, were specifically held on the anniversaries of the 1967 referendum. This merging of Indigenous and non-Indigenous identity and history would enable non-Indigenous people to claim a greater connection with Australia and also would blur the distinction between ‘Indigenous’ and ‘non-Indigenous’, thus restricting any challenges to the existing power relationships (Moran 1998: 109).

An illustration of how the reconciliation process actively encouraged non-Indigenous Australians to adopt Indigenous identities and histories came from one of CAR’s Key Issues Papers, *Sharing History*:

The reconciliation process seeks to encourage non-indigenous Australians to deepen and enrich their association with this country by identifying with the ancient Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander presence in Australia. A common misconception is that Australia is the youngest continent – only 206 years old – whereas in reality it is one of the oldest: both in terms of geology, and continuous human history. It is only through indigenous Australians that non-indigenous Australians can claim a long-standing relationship with and a deeper understanding of Australia’s land and seas, in a way possible to other

nations who have occupied their native soil for thousands of years ... Thus a sense of identity and pride can be gained from the length of time Indigenous Australians are known to have lived here (CAR 1993: 28-29)

Furthermore, the reconciliation process attempted to assimilate Indigenous culture into the wider Australian community. Various rationales were propounded for this acquisition, often through "Christian, Jungian and New Age perspectives", which argued, "Aboriginal cultural property will enable non-Aboriginal Australians to heal the alienated self, become reconciled with the land that they inhabit, regain a lost mythopoeic realm and acquire a hitherto lacking spiritual continuity" (Rolls 1998: 171, 184). As Gale (2001: 129) argued:

Within the thematic of symbolic reconciliation there is an emphasis on tolerance and being a united nation. This theme includes possessive, romantic representations of Aboriginality. Indigenous culture is seen as part of Australia's heritage. The art and the dancing along with the didgeridoo and the boomerang become symbols not only of Aboriginality but also of Australia as a nation (see also Norman 2002: 13).

Rolls (1998: 171-172) provided several examples of this cultural appropriation, including: some non-Indigenous people in Alice Springs had asserted that they had rights to country as they had acquired some basic Indigenous knowledge; an author claimed his being born in Australia granted him access to a "Dreaming story" in the Kimberley; and John Williamson, a country singer, stated he felt like a "white Aborigine". Ronald Wilson, the Deputy Chairperson of CAR from 1991 to 1994, spoke of non-Indigenous Australians having "pride in indigenous art, music and writing which now forms part of our culture" (Wilson 1994: 15). David Malouf, a non-Indigenous writer, who co-authored CAR's *Declaration towards Reconciliation* with Jackie Huggins, argued there should be "a convergence of indigenous and non-indigenous understanding, a collective spiritual consciousness that will be the true form of reconciliation here" (Malouf 1998: 39-40). Germaine Greer, a noted author and academic, argued:

Aboriginality is not a matter of blood or genes ... it follows that whitefellas can achieve a measure of Aboriginality ... if we think of Aboriginality as a nationality, it suddenly becomes easier ... acquiring Aboriginality is to a large extent the getting of knowledge ... (Greer 2003: 15-16).

Indigenous people were concerned at the appropriation of their history, identity and culture by the reconciliation process and many non-Indigenous supporters of reconciliation. Many Indigenous people in Tasmania argued, "Aboriginal

reconciliation is another form of assimilation whereby, in the year 2001, most people in Tasmania will claim some form of Aboriginal descent" (Ryan 1996: 310).

Many progressive non-Indigenous people clearly see reconciliation as a process that will deliver a final settlement of history, a final outcome of justice. For example, Kim Beazley argued that reconciliation should lead to closure (cited in Ferrier 2000: 5). Many Australians believe this will be achieved when the Prime Minister apologises to Indigenous people; there will then be no moral connection between the past and the present (Gaita 2001: 25, 30; Pratt, Elder and Ellis 2000: 3). However, this concept of history and justice, in which all disputes would be forever resolved, is not only completely unrealistic, but aims to "eliminate" all of the important distinctions between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Moran 1998: 109).

CAR is implicated in this approach. Its inclusion of an apology in the *Declaration towards Reconciliation*, that was conditional on Indigenous people expressing forgiveness, clearly illustrated the notion that reconciliation involves a final settlement. However, as Digeser (2000: 9) argued:

What is surrendered through the act of political forgiveness is the ability to use past wrongs or debts to make future claims. Victims and transgressors, creditors and debtors are reconciled through forgiveness in the sense that past wrongs and debts remain in the past ... the past has been settled and overcome. Political forgiveness is, in part, a promise not to use the past against the future (see also C. Scott 1999: 354; Cohen 2001: 238; Manne 2000: 130).

Many non-Indigenous people were also envious of Indigenous people, their culture and their connections with land. For instance, Travis Kemp, a non-Indigenous academic, lamented "that my own indigenous knowledge has been lost; distorted, manipulated and misrecorded over such an extensive period of time as to render it largely devoid of the wisdom and spirit of my ancient indigenous relatives" (Kemp 2003: 20). However this envy was checked by the reconciliation process' claim that there can be a shared identity and history between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people (Moran 1998: 110).

As argued above, the nationalist agenda of the reconciliation process aimed to construct a single, legitimate national identity and history and was primarily aimed at assisting those non-Indigenous Australians who felt guilty or ashamed about the past to feel more secure about both themselves and their country (Pratt, Elder and Ellis 2000: 7-8; Anne Pattel Gray cited in Ferrier 2000: 5). As Christopher Pearson argued, "from a sceptical perspective, it's tempting to see reconciliation predominantly as a way for parts of suburban white Australia to feel good about itself at minimal personal cost" (C. Pearson 2000: 262). Thus, the reconciliation process concentrated on encouraging Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to

develop relationships, but not on exploring the moral issues of contemporary repercussions of the invasion, massacres and genocide. As Pratt, Elder and Ellis (2000: 8) argued:

Many of the representations of reconciliation that circulate today [are] the logo 'Walking Together', images of outstretched hands, clasped hands, sea of hands ... the original moment of invasion and the continuing process of colonisation is not visible. The psychic, emotional and legal legitimacy of the colonial/post-colonial nation is not questioned. The fact of colonisation, even when it is accepted as illegitimate, is taken for granted and seen as a given. The task is represented as being about moving on from there.

The cost of this nation-building exercise was that many demands were placed on Indigenous people. They were expected to forgive non-Indigenous Australians, abandon the desire for retributive justice and to merge their history and identity with that of non-Indigenous Australians. An illustration of these three demands came from CAR's *Declaration towards Reconciliation*. This document contained an apology to Indigenous people that was conditional on Indigenous people accepting the apology and forgiving non-Indigenous people (CAR 2000: 3). It did not mention sovereignty, the need for a treaty or land rights and only referred to self-determination "within the life of the nation" (CAR 2000: 3). It also incorporated phrases such as "we, the peoples of Australia", "we share our future and live in harmony", "our nation", and "move on together" (CAR 2000: 3). As Tatz (1998: 7) argued:

The 'good' people preach reconciliation. They argue for a sharing of the future at the price of closing the chapters on the past. The victim must forgive the perpetrator, clearing the record and the perpetrator's conscience. 'Let's turn over a new leaf and begin again' is a commonplace in reconciliation rhetoric. Its proponents never acknowledge what the old leaf was or what it is that is to begin again. Nor do they ever spell out what it is that Aborigines should cease doing by way of injury to the mainstream. This must be the best imaginable bargain for the reconciliationists. (see also Kelly 2001b: 29)

Rolls (1998: 171) asserted that the appropriation of Indigenous cultures, histories and identities by the non-Indigenous society would hamper any attempt to achieve substantive reconciliation.

In arguing that non-Aborigines can 'Aboriginalise' the landscape and/or even themselves, and enter into a spiritual affiliation with place or country on the same or similar basis as Aborigines, the Aboriginal claim for recognition of unique status and for land rights (amongst other matters) is substantially weakened.

The demands by some Indigenous people for non-nationalist goals, such as sovereignty, genuine self-determination and treaties (for instance see Foley 2000: 31), illustrated that many Indigenous people were often not satisfied with the nationalist goals of the reconciliation process. "They challenge the understanding that the vague and amorphous concept of reconciliation is sufficient for Indigenous people" (Pratt, Elder and Ellis 2000: 10). As these Indigenous demands did not fit within the nationalist discourse of reconciliation, and hinted at the possibilities of a non-united Australia, they were consequently marginalised or ignored (Pratt, Elder and Ellis 2000: 6, 10). "The idea of a treaty or compact between indigenous and non-indigenous people [was] given lip service in the *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act* 1991 [and] seems to be receding from view daily" (Moran 1998: 111).

Those Indigenous people who continued to advocate sovereignty were heavily criticised. Hal Jackson, a non-Indigenous person who was then President of the Western Australian Children's Court, argued, "there is no future in the rhetoric of those Aboriginal people who, under the banner of an Aboriginal Provisional Government, urge some form of separate nationhood" (Jackson 1994: 91). Further, Indigenous people who advocated issues of sovereignty or challenged existing power relationships were accused of "'derailing' the 'journey' of reconciliation" as they were "not complying with dominant ideas about what reconciliation entails" (Pratt, Elder and Ellis 2001: 146).

These criticisms resulted in much scepticism about how genuine many non-Indigenous people were in their claims to desire a better future for Indigenous people. As Reynolds (1992: 4) argued, "we [non-Indigenous people] would like to recognise the Aborigines as the indigenous people of Australia but we don't want that recognition to have any consequences that matter". Ridgeway (2001) argued, "non-Indigenous Australians are keen to embrace the rhetoric of reconciliation, so long as it doesn't require them to take effective action to share the country's abundant resources and political power" (see also O'Donoghue 2003; Pratt, Elder and Ellis 2001: 142, 146). Further, these criticisms were, according to Pratt, Elder and Ellis (2000: 2), evidence of the nationalist discourse of reconciliation:

Reconciliation fits neatly with ideas of the nation as singular and monolithic effectively silencing discussion and debate about indigenous rights such as sovereignty, land rights, a treaty and self-determination Voices that speak against this single and monolithic understanding of Australia are marginalised, excluded and represented as delinquent, because they critique, disrupt, and challenge the fundamental notion that dominant national discourses seek to reproduce: the notion that Australia is, or ever has been, one, single, united nation.

CAR and those supporters of the nationalist parameters of the reconciliation process largely failed to understand that by ignoring issues of sovereignty and treaties, then non-Indigenous Australia continued to assimilate Indigenous people by failing to genuinely listen to any non-nationalist Indigenous views. As Gaita (2001: 28) argued:

Resistance to assimilation and talk of a treaty and self-determination are, at the very least, the insistence that discussion of the political future of the Aborigines should not be closed by the complacent assumption that their political destiny lies as fully assimilated members of a multicultural Australian nation ... if we are not genuinely open to novel possibilities, if, before serious dialogue, we shut our ears to talk of new political association within the commonwealth, if we yield to an impatient, false realism, then our apology will be self-indulgent and self-promoting, and our practical efforts patronising.

Conclusion

In this paper, I explored a major concern with the formal reconciliation process. This concern was the emphasis on nationalism within the reconciliation process. The importance of nationalism can be illustrated by observing that reconciliation was intended to be achieved by the centenary of Australia's Federation in 2001. The nationalist discourse of reconciliation encouraged Indigenous and non-Indigenous people to become a 'united' people and to 'walk together' through sharing histories, cultures and identities. This discourse failed to recognise that historical factors, such as the invasion, colonisation, massacres, genocide and theft of land and children, and their continuing contemporary repercussions, ensure that there will continue to be conflicts and differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. The discourse also ensured that those Indigenous demands that could not be situated within the nationalist discourse - such as sovereignty, land rights, a treaty and self-determination - were marginalised or ignored by the reconciliation process. This failure to incorporate a number of key Indigenous demands ensured that the reconciliation process could not adequately address its goals of educating the wider community about Indigenous issues and consulting with Indigenous and non-Indigenous people about a document of reconciliation.

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